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CONSPIRACY THEORIES, MILLENNIALISM, AND THE NATION: Understanding the collective voice in improvisational millennialism

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Abstract

The following critical appraisal presents eight interlinked works that apply and extend Michael Barkun's (2003) concept of 'improvisational millennialism'. This body of work demonstrates that, as Barkun suggests, the concept is widely applicable to the online communities in which stigmatized knowledge is widely accepted. Moreover, it extends the definition to consider how improvisational millennialism provides ill-defined or dispossessed communities a means of articulating a collective relationship to historical time as well as a crude means of shoring up basic assumptions of group membership. Mythical pasts and millennial expectation provide the opportunity for shared eschatological orientation whilst the dualism of conspiracy theories demarcates between the communities and their outsiders. This critical review demonstrates how the journal articles and book chapters collected in the appendices provide specific examples of the application and extension of improvisational millennialism. The examples chosen are varied but a persistent theme drawn out through analysis is the role that national cultures – official and official – are articulated through improvisational millennialism. The examples include consideration of how the depiction of millennial beliefs in the mass media contribute to national cultural constructs but more typically focus on the use of improvisational millennialism in online communities. Of the latter, the greater number of examples are concerned with improvisational millennialism within the neo-fascist milieu. Mobilised by conspiracy theories with apocalyptic subtexts, the far right reliance on improvisational millennialism demonstrates the implicit danger of the increased incursion of stigmatized knowledge into the cultural mainstream. This critical review serves to show that despite being typified by a syncretic bricolage of unconnected ideas and traditions, improvisational millennialism is reflective of both social and political realities.

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Introduction

This thesis will make the case, through this critical review and the published works submitted, that conspiracy theories and millennial beliefs are expressions of collective hopes and fears. This has been well established in the case of millennialism but the thesis will draw on the works of Michael Barkun to demonstrate that conspiracy theories are a related phenomenon and are similarly expressive of communities' outlooks. Further, whilst these may take benign forms there are contained within them the potential for fuelling divisive and extreme views of society; in conspiracy theories' division between 'them' (the conspirators) and 'us' (the conspired against) and in millennialism's identification of 'the chosen people' and the 'remnant' (those outside the chosen community).

The following critical review therefore presents the case for considering current conspiracy theories and millennialist narratives as reflections of developments in contemporary social and political discourse. Further, what is claimed here is that Michael Barkun's concept of improvisational millennialism should be extended to consider the persistence of dominant ideologies within it and at the heart of its purposive syncretism is a symbolic renegotiation of membership of, and the terms of belonging to, regressive or emergent communities in an age of globalizing cultures. The flourishing of improvisational millennialism described here is aided, and characterised, by the emergence of digital communications networks that allow users to be active producers of cultural materials. The evidence for this thesis is presented in a collection of published works and is clarified in this accompanying commentary. The works are all peer reviewed journal articles or chapters included in edited collections and published by academic publishers. The titles are as follows:

- '*Beyond reason: The exotic millennium in English culture*' (Wilson 2011a)
- '*On the outskirts of the new global village: computer-mediated visions of the end*' (Wilson 2011b)
- '*From Apocalyptic Paranoia to the Mythic nation: Political extremity and myths of origin in the neo-fascist milieu*' (Wilson 2012)
- '*From Mushrooms to the stars: 2012 and the apocalyptic milieu*' (Wilson 2013)
- '*Postcards from the Cosmos: Cosmic Spaces in Alternative Religion and Conspiracy Theories*' (Wilson 2017a)

- '*The Bitter End: Apocalypse and conspiracy in white nationalist responses to the ISIL Paris Attacks*' (Wilson 2017b)
- '*#whitegenocide, the Alt-right and Conspiracy Theory: How Secrecy and Suspicion Contributed to the Mainstreaming of Hate*' (Wilson 2018)
- '*The Prism of Lyra: UFO Consciousness and Portals to Cosmic Awareness*' (Wilson 2019).

The work of Michael Barkun (1997, 2003, 2016) is drawn upon and developed throughout this critical review, as he drew attention to the interrelated way in which conspiracy theories and millennialist narratives feed and sustain one another. Barkun's arguments are principally laid out in the book *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. Published in 2003, and in a revised edition in 2006. This was one of three influential texts published at the turn of the millennium that discussed conspiracy theories and their place in modern culture. The others, Mark Fenster's (1999) *Conspiracy Theories* and Peter Knight's (2000) *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to The X-Files*, both recognised the place of power and agency in engagement with the culture of conspiracy theories and made evident that conspiracy theories can be used to extreme political ends. Nonetheless, both celebrated the potential that the authors saw in conspiracy theories for fostering a healthy scepticism towards official accounts and in their capacity to wrest from hegemonic institutional monopolies the possibility of producing public knowledge.

Barkun was more wary of conspiracy narratives and his argument is more clearly a development of the identification of conspiracy theories with belligerent, populist politics more aligned with Richard Hofstadter (Hofstadter 1963, 1964, 1965). Hofstadter is discussed further below and in Wilson (2018). Of key importance here is to note how this thesis extends Barkun's concept of improvisational millennialism and shows how national cultures shape the formation of improvisational millennialism and, in that context, its value to nationalist discourse particularly in its most extreme forms of expression.

Improvisational millennialism is, in Barkun's words, 'wildly eclectic. Its undisciplined borrowings from unrelated sources allow its proponents to build novel systems of belief' (Barkun 2003, *xi*). He is clear that improvisational millennialism is distinct from earlier forms of millennial longing in that, as a whole, 'they combine elements so disparate that it is often impossible to determine what if any influence predominates' (*Ibid*, 23). Its multiple 'borrowings' invariably come from the repository of 'stigmatized knowledge', a further

concept of Barkun's and one he develops from Colin Campbell's 'cultic milieu' (Campbell 1972) and James Webb's 'rejected knowledge' (Webb 1976). 'Stigmatized knowledge' is, in Barkun, forms of belief that are contradicted by, and marginalised by, established norms of belief, cultural orthodoxy, and scientific proof, 'knowledge claims that run counter to generally accepted belief' (Barkun 2003, 8). Aided by the ease of sharing knowledge and the lack of editorial control, the internet has aided the dissemination and sharing of stigmatized knowledge. Just as the 'seeker' was able to encounter a variety of divergent beliefs and practices during the new age fairs that comprised 'the circuit' of events through which Campbell suggested the cultic milieu was realised, so too can the modern web user encounter a dizzying array of forms of stigmatized knowledge through social media platforms, specialised forums, and 'traditional' web pages.

It is due to this electronic context for the discussion and exchange of stigmatized knowledge that the majority of the works submitted as part of this critical review explore web-based expressions of improvisational millennialism (Wilson 2011b, 2012, 2013, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019). The online context becomes a key component for the extended understanding of improvisational millennialism that this critical review describes in the works submitted. This supplement to Barkun's concept is described in the following.

It is not only the internet that has increased the tendency for stigmatized knowledge to flourish. Echoing Lyotard's (1984) diagnosis of a generalised incredulity towards metanarratives, Barkun suggests that in the context of a decline in the status of 'existing authority structures' (Barkun 2003, 20), stigmatized knowledge has gained ground in a search for mainstream penetration. Without providing a definitive periodization, Barkun describes examples that occur following the collapse of the nominal communist regimes in Europe and refers to Bell's 'end of ideology' and Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis as key moments in the decline of ideological authority. Exacerbated by the internet's undermining of traditional media's near monopoly on knowledge production, the loosening dominance of traditional sources of informational authority has provided an environment in which stigmatized knowledge has become increasingly widespread. Barkun's position is that this increased dissemination of stigmatized knowledge allied with a broad rejection of authoritative knowledge sources and their representatives has led to a greater propensity for the production of improvisational millennialist beliefs among countercultural, radical, and other marginalised groups. He argues that, with their success exemplifying the decline of existing authority structures, improvisational millennialist beliefs reflect a wholly new phenomenon

given that they are distinct from earlier forms of belief that were similarly stigmatised. For Barkun, where earlier structured forms of stigmatized knowledge reflected schismatic variations on established religious and secular forms, improvisational millennialism is characterised by its idiosyncratic nature in which no dominant tradition is evident,

> In the act of ignoring boundaries, improvisational millenarians implicitly challenge orthodox conceptions of belief and knowledge. By picking and choosing among a variety of beliefs, improvisationalists convey the message that no single belief system, whether religious or secular, is authoritative. By implication, only the idiosyncratic combination associated with a particular leader or group is deemed to be valid (Barkun 2003, 21).

By restricting his supposition of dominant authority structures to those of religious or political traditions, Barkun underestimates the role of national cultures and similar deeply felt collective affinities in providing authority structures in which the wider appeal and cultural currency of improvisational millennialism is exerted. Barkun is not politically naïve; his earlier work, *Religion and the Racist Right: Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Barkun 1997) demonstrates the dangerous interplay between conspiracism, millennialism and far right ideology. Rather, it is suggested here that he wrote *A Culture of Conspiracy* at a moment in which the revitalisation of the kind of populist nationalism associated with the Twentieth Century appeared less likely given the (admittedly widely challenged) prognosis of the 'end of history' and the triumph of individualism. Instead, this thesis demonstrates the centrality of the collective voice in improvisational millennialism.

Conceptual and Methodological Approaches

The methods in evidence in the written pieces are varied and, frequently, in the published works themselves only implicit rather than being explicitly articulated but it is worth drawing attention to the way in which the approach taken has drawn upon a training in both the Cultural Studies and Sociology traditions. In part, this can be understood as a consequence of the author's background and initial training in the humanities. Stuart Hall's seminal encoding/decoding model is an unstated but continuing influence (see, for instance, Hall

1980, 1997); Linda Steiner makes a strong case for Hall's ongoing influence (Steiner 2016). Steiner encapsulates Hall's contribution to the crucial consideration of any text's historical context – and its potential contribution to the dominant ideology of that context – in the following way,

> Hall thus denied that content, or producers of content, can make people behave in a certain way. But he retained the notion of the power of media in providing cultural categories and frameworks within which members of a group tend to operate. Institutions producing messages can set agendas and define issues. (Steiner 2016, 7)

This is useful because it captures the complex interplay between the mass media, audiences, culture, and power. It recognises the potential for mass media products to shape the discursive framing implied and articulated through their content. This was certainly the approach taken in the earliest of the pieces presented here, Wilson (2011a). In this Hall's influence is noted for its ability to help identify how texts can produce a unifying framework through which the text's producers and their intended audience are drawn together into an ideological affinity that is the basis of a collective unity. Cited directly in '*Beyond reason: The exotic millennium in English culture,*' Hall's approach provides a consistent influence given all the submitted papers' concern with communal and nationalist cultural expressions.

> For Hall, the mass media have "colonized the cultural and ideological sphere." In essence, then, what he is suggesting is that it is through the mass media that a group or community knows itself and its others. They, therefore, can be understood to provide a visual-aural register of what Benedict Anderson calls the "imagined community" of the nation. (Wilson 2011a, 202)

This early piece was concerned with the depiction of the apocalypse in 'official' British culture; the documentaries were both broadcast by national broadcasters (BBC and Channel 5). The articles and chapters that followed this piece retain the core concern for the relationship between texts and audiences but instead focus on texts produced within, and contributing to the ideological position of, smaller communities. The interrelationship of text, discourse, audience, community continued to be of central importance but it becomes clear that the internet has made possible the bypassing of centralising mass media and made more readily available the channels through which groups can self-determine the 'categories and frameworks' available to group members.

Barkun's analysis (2003, 2006) depends on an assumption of this relationship between producers, text, audience, discourse but his methodological approach is never clarified; it is largely concerned with the analysis of recurrent parallel themes across differing categories of stigmatized knowledge and demonstrating the shared rhetorical strategies within the milieu as a whole. However, the unstated nature of this approach has limited the methodological reflection available in each work presented here inasmuch as they draw on and apply Barkun's implicit approach. Whilst this is no defence of the omission it is not unusual in the field, indicating, perhaps, the less overt methodological stance taken in the humanities. So, for instance, Fenster's equally influential *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (1999, 2008) takes a similar approach although he writes in a more or less recognisibly 'Hall-ian' cultural studies style. His concern is to explore the expressive agency that conspiracy theories afford their formulators and audiences and the interplay of intentionality and interpretations. Whilst he writes with reference to the semiotic chains that defer (and confirm) meaning in conspiracy theories he is never explicit about his method as such. He is careful, however, to make evident that he did not seek to uncover conspiracy theory's wider causes but to explore them as interpretative narrative forms that give pleasure to their authors and audiences. Similarly, Peter Knight in *Conspiracy Culture: From Kennedy to the X-Files* (2000) offers a rhetorical analysis with an emphasis on exploring 'the meaning of conspiracy culture for both those who produce it and those who consume it' (Knight 2000, 22). Whilst finding much to appreciate in Fenster, and also Jodi Dean's (1998) *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace*, Knight is dismissive of what he refers to as, "The cultural studies wager [that] there are hidden utopian yearnings buried deep within popular culture, and which can be rearticulated to more productive political projects," (*Ibid*, 21). This, he contends is a, "mistake," which necessitates the analyst, "cast other people at whatever cost as the principal actors in one's own revolutionary drama," (*Ibid*, 22).

To reject an analytic approach to stigmatized knowledge, though, is to undermine the potential for signalling warnings that academic analysis of – what was – the fringes of belief can offer. Indeed, it is difficult to see millennialism as anything other than a utopian yearning. Barkun offers a corrective to the depoliticization of conspiracy theories in Knight's work. He wrote presciently of the dangers implicit in the unchecked spread of stigmatized knowledge into the cultural mainstream. Knight's own position has shifted and in a co-authored summary of recent developments in the study of conspiracy theories, he makes a case for the

value of the cultural studies approach in producing an academic approach to conspiracy theories that is critical but mindful of the sensitivities of dealing with people's beliefs (Peter Knight and Michael Butter 2018).

Researching online public culture: ethical considerations

The majority of texts analysed in the pieces submitted (Wilson 2011b, 2012, 2013, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2019) are digital texts from a range of sources. These include organisational homepages, discussion forums, personal blogs, and Twitter posts. These texts typify the criteria that Thelwall *et al* (2011) use to differentiate online communication from traditional communications media, 'In contrast to typical face-to-face communication, online communication might be anonymous, textual, asynchronous, remote, permanent, and/or very public, although some online forms can be none of these.' (Thelwall *et al* 2012, 617). What renders the question of ethics complex here is the extent to which users understand their posts as published texts in the same way as traditional media producers. Where film or television media workers, novelists, performers and others, with a clear intentionality, offer their work in the public domain *as* public there is no guarantee that posters on social media do so with the same level of informed intentionality. Clearly, this will vary from platform to platform.

For instance, James Hudson and Amy Bruckman's (2004) study of chat room users suggested that the users generally objected to having the text they were producing replicated or analysed in (especially) etic research. It has been cited as a case against the use of user-generated online content in academic research – whether or not consent had been sought. What is overlooked is the specificity of their study. They analysed chat rooms which are non-permanent, textually created spaces that are typically shared over a short duration by contributing users. As such they do not have the enduring presence identified by Thelwall *et al* (2012) nor are they publicly accessible. It is therefore difficult to support Hudson and Bruckman's claim that their findings can be extended to other forms of internet-based communication. They stated, 'Based on this study, we can safely conclude that individuals in online environments such as chatrooms generally do not approve of being studied without their consent' (Hudson & Bruckman 2004, 135). The elision of 'chatrooms' and 'online environments' is not sustainable when considered in light of the clear demarcation between

public and private areas in forums such as *Stormfront*. Thus, Hudson and Bruckman's conclusion is wholly applicable to private online cultures but overlooks the communicative intentionality of public online cultures.

A key consideration in this ethical discussion is concern for the research subjects' safety. This, in turn, implies a consideration of the extent to which any individual online producer or contributor may be safely anonymized. The decision to do so allows individuals a perceived freedom to post material of a more contentious or provocative nature than they might share in their offline lives (Thelwall *et al* 2012). This takes on a nuanced complexity in online research as many participants on public platforms do so in a way that intentionally conceals their own identities in order to allow themselves this freedom. But this self-anonymization cannot be a guarantee of a successful bid to fully anonymize themselves. The sharing of personal information, location identifiers such as DNS addresses can render individuals' anonymous status at risk. As Michael Zimmer (2010) makes clear, users of forums can on occasion be unsure of the public/private status of their posts particularly on forums with complex systems of public and private areas; having entered their username and password to gain access to private areas their own perception of public/private can become undermined having gained equal access to all areas.

Smedley and Coulson (2018), whilst attentive to Zimmer's directive, suggest that shifting statuses of public/private and producer/consumer access necessitate a more reflective and contingent approach than a prescriptive approach might demand. Instead, they argue for an ethical and methodological flexibility that adapts itself to each particular instance under investigation but which, nonetheless, is framed by an awareness of the ethical responsibility that researchers have to their subjects, 'There are no clear-cut answers to untangle the dilemmas surrounding these issues, so researchers have a responsibility to make the best decision they can on a case-by-case basis' (Smedley & Coulson 2018, 17).

This is echoed by Lisa Sugiura, Rosemary Wiles, and Catherine Pope in their reflection on the ethics of online research in the human sciences (Sugiura et al 2017). They conclude that the potential value of internet research demands a careful but adaptive approach to ethical considerations and that the complexities and new challenges should not act as a deterrent from conducting web-based research. Moreover, public texts should be treated as public texts and be available for analysis. They write, 'Our research suggests that the convention that all

research participants should give full and free consent to participating in research is, in the online context, neither possible nor necessary' (Sugiura et al 2017, 195).

It is in this spirit, and in the case-by-case approach described by Smedley and Coulson, that the studies undertaken in the work submitted here have been approached. Participants' identities have been protected as much as it makes sense to do so. In some instances public figures have posted materials *as* public figures and so these are treated as public texts that have been shared in order to be identified *with* the producer; in other instances producers of texts have had their identities protected, typically in cases in which private individuals have shared their views in public forums. In the following discussion, the rationale for these choices are made clear for each submitted work. A number offer analysis of comparable materials and so these are considered together.

The chapter, '*On the outskirts of the new global village: computer-mediated visions of the end*', offers an extended reflection on religious and new religious forms in a digital context but the online texts it analyses are what might be referred to as traditional authorial texts; they are published online but are intended as sole-authored pieces that rely on the centrality of authorial intention for their message. This is self-evident in Michael McClellan's web-published 'book' *Nostradamus and the Final Age*. The submitted article (Wilson 2011b) concentrated on two sections: one titled 'The Diana Prophecy' (McClellan 2001) and the other 'Revelation' (McClellan 2004); these are clearly intended as texts written for consumption by a general audience. On the welcome page of the website McClellan offers guidance on how best to navigate his website, directly addressing the reader and the sections relating to Diana and discussed in Wilson (2011b) continue this tone. Similarly, the message from Diana that Gillian MacBeth-Louthan claims to have channelled uses a similar direct address to an assumed mass audience. She writes, for instance, 'Earth for many of you has oft times been a place of many hardships,' (MacBeth-Louthan 2001, §2). As with McClellan, the intention is to communicate a direct message to an assumed but unknown audience. This is also the case for the message that Diane Tessman claimed to have received; this addressed 'seekers' and gave guidance on finding their guardian angels whilst promising aid to 'The Land, to protect, to bless, to heal, and then to help her evolve spiritually into a new Dawn' (Tessman 1998, §27).

In a similar vein, 'The Invisible Empire: Political extremity and myths of origin in the networked cultic milieu', analysed texts identifiable with the rhetoric of prophecy but clearly

aligned with what James Darsey saw as the negative potential in radical prophecy, e.g. Robert Welch and Joseph McCarthy (Darsey 1997). The chapter drew on works by white supremacist David Lane. These are avowedly political in content but are characterised by a millenarianism that has since fed the 'white genocide' conspiracy theory. These were not written for the internet but were preserved and disseminated through it. The political writing of Troy Southgate that is also considered in this chapter draws on a comparable rhetorical mytho-politics to Lane. Clearly, the tone is polemical and the texts are intended to promote Southgate's ideological position. Unlike Lane's writing, Southgate uses the internet as a means of disseminating his ideas and the pieces under analysis are written for the digital medium. The website *Mourning the Ancient* was also discussed here and as was noted in the published work it situates itself as a public information outlet that is in opposition to the 'mainstream media' (MSM) but clearly reproduces its forms.

Barkun (2006) emphasises the attraction of the medium to marginalized voices who are given access to the same audiences as the traditional, mainstream media outlets. This applies to the archiving of Lane's writing, Southgate's essays and the photographic material on *Mourning the Ancient*. Each seeks to disseminate the authors' interventions in public culture and are, as such, publicly communicated texts. In each instance the author chooses to be identified with the message and for it to be a contribution to what is being termed here as public online culture. The substantive materials examined in 'From Mushrooms to the stars: 2012 and the apocalyptic milieu' (Wilson 2013) continues this focus on prophecy as part of public online culture. It surveys a range of millenarian voices who produced public websites to promote their prophetic message(s). These were varied in the theological frameworks that determined the content and tone of these messages but they were posted with the intention that the prophecy be publicly identified with the websites' authors.

'*Postcards from the Cosmos: Cosmic Spaces in Alternative Religion and Conspiracy Theories'* (Wilson 2017a) and *'The Prism of Lyra: UFO Consciousness and Portals to Cosmic Awareness'* (Wilson 2019) both explored the beliefs described through similar material to those examined in Wilson (2011b and 2013). Whereas the earlier works were singularly concerned with the prophetic rhetoric of individuals these later pieces are more concerned with the wider beliefs presented by individual channels and new religious movements. Nonetheless, the materials analysed are all public position statements publicly shared online by the Raelians, Aetherians, Laura Eisenhower, and Lyssa Royal Holt. In this

they also present no problematic ethical considerations being purposive contributions to public online culture.

The white supremacist *Stormfront* forum was discussed above and the position was taken that there is a clear a demarcation between public and private posts, Zimmer's (2010) observations notwithstanding. '*The Bitter End: Apocalypse and conspiracy in white nationalist responses to the ISIL Paris Attacks*' (Wilson 2017b) drew extensively on *Stormfront* and relied on the public/private distinction in order to treat the posts as part of public culture. Nonetheless, a cautious approach to protecting authors' identities was observed and no individual poster could be identified. The article drew out conspiracy and millenarian tropes from a specific corpus of posts that discussed the ISIS attack on Paris in November 2015. The work showed how these tropes inform white supremacist discourse in the day-to-day communications of white nationalists and thus extends beyond the notable figureheads and organic intellectuals – such as Lane and Southgate in Wilson (2012) – who are often cited as the ideologues of the movement.

As the title suggests, the article *'#whitegenocide, the Alt-right and Conspiracy Theory: How Secrecy and Suspicion Contributed to the Mainstreaming of Hate',* (Wilson 2018) examined the strategic use of a single Twitter hashtag by far-right communities. Although similar in form to online forums there are specific ethical complexities associated with using Twitter data especially the typically large corpus of textual data used in discourse studies. This is made problematic as there is little attention paid to ethical dimensions of big data Twitter research. In a study of research methods in Twitter research, Zimmer & Proferes (2014) found that of the corpus of projects they studied just, '4 percent of the corpus, made any mention of ethical issues or considerations in relation to the research design and data collection methods,' (Zimmer & Proferes 2014, 256). Hodson's (2019) analysis of tweets discussing Canadian politics containing the hashtags #cdnpoli and #elxn42 did provide a rudimentary methodology but offered no ethical discussion.

Elizabeth Buchanan (2017) makes clear the conflicting pressures facing the Twitter researcher. She acknowledges that big data analysis offers the promise of automatically anonymizing the identities of contributing subjects by reducing their presence to their writing alone but this can be deceptive. Tweets can include tagged contributors or retweeted private tweets. These cross ethical boundaries. In Wilson (2018) two individual Twitter users are referred to on the basis that they are public figures and that there is a purposive performance

of their public personas in their Tweets echoing Bethany Usher's (2016) study of the construction of politician's online personas during the 2015 UK election. Moreover, both figures are social media 'personalities' meaning that they are purposive producers of public online cultural content. No other individuals can be identified through the research. Buchanan's observations are, nonetheless, crucial interventions because they draw attention to the challenges to human subject research that online communication has brought.

The submitted works and their relation to the central themes

What follows is a detailed exploration of this critical review with references to the submitted works providing insight into the presence of constituent elements of this thesis in the body of works as a whole. Prior to the extended statement of the critical review that follows, a brief summary of how each individual work contributes to this thesis will be made. The works represent an ongoing exploration of the key concepts and a reworking and refinement of the thesis as a whole. As such, they are described in the following summary in terms of their contribution to the development of the overall argument of the thesis rather than in chronological order.

(Wilson 2011a) Beyond reason: The exotic millennium in English culture This delineates the working through of a notion of 'Englishness' in two television programmes that drew upon apocalyptic themes; it concluded that both made a case that suggested that millennialism was 'other' to English culture. In so doing, both presented 'England' as eternal; sublimating the idea of 'the end' through the idea of 'the nation'. As such it demonstrated how apocalyptic narratives, even in their negation, can be used to articulate collective belonging. It reads the televisual texts as reflective of Anthony Easthope's suggestion of nationalism being born out of affiliation to a series of discursive tendencies (Easthope 1999). As such, nationalist affiliation can be understood as predicated on cultural affiliation as opposed to loyalty to a nation state. This becomes crucial in later pieces that reflect on the 'virtual nation' of white nationalists (i.e. Wilson 2017b, 2018).

(Wilson 2019) The Prism of Lyra: UFO Consciousness and Portals to Cosmic Awareness In this, the possibility of identifying political content in the statements produced by UFO channels was assessed. In doing so, it drew on the interplay of

millenarian and conspiracy narratives within stigmatized knowledge (Barkun 2003) as well as work by Brian Gibbons (Gibbons 2001) among others (Ward and Voas 2011, Partridge 2005, Letcher 2001) to demonstrate a protean political content in the messages that channel Lyssa Royal claims to have received from extraterrestrial sources. In doing so it underlines the important point that superficially counter rational discourse is almost never unrelated to the social and political contexts in which it emerges. More particularly, this piece makes clear that even in narratives of 'personal' spiritual growth the endpoint of this development is a *collective* evolution in which humanity, in all its diversity, recognises its shared interests.

(Wilson 2013) From Mushrooms to the stars: 2012 and the apocalyptic milieu offers further reflection on the rapid evolution of apocalyptic narratives when exposed to the syncretic tendencies that operate through stigmatized knowledge and within the cultic milieu. In providing a potted history of the development of the '2012 prophecy' this piece demonstrates the way in which diverse cultural groupings within the US incorporated the 2012 'end of the world' prophecy into their beliefs. It underlines a key principle in the overarching themes that characterize this body of work: that millenarian prophecy is still a vibrant popular form that reflects current social tensions. Far from being under siege from the rationalizing forces of secularization, it noted, 'the surprising vitality of the apocalyptic milieu; of the readiness for significant sections of the Western population to hope for profound, indeed cataclysmic, change' (Wilson 2013, 268).

Whilst the above explore the millennial destiny of various groups of believers, the next work examines how collective fears are expressed in apocalyptic discourse. (Wilson 2017a) Postcards from the Cosmos: Cosmic Spaces in Alternative Religion and Conspiracy Theories considers this social rootedness of conspiratorial spirituality and in this is influenced strongly by Ward and Voas' concept of 'conspirituality' (Ward and Voas 2011) as a means of expressing the passing of one cultural world and the otherwise unexpressed fear of an emerging one: in this case, of a spacefaring humanity from the perspective of an Earthbound population. This piece also recognised the drift toward the mainstream of stigmatized knowledge and questioned the sustainability of stigmatized knowledge's depiction as marginal. Like the later Lyssa Royal piece (Wilson 2019) it recognised the collective nature of these narratives.

(Wilson 2011b) On the outskirts of the new global village: computer-mediated visions of the end offers a dual consideration of the impact of the internet on the cultic milieu and the transformation of an iconic national symbol, Diana, Princess of Wales, into the source of claimed channelled messages from a realm of higher consciousness and, within these, prophecies. The piece suggested that the internet provides a new communal space in which the cultic milieu is revitalized and enlarged and, in so doing, provides a context in which forms of stigmatized knowledge can circulate more freely and contingent communities of believers can be built around shared beliefs. This idea is crucial here because the internet as a conduit through which marginal beliefs are able to flow into the mainstream of public cultures is a significant feature of the central arguments presented here. So, too, is the idea that the kind of improvisational millennialism revealed in the channelled messages to Diana are not wholly free of discourses originating in existing authority structures. In the channelled prophecies Albion is renewed; for all their improvisational syncreticism and *contra* Barkun, the prophecies sustain the dominant notion of the 'nation'.

This combination of internet exposure and the presence and persistence of belligerent forms of nationalism within stigmatized knowledge informs (Wilson 2012) From apocalyptic Paranoia to the Mythic nation: Political extremity and myths of origin in the neo-fascist milieu. This piece marks a clear evolution of the ideas that emerge in, '*On the outskirts…*' and '*Beyond Reason…*' and combined the idea of national identity, apocalyptic belief and internet-facilitated spirituality to assess the entryist techniques of far right groups to appropriate the symbolic forms of resurgent paganisms. Here, the porosity of the boundaries between nationalism, conspiracy theory and apocalyptic spirituality was foregrounded and this provides the basis for the article published in *Patterns of Prejudice*, 'The Bitter End: Apocalypse and conspiracy in white nationalist responses to the ISIL Paris Attacks' (Wilson 2017b) and that published in *Secrecy in Society*, '#whitegenocide, the Alt-right and Conspiracy Theory: How Secrecy and Suspicion Contributed to the Mainstreaming of Hate' (Wilson 2018). This piece made evident the importance of the concept of 'ethnonationalism' and drew on the work of Walker Connor (Connor 1994) to demonstrate how the millennialism present in David Lane's 'Wotanism' and other online neofascist spiritual formations inform the communal identities of white nationalists.

(Wilson 2018) #whitegenocide, the Alt-right and Conspiracy Theory: How Secrecy and Suspicion Contributed to the Mainstreaming of Hate and Wilson 2017b The Bitter End: Apocalypse and conspiracy in white nationalist responses to the ISIL Paris Attacks. These two pieces reflect a methodological variation on the other pieces and draw on simple text mining techniques to explore the conspiritual-apocalyptic axis in alt-right and white nationalist thought. It is here that the major themes of the thesis converge to demonstrate the danger implicit in underestimating the role of improvisational millennialism in sustaining existing authority structures such as nationalism albeit in its most extreme forms. This is evident in the conclusion to Wilson (2017b),

> What requires further scrutiny is the ease with which these values and beliefs are capable of extending into the more populist and less marginal aspects of apocalyptic belief. Racist improvisational millennialists with social media strategies and a degraded but partially familiar map of the current situation pose a threat to domestic and international order (Wilson 2017b, 429-30)

The use of Barkun (2003) is evident from this quotation but the piece also makes more fundamental claims for the broadly political nature of millennialist groups and draws on Cohn (*op cit*), Daniel Wojick (1999), Catherine Wessinger (2001) among others to articulate this aspect of the thesis in the clearest terms. Wilson (2018) performs a similar function in the thesis by providing the clearest articulation of the links between current conspiracy theories and political populism. It, too, expands on Barkun (2003) but also provides a nuanced reading of Mark Fenster (2008), Fredric Jameson (1991), Peter Knight (2000), and Stef Aupers (2012). Again, the centrality of collective expression to improvisational millennialism is made clear but in these two pieces what is also made evident is the danger implicit in collective formations defined through divisive irrational discourses.

Taken as a body of work they demonstrate the variety of ways that Barkun's (2003) insights can be applied and, as the work has developed, extended. In each instance they reflect the secular concerns of specific communities. As such, they contain and articulate the political ends of that group; the social and cultural transformation necessary for their endpoint to be achieved.

Together these pieces represent a systematic attempt to understand the relationship between conspiracy theory, apocalypticism and nationalism. Whilst the content varies the central

question of each returns to common themes of belonging and difference, social change and cultural responses to imagined globalized futures. What is original in this is the suggestion that national identity is always a defining element of spiritual forms; the term 'spiritual forms' is used to indicate the inchoate and ill-defined field of spiritual life that is often associated with new religious movements (NRMs). Even in the most marginal or stigmatized forms of belief, expressions of collective belonging are present; in the most extreme iterations (such as white power Wotanism) the negotiation of national belonging is self-evident but in the syncretic setting of the New Age 2012 prophecy or UFO/space oriented NRMs this discourse of belonging and community in the wider sense is also crucial in the relationship between producer/audience.

Thematic development

Ward and Voas (2011) offer an analysis of specific forms of conspiracy theory and spirituality what they draw attention to is the implicit conflationary pressures that undo the distinction between the political and religious milieu within stigmatized knowledge. Barkun's improvisational millennialism drew attention to this tendency but in 'conspirituality' Ward and Voas provide a flexible concept that draws specific attention to the phenomenon. The value of the concept here is a means of highlighting how the stylised realpolitik of conspiracy theories is, in some instances, dependent upon unstructured forms of spiritual expression. This, in turn, makes clear the shared discursive fields that ally conspiracy theory and millenarian movements. Thus, apocalyptic prophecy can at once speak to a community's spiritual ends (destiny) and material concerns (politics). It is around this thematic interrelationship and discursive slippage that the works submitted are organised; where they seek to draw out the themes of '(a) common sense nationalism' inherent in representations of apocalyptic beliefs (Wilson 2011a, 2011b).

From Cohn's (1970) *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* onwards the apocalyptic has been understood in academic analysis as a compensating mechanism through which communities can consolidate their ongoing identities and claim to existential certainty through the projection of their existence into a knowable and utopian future. In '*Beyond Reason: The Exotic Millennium in English Culture'* (Wilson 2011a) I explored how by articulating the nation through the

production of apocalypticism as other was productive of the idea of the persistence of England as eternal. Apocalyptic belief was constructed in the television programmes discussed as being either something allied to fanaticism and 'the Orient' (very much aligned to Said's (1978) reading of Orientalism in nineteenth and twentieth century Western discourse) in the crime drama *Messiah* or harmless exotica in the case of the documentary *A Very British Apocalypse*. In order to preserve the principle of the nation in the face of 'foreign' eschatological threats the nation must become transcendent itself and be depicted as a world without end for its people. This reconfirms Easthope's (1999) insight that the chapter drew on: that at the heart of the discursive construct of 'Englishness' is a dualism that depends upon a stolid, rational pragmatism at the core of the supposed English character contra a tendency to emotive abstraction in the character of England's Others. Easthope points to an English empiricist tradition that is expressed culturally as well as in English philosophy.

As Wilson (2011a) makes evident, in order to maintain the idea of England, threats to the purity of its empiricist discourse must be made exterior to the cultural mainstream, 'Apocalyptic belief can only ever find a voice within English culture at its margins or within its underground, in the cultic milieu,' (Wilson 2011a, 214). The implications of this are twofold, and this body of work underlines these points, that (i) the commingling of apocalypticism with other forms of stigmatised knowledge through improvisational millennialism provides fertile ground for exposure to radical forms of expression and (ii) the nation *is* a transcendent form and is the rendering of space, people and culture into a project in sacrality. Similarly, Wilson (2011b) presents the idealised 'Albion' of the new Dianic prophets. The key point here is the convergence of 'conspirituality' and improvisational millennialism within an imagined space that provides a territory, either a reinvented 'real' or wholly virtual one for a community that imagines itself to be under threat.

There is much work that draws attention to the extent to which conspiracy theory depends upon an eschatological dimension to maintain the internal logic of the threat contained within the malevolent intentions of identified conspirators. For instance, Wilson (2018) cites Richard Hofstadter's classic essay identifying 'the paranoid style' in U.S. political rhetoric. In this he refers to the paranoid spokesman trafficking 'in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values. He is always manning the barricades of civilization', (Hofstadter 1964, 82). As was mentioned above, more recent

central texts in conspiracy theory scholarship make similar points (Barkun 2003, Fenster 2008, Knight 2000). To a large extent they reject the terminology of Hofstadter's essay (although Wilson (2018) argues that this is due to an overly literal reading of Hofstadter) but retain the cosmological dimension within it.

This is crucial because it makes evident the case that the conspiracy theorist is claiming agency within a material battle against an overwhelming force, the outcome of which will determine the eschatological predictions present within the conspiracy theorists' system of thought. Through the thematic development present in the works submitted there is a persistent reiteration of the secular basis of the improvisational millennialism described and that this is tied to communities, real or virtual.

The 'places' of improvisational millennialism in the submitted works

The expressions of community described here are wholly expressed in spatial terms. Each community articulated through improvisational millennialism does so with reference to a homeland be it a nation state (Wilson 2011a, 2011b), an imagined ethnonation (Wilson 2012, 2017b, 2018), a new Earth (Wilson 2013, 2017a), or another dimension (Wilson 2017a, 2019). Wilson (2011a) was concerned with the construction of 'England' in distinction from its 'Others' through the negation of apocalyptic belief (and its stigmatization as an irrational 'foreign' threat). Wilson (2011b) sought to demonstrate how the afterlife of Diana, Princess of Wales in messages that spirit mediums claimed to have channelled produced an ideal 'Albion', a kind of spiritual [sic] home for seekers. Whilst the virtual nation that is discerned in Wilson (2011b) expresses what is, perhaps, a vague utopic longing, the virtual nation in Wilson (2012) is more threatening and foreshadows the concerns of later works (Wilson 2017b, 2018).

In this chapter (Wilson 2012), the improvisational millennialism of David Lane and the visual archive of *Mourning the Ancient* are discussed in terms of the symbolic forms that they draw on and seek to associate with their politics of race hate. These are typically appropriated 'Nordic' and European pagan mythic symbols. It is here that the intentional bricolage that can shape an authorial improvisational millennialism is most apparent in its attempt to

retroactively infect relatively unfixed[1] symbolic forms with modern political formations. Wilson (2012) concluded,

> The building of a deterritorialized neo-fascist nation is a project that draws upon and colonises existing cultural constructs, forcing them to be re-read within the terms set by the virtual nationalists. (Wilson 2012, 212)

It was argued that this was dependent upon the potential for mythic forms to sacralise the imagined community (*pace* Anderson) appealed to by nationalists. Thus, it becomes vital to engage in the struggle to retain the mythic past as an open and unfolding story,

> [M]yth is always an ongoing project, it is re-visited, reworked, and revised and, crucially, must be contested and re-won when attempts are made to appropriate it in ways that would crush its polysemous pleasures into a solitary, bleak, vision. (Wilson 2012, 213)

Wilson (2013) addressed the particularities of national apocalyptic cultures. It showed that despite spanning time and space from 'the ancient Maya' to aliens from Zeta Reticula by way of the Revelation of John, the 'Mayan 2012 apocalypse' was largely a North American phenomenon, derived from the thought and work of two key figures in the U.S. counterculture, Terence McKenna and José Argüelles. The chapter argues that it is the national cultural context in which it developed that gave the 'Mayan' apocalypse a distinctly North American inflexion.

Wilson (2017b) showed how the community of white nationalists gathered on the forum *Stormfront* responded to the 2015 ISIS attacks on Paris through a conspiracy hermeneutic characterised by antisemitism and racism. But, moreover and important here, it also demonstrated how the disparate community used posters' commitment to its improvisational millennialism to maintain itself as a community. The article, for instance, highlights the targeting of a poster who cast doubt on the idea that the ISIS attack was part of an unfolding Jewish plot, 'the community quickly rounded on this poster and ridiculed their suggestion', (Wilson 2017b, 430). It is in this way that adherence to stigmatized knowledge becomes a marker of belonging, of determining the community's epistemic borders. In its discussion of

[1] 'Unfixed' in the sense that many historical pagan beliefs are relatively unknown and in their modern forms are contested and subject to ongoing revision. Ronald Hutton's (2010) 'Writing the History of Witchcraft: A Personal View' is instructive on this point.

the convergence of apocalypticsm and conspiracy theory present within the *Stormfront* community's posts, the article also noted the purposeful use of Twitter and the hashtag 'whitegenocide'; this millenialist, racist conspiracy theory was explored more fully in the following year's article, *'#whitegenocide, the Alt-right and Conspiracy Theory: How Secrecy and Suspicion Contributed to the Mainstreaming of Hate'* (Wilson 2018).

In Wilson (2018) the use of the 'white genocide' conspiracy theory is understood in relation to David Lane's '14 words' discussed in Wilson (2012). The search for a virtual – and utopian – nation in which Lane's imperative 'we must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children' is realised, and is continually renewed through the use of the hashtag, betokening the, 'fragile desperation with which the alt-right seeks a consistent, communal "white" identity', (Wilson 2018, 38). It is thus the case that the territoriality of the virtual white nationalist community can be understood to be territory 'in formation'. The case being presented here is that the spatial dimension present within improvisational millennialism lends itself to an extremist cause that defines itself in spatial-cultural terms ('white Europeans') and that, lacking a consistent or agreed nation state due to its stigmatized status in modern civic nations, maintains a loosely-defined virtual nation through the appropriation and manipulation of mythic forms and the kinds of stigmatized knowledge described above.

Conclusion

Conspiracy theories and apocalyptic beliefs are the *lingua franca* of the far right. They articulate and justify the Manichean divide of their hate-filled world into a chosen 'us' and a dangerous, subversive 'them'. Although unreasonable in their claims they provide a warped logic to the politics of the far right. Nonetheless, in their apocalyptic dimension – the revelation of the plot against 'the people' – they provide an eschatological narrative to the 'the struggle': the people will prevail and achieve a paradise for 'the pure' or the conspiracy will succeed and eradicate them. They become articles of faith as much as ideologies. On this basis, then, engagement with far-right groups and individuals would be well-placed to approach them as members of potentially violent new religious movements with catastrophic millennial beliefs and, as such, subject to the same pressures and motivations to action that

Wessinger (2000) and Walliss (2004) identify. Given this, in addition to existing approaches to countering far right radicalisation it is necessary to consider the spiritual pull factors implicit in the metapolitical cultures of far-right conspiracy culture.

This, then, is at the heart of this project: To show how 'irrational' beliefs are shaped by their times; that they are a *response* to the world around them and are therefore concerned with the political in the widest sense. Additionally, that the flexibility of beliefs that circulate as stigmatized knowledge make them polyvalent resources in the syncreticism that typifies the circuits of improvisational millennialism. Further, to demonstrate that they have a communal 'locality' that may become blurred by transnational digital networks but which make these ideas particularly appealing in the context of extreme forms of nationalism.

In a very particular way, we can understand the improvisational millennialism of the virtual nations described here as fulfilling this role through a sacralised form of collective belonging. In this, a future oriented battle of an elect against the machinations of otherwise overwhelmingly powerful foe is played out through conspiracy theory and apocalyptic prophecy. Thus, this critical review contends that improvisational millennialism describes the syncretic tendency within online cultures characterised by a belief in stigmatized knowledge but they, in turn, reflect broader social and cultural hopes and fears. In doing so, it suggests that Barkun correctly identified the improvisational proclivities in groups of stigmatized knowledge believers but, in emphasising their novelty, underplayed the continuities of thought they appealed to and the communities whose beliefs they encapsulate.

This critical review thus shows that improvisational millennialism maintains one of the characteristic features of millennialist belief, that millennialism represents a collective longing. Rather than the purview of individual 'millenarian entrepreneurs' (Barkun 2003, 21), this thesis shows that improvisational millennialism can be understood as a resource drawn upon by a specific community and used to affirm their claim to their continued existence in the present and (implicitly and explicitly in millennialism's eschatological content) in the future. Moreover, it gives cosmological (or political) significance to the actions of those members of the community who apply millennialism's hermeneutic strategies to the world around them: by seeing signs of the 'coming of the end', the everyday becomes reenchanted and communal purpose renewed once more.

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Appendices A-I

The following Appendices contain the published works under consideration in this submission. Wherever possible the original layout has been followed but in some instances compromises have been made to ensure full compatibility with this document; the referencing style of each publisher has been retained. All works were sole-authored (Andrew Fergus Wilson). The editorial arrangements and, where relevant development of each work is also noted. They are listed here in chronological order as follows:

Appendix A. (2011a) 'Beyond reason: The exotic millennium in English culture' *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture.* Vol. 23(2). Summer 2011. Double blind peer reviewed

Appendix B. (2011b) 'On the outskirts of the new global village: computer-mediated visions of the end.' In Rob G. Howard (ed.) *Network Apocalypse: Visions of the End in an Age of Internet Media*. Sheffield: Phoenix Press. Abstract submitted and accepted by editor. At the time of publication the editor was Associate Professor of Communication Arts at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Appendix C. (2012) 'The Invisible Empire: Political extremity and myths of origin in the networked cultic milieu' in Marion Gibson, Garry Tregidga and Shelley Trower (eds.) *Myth, Mysticism, and 'Celtic' Nationalism*. London: Routledge. Abstract submitted to editors. The chapter was developed from a conference paper, 'The Invisible Empire: Political extremity and myths of origin in the cultic milieu' delivered at *Mysticism, Myth, Nationalism Conference*, University of Exeter, 23 & 24 July 2010. This conference was convened by the same team of academics who were all based at the University of Exeter.

Appendix D. (Wilson 2013) 'From Mushrooms to the stars: 2012 and the apocalyptic milieu' in S.Harvey & S.Newcombe (eds.) *Prophecy in the New Millennium - When Prophecies Persist*. Farnham: Ashgate. Abstract submitted to editors. The chapter was developed from a conference paper, 'The Invisible Empire: Political extremity and myths of origin in the cultic milieu' delivered at *INFORM Seminar XLVIII. Prophecy in the New Millennium: When Prophecies Persist*, London School of Economics, Saturday 12 May 2012. The edited collection was derived from this event.

Appendix E. (Wilson 2017a) ‘Postcards from the Cosmos: Cosmic Spaces in Alternative Religion and Conspiracy Theories’. *The Journal of Astrosociology* Volume 2. http://www.astrosociology.org/Library/PDF/Journal/JOA-Final/JournalOfAstrosociology-Vol2.pdf Double blind peer reviewed.

Appendix F. (Wilson 2017b) ‘The Bitter End: Apocalypse and conspiracy in white nationalist responses to the ISIL Paris Attacks’. *Patterns of Prejudice* 51(5), 412-431. Double blind peer reviewed.

Appendix G. (Wilson 2018) ‘#whitegenocide, the Alt-right and Conspiracy Theory: How Secrecy and Suspicion Contributed to the Mainstreaming of Hate.’ *Secrecy and Society* 1(2). http://scholarworks.sjsu.edu/secrecyandsociety/vol1/iss2/1 Double blind peer reviewed

Appendix H. (Wilson 2019) (Wilson 2019) 'The Prism of Lyra: UFO Consciousness and Portals to Cosmic Awareness’ in J.Poller (ed.) *Altered Consciousness in the Twentieth Century*. London: Routledge. Invited to submit proposal and subsequent chapter. Editor based at Queen Mary, University of London.

Appendix A. (2011a) 'Beyond Reason: The Exotic Millennium in English Culture'
Journal of Religion and Popular Culture. **Vol. 23(2). Summer 2011**

Beyond Reason: The Exotic Millennium in English Culture

Andrew Fergus Wilson

Abstract: Using two contrasting television programs made and broadcast in the United Kingdom, this article will explore how representations of apocalyptic themes and belief contribute to an idea of 'nation.' Drawing upon Benedict Anderson's analysis of the interplay between 'reason' and 'unreason' in English culture, this analysis will reveal the innate 'foreignness' of the coming of the end within mainstream English mass culture.

Keywords: Anthony Easthope, Messiah 5: The Rapture, A Very British Apocalypse, Werner Herzog, English culture, apocalyptic belief

The Untranslatable Difference

Werner Herzog's film *Where the Green Ants Dream* (1984) details cultural and legal conflict over the ownership of Aboriginal land in Australia. The film centres on the struggle for ownership of uranium and mineral-rich land between a mining company and the local Aborigines who own the land. The land is also rich in ant hills. In the beliefs of the local Aboriginal tribe, the green ants dream within these hills and disturbing their dreaming will lead to the end of the 'universe-world.' In a discussion of the film, Bill Readings recognizes the incommensurability of the two narratives that claim the land: the Aboriginal voices and Ayers Mining, the company that seeks to mine the land. In Readings' reading of the film, the Aboriginal case is always already destined to fail – its terms of reference and structures of meaning are utterly remote from the assumptions of the court and the national culture that the court speaks from and of. The Aboriginal apocalyptic beliefs are untranslatable, not simply in linguistic terms but are also unable to be translated into the conceptual frameworks of the Australian state in late modernity.

Translation would be possible, in principle, between these languages. Injustice in the proceedings of translation comes not from the fact of simply speaking a different language but from the fact that the language of the Aborigines is untranslatable into the language of the court, heterogeneous to the language of common law, of common humanity.[1]

The universality of judgment assumed by the modern state is found wanting when its sought-after inclusiveness ultimately excludes the Aborigines from the 'universal' state of assumed modern, rational subjects. In revealing themselves as beyond the frame of reference relied upon by court and state the Aborigines' externality is compounded.

The questions raised by Readings in his discussion of Herzog's film direct us to consider the problem of representing any (apocalyptic) unorthodox belief within a rationalist and rationalizing modern state. The context of Herzog's film is a court case and, as such, it draws its audience along the associative chain that leads from the court to the state to the nation to the national culture. This problematic, of the representation of radically different beliefs within national cultures, lies at the heart of the following paper and points to the way in which the structured opposition of difference to orthodoxy lies at the heart of representations of apocalyptic belief in British television productions.[2]

It has been argued that British society is now predominantly secular and that at least part of the process of secularization was marked by a diminishment of the nation state's dependence upon the dominant religious force within its territories for the legitimation of its own power.[3] In addition, Britain has been used as an exemplar for the idea that modern societies have become indifferent to religious belief and, further, it has been suggested that from the early 1960s women's changing roles undermined a traditional bedrock of support for institutional Christianity in Britain.[4] In this context any depiction of religious practice or belief that marginalized it or offered criticism of it would be viewed as keeping with national cultural trends. However, it should be noted that counter-arguments stress the diversification of religious practice and an increased non-aligned syncretic spirituality as being typical of belief

[1] Bill Readings, 'Pagans, Perverts or Primitives? Experimental Justice in the Empire of Capital' in Andrew Benjamin, ed. *Judging Lyotard* (London: Routledge, 1992), 183.
[2] It should be noted that the description 'British television' is moot. As will be shown, the national culture invoked most frequently is a particular rehearsal of Englishness.
[3] Bryan R. Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society: A Sociological Comment* (London: C.A. Watts, 1966).
[4] Steve Bruce, *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002) suggests that Britain has seen a waning of the relevance of religious affiliation while Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation 1800–2000*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2009) links the erosion of institutional Christianity to increased female autonomy

in modern Britain.[5] Against this backdrop, the viewer might expect some degree of sympathy to the depiction of non-conventional religious beliefs, but this is not the case. As will be discussed, in each instance the depiction of apocalyptic beliefs stresses their 'foreignness.' This is not simply the sense that they originate beyond Britain's borders, but that they are shown to be inadmissible to British thought. At the heart of these representations, then, is not a consideration of religiosity or of apocalyptic thought, but instead the latter serves as a vehicle for rehearsing narratives of 'Britishness.'

Television and Reality

As part of the mass media, television can be understood to perform, in part, the functions described by Stuart Hall in the following:

> the mass media are more and more responsible (a) for providing the basis on which groups and classes construct an 'image' of the lives, meanings, practices and values of other groups and classes; (b) for providing the images, representations and ideas around which the social totality, composed of all these separate and fragmented pieces, can be grasped as a whole.[6]

For Hall, the mass media have 'colonized the cultural and ideological sphere.' In essence, then, what he is suggesting is that it is through the mass media that a group or community knows itself and its others. They, therefore, can be understood to provide a visual-aural register of what Benedict Anderson calls the 'imagined community' of the nation.[7]

For Anderson, the nation as cultural entity is produced within the imagination of its people—it is this imagined and imagining community that dreams a nation into being. This imagined community, like any 'real' community polices its borders, maintaining the integrity of the

[5] See, for instance, Christopher H. Partridge, *The Re-enchantment of the West: Understanding Popular Occulture Volume 1* (London: T&T Clark, 2005); Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: Religion, Culture and Society in the Age of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), and Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).
[6] Stuart Hall, 'Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect',' in J. Curran, M. Gurevitch, and J. Woollacott, ed., *Mass Communication and Society* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), 340.
[7] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

'social totality' and thus conferring reality to the 'imagined community.' This semblance of reality of the national culture is what is at stake in its representation.

Discussed here are two examples of British television productions with apocalyptic belief at their heart. They each belong to identifiably different television genres: Messiah 5: The Rapture, a police drama and A Very British Apocalypse, a documentary. Despite the differences in genre each seeks to convey a relationship with the real. John Fiske suggests the documentary is intended to reflect reality with mimetic precision so that the viewer feels that, 'the camera has happened upon a piece of unpremeditated reality which it shows to us objectively,' while the dramatic presentation seeks to, 'give the impression that we are watching a piece of unmediated reality directly, that the camera does not exist.'[8]

The apparent objective naturalism of the television camera, when turned upon reality, extends the promise of verisimilitude further; while television fiction(s) are staged according to the demands of the narrative and produced as artifice, they still promise a reliable and consistent representation of objective reality—we can trust what we see to correspond to a designated fictional reality be it Coronation Street or The West Wing—the promise of documentary was always that it was not a mere re-presentation but was, instead, a mirror held up to reality, that it corresponded to the real. Leaving aside Baudrillardian fears of the demise of the real of representation, this notion of an objective mediated 'reality' is still appealed to by the premise of documentary—there is an expectation that we are being shown something tangibly 'real' that is, relatively, untouched by the presence of the television cameras and can be experienced as real by viewers even though the advent of so-called reality TV has problematized this expectation.[9] The contract of the real that exists between broadcasters and viewers is that there is an agreement upon the direct relationship between the genre of documentary and an observable and experienced reality.

Television drama tends, for the most part, toward realism in its representative strategies. The extent to which it does so and the manner in which realism is used to progressive or reactionary political ends is much contested, as is the term itself,[10] but what is crucial here is

[8] John Fiske, *Television Culture* (London: Routledge, 1987), 24.
[9] Richard Kilborn, Staging the Real: Factual TV Programming in the Age of Big Brother (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
[10] See, for instance, John Caughie, *Television Drama Realism, Modernism, and British Culture* (Oxford: OUP, 2000) and John Tulloch, *Television Drama: Agency, Audience, and Myth* (London: Routledge, 1990).

that television drama is read as having continuity with reality and of intervening in the production of the 'social totality' that Hall refers to above.[11]

It is argued here that the programs discussed appeal to a particular discourse of the 'national real' and, in doing so, employ a rationalist realism. This relationship to the real is crucial to both Messiah 5: The Rapture and A Very British Apocalypse because they both seek to defend a particular discourse of the real from external threats. A Very British Apocalypse stakes its claim to the real as documentary while Messiah 5 draws upon the realist conventions of television drama. Messiah 5's appeal to the real is amplified by its subgenre; Alan Clarke, for example, argues that the police drama has a heightened relationship with the real for the viewer. In his account, the police and police procedures are made unusually available through the genre. Its artifice is rendered partially obscure by the sudden proximity to the known but unfamiliar world of the police: 'For many people their only contact with a speaking policeman is on the television and this reinforces the aura of reality which police series strive so hard to construct.'[12]

Thus the two programs under discussion here can be understood to seek to reflect or give insight into 'the real' and are watched by their audience(s) with that understanding. In each case what is at stake is the location of apocalyptic belief within the 'national real' or, more particularly, interactions between mainstream culture and apocalyptic culture. In the case of Messiah 5: The Rapture this interaction is marked by failed integration and violence while for A Very British Apocalypse the interaction is less confrontational, but still founded on the radical difference of apocalyptic belief from the perspective of dominant English culture.

As has been described, it is understood that there is a structuring effect at work within the mass media. Hall's above passage points to the way in which groups learn affinity and difference through the mass media. Fiske also provides useful insight into this and shows that these affinities and differences need not be hegemonic, citing Aboriginal affinities with 'American Indians and American black children.'[13] Borrowing from Barthes' 'Myth Today' he further suggests that, despite this, there is still an endeavour to conceal the constructedness of culture through naturalism's appeal to the real: '.. . those groups with authority [.. .] try to

[11] Glen Creeber, *Serial Television: Big Drama on the Small Screen* (London: BFI, 2004).
[12] Alan Clarke, 'You're nicked! Television Police Series and the Fictional Representation of Law and Order,' in Dominic Strinati and Stephen Wagg, ed. *Come on Down? Popular Media Culture in Post-War Britain* (London: Routledge, 1992), 232.
[13] Fiske, *Television Culture*, 320.

prevent a struggle over meaning by naturalizing their meaning—their economic, and social power is mobilized discursively, ideologically, and culturally to exnominate itself beyond the realm of potential opposition.[14]

It is the argument here that both Messiah 5: The Rapture and A Very British Apocalypse are framed with a normative discourse of national identity that seeks to exclude apocalyptic belief from the visual-aural register of the nation and thus to shore up the dominant form of English identity, or 'exnominate itself beyond the realm of potential opposition.'

Making Sense of the English

The dedicated tradition of appealing to and seeking to reproduce the real in both documentary and dramatic television production can also be understood in light of the 'empiricist tradition' in English culture that we find delineated by Anthony Easthope in *Englishness and National Culture*.[15] Easthope's concerns are primarily literary but, as will be seen, the English empiricist discourse is mobilized through television also.

Drawing on the self's reliance upon the existence of others in demarcating itself as self, Easthope points to the indeterminacy of identity that this produces: the self is always already 'other' to those others. We can thus understand the desire described by Hall to 'grasp' social totality 'as a whole' through the mass media as a paranoid reaction to the threat to distinctive self-identity posed by 'others'; they threaten to reveal the otherness that exists within self and must, thus, be kept at bay: 'The subject would preserve its coherence by denying what undermines it and projecting internal threat on to the outside.'[16] It is with national identity and the culture that mobilizes it. Easthope puts forward the idea of a peculiarly English mode of cultural production, a discourse of Englishness that provides the basis for the semblance of a unified national subjectivity. It can be understood as underpinning how we perceive the world and guarantees that (in cultural terms),

> a notion of Englishness can be seen to preside over 'the English language' and English 'way of talking', a canon of literature established as English, English

[14] Ibid., 35.
[15] Anthony Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London: Routledge, 1999).
[16] Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture*, 219.

> landscape, a certain sense of humour felt to be English, English common sense, and so on and so on.[17]

This formulation of a cultural Englishness is unified with the English state, embodied in its institutions, through English empiricist discourse: through English culture English subjects are led to identify with the nation as state.

For Easthope, English discourse is characterized by a straightforward empiricism that foregrounds a 'matter of fact' understanding of the apprehension of reality and the communication of that apprehension. In other words, we perceive the world through our senses, and through the application of reason, are able to 'get to the heart of the matter' and fully perceive an indivisible and true reality. Easthope is thus in a position to put forward examples of the 'transparent style' used in the recording of facts which, 'delivers things into words' and thus preserve the real.[18] We might, at this point pause to consider that the reality effect of the television documentary and police drama described above can be seen to conform to this discourse: their promise is an access to reality or an accurate reflection of it.

The English empiricist discourse is thus marked by a seeming lack of artificiality, of a clarity of expression and a distinct correspondence with reality. It is akin to the Barthian account of naturalized dominant ideology that Fiske provides; akin but separate for where Fiske's primary interests are the reproduction of, and contestation within, the discourses of class, gender, and race. Easthope seeks to demonstrate that the subject seeks in dominant national culture an identity that transcends and simultaneously gives meaning to the otherwise threatened self within modernity.

This English empiricism is defined in relation to an oppositional Other which takes a variety of guises, each of which define an exteriority and interiority to Englishness. At the heart of 'Englishness,' contends Easthope, rests a binary opposition that informs and predicates an English mode of thinking, writing, and organizing the world. It recreates the world in a particularly English idiom: Easthope's English empiricist discourse:

[17] Ibid., 56.
[18] Ibid., 96.

English empiricist discourse, I propose, maintains itself on the back of a binary opposition between the real and the apparent, an opposition reproduced and reworked in many directions, including:

objective/subjective;
concrete/abstract;
practice/theory;
clear/obscure;
fact/fiction;
serious/silly;
common sense/dogma;
sincere/artificial;
amateur/professional;
hard/soft;
truth/pleasure;
right/wrong;
Protestant/Catholic;
English/French;
home/foreign;
centre/extreme;
virility/effeminacy;
and
masculine/feminine.[19]

This discourse structures English culture with the former positive terms repeatedly competing against the latter in order to maintain the apparent wholeness of English national identity.

The nation is thus not simply imagined but is, rather, protected, defended, contested and continually won from external threats, those others marked by the negative terms in the oppositions that Easthope catalogues. As we shall see, apocalyptic belief is constructed from within the English empiricist discourse and defined through the negative, right hand terms; it is represented as 'other' and thus alien to English culture – inadmissible.

An Apocalyptic Gore-fest

Messiah is an ongoing series of crime dramas made by BBC Northern Ireland and shown on BBC Television. Despite its origins the series is entirely set in England with brief overseas sequences in the fifth installment set in the Middle East. The series is composed of two part stories which make up each installment of the series. The constituent parts of each installment

[19] Ibid., 90.

are roughly an hour long. The first installment was simply called Messiah and was broadcast in 2001, featuring the murders of eleven men who shared their first names with the apostles and who met their deaths in the manner of the apostles. This was followed by Messiah 2: Vengeance is Mine (2003); Messiah III: The Promise (2004); and Messiah IV: The Harrowing (2005).

Broadcast over two consecutive nights in January 2008 (Sunday, January 20th and Monday, January 21st), Messiah 5: The Rapture (2008) continued its reputation for gruesome and bloody murders which led Scottish newspaper *The Herald* to describe it as an 'inventive and involving two-part gore-fest.'[20] The motivation for the murders in this installment is gradually revealed to have its basis in apocalyptic beliefs and these beliefs are constructed throughout the production as being beyond the boundaries of a carefully policed Englishness. Messiah 5: The Rapture (2008) depicts belief in the apocalypse as existing in the hinterlands between reason and unreason and originating beyond reason and, in the context of Easthope's reading of the terms in which English culture is reproduced, apocalyptic belief here is understood to be something that is inadmissible to the English mind.

The program opens in Palestine, with DCI Joseph Walker (Marc Warren), his girlfriend Salma Al-Fulani (Sasha Behar) and her brother Khalid (Daud Shah) in a car passing through a checkpoint into Israeli territories. Walker and Saima wave goodbye to her brother. Seconds later there is an explosion with Saima's brother at the centre of it. This scene establishes a narrative framed within a discourse of religious extremism and, potently, foreign religious extremism. The second scene emphasizes the alien nature of what has preceded it—the camera cuts to the mundanity of the corridors of an English court and its attendant bureaucracy. Here, two of the first murder victims, Alex Iqbal (Tamin Mobayed) and his father, Fareed (Aftab Sachak) are initially introduced to the viewers. Alex Iqbal is a prosecution witness in a case of the rape of a daughter by her father—the girl being Alex's girlfriend. Tensions within the Iqbal family are evident and Fareed is seen to slap his son; these tensions are the result of Alex's relationship with Leah and the shame that it is perceived as bringing upon the family. The alleged victim in the case, Leah Wallace (Laura Greenwood) is revealed to be a member of the 'New Advent Church' (NAC).

[20] David Belcher, 'Messiah: Little short of a revelation,' *The Herald*, January 21, 2008.

The NAC is cast as a dangerous cult—using the term in the populist manner that Messiah 5: The Rapture is drawing on. A series of signifiers of unorthodox Christian beliefs and negative stereotypes are drawn upon to establish the exteriority of the NAC. For instance, it is described as practicing 'personal exorcism or casting out of demons,' they hold a 'fundamentalist belief in the word of God, strict belief in the Bible,'[21] here a belief in the inerrancy of the Bible again marks the group out as 'alien,' cultic. It is further revealed that Alex Iqbal was going to speak for defence rather than the prosecution and suggest that he believed that that Leah was being 'brainwashed,' predominantly by the charismatic leader of the NAC, Daniel Hughes (Ciarán McMenamin). The NAC is lead by a Daniel Hughes—with a soft Northern Irish accent he is at once tied by an signifying chain that leads the viewer to the Celtic fringe and the troubled history of the region; it is a history understood to be founded as much through religious difference, intolerance and extremism as national identity. This cultural difference from the English setting of the program is reflected at a personal level; he is later described as having locked a pregnant follower into a basement for three days so that she might 'seek atonement.' In this act his personal extremism and intolerance is revealed.

In this way the beliefs of the church take up a position on the problematized 'other' side of the self/other duality and further cement the equivalency of difference and danger that we encounter in the opening scenes. We might also consider the outcome of Leah and Alex's cross-cultural relationship—she, brainwashed, in a cult, he and his family brutally murdered.

We soon visit the crime scene of this murder. All members of the Iqbal family have been killed: Alex, his mother and father, and his sister. They have been arranged, postmortem, around their dining table with their hands bound, as if in prayer. The father's throat has been cut so that his blood has drained from his face, whitening his skin. There is sand on the floor. The sand is focused upon by DCI Walker (who has experienced flashbacks of Khalid's suicide bombing while waiting to enter the murder scene) and it transpires that it came from the Jezreel Valley in Israel, better known as the location of the plain of Megiddo. The murder scene is marked by the ongoing current of 'the foreign' and this refers us back to the framing device of extremism encountered in the opening scene.

[21] Messiah V. Episode 1, first broadcast 20 January 2008 by BBC1. Directed by Harry Bradbeer and written by Oliver Brown.

Two sisters are then killed, the first victim mistaken for her promiscuous sister who, we learn, was the intended victim. Sand features again at the murder scene, but here it is seen to contain a design based upon the figure of the eye in the pyramid design with the letters of the Tetragrammaton inscribed around it. Here we can be in no doubt that the killer is conversant in what Barkun typifies as 'stigmatized knowledge.'[22] The police initially believe it to be a cryptic message to them but the lead, DCI Walker, comes to doubt this, declaring the killer isn't communicating with them, '[it's] not a message for us, he's talking to God.' Hughes, the leader of the NAC becomes the main suspect at this point. He has been constructed under multiple signs of religious fanaticism: cult activity, brainwashing, physical punishment, and charismatic leadership. At this point in the narrative these coalesce into the metalanguage of myth and he becomes a 'cult killer.'[23] Repeated throughout this first half-hour of the program is this tying together of unorthodox religious belief, extremism, and violence.

A third murder occurs, a mother whose daughter is dying of cancer is tied up and has acid poured into her eyes. Hughes is quickly arrested, led off mid-sermon; he is taken away shouting scripture. The episode cuts to an interrogation scene with the central investigating team of DCI Walker, DI Terry Hedges (Daniel Ryan) and DS Mel Palmer (Marsha Thomason) questioning Hughes.

During the interrogation Hughes interprets the murders as linked by scripture to the 'seven signs' of the apocalypse. As he quotes scriptural passages, DCI Walker continually pursues his seemingly gnomic utterances where Hedges suspected Hughes of 'playing games'; at one point Hedges angrily exclaims, 'He's getting off on it, the sick bastard!' Instead DCI Walker asks, 'What is that?'[24] Reason penetrates, finding sense in madness— as Easthope continually reminds us, there must always be the trace of fact beneath all irruptions of the irrational— reason prevails, English reason doubly so.

Faced with further scriptural quotation from Hughes, Walker is energized. He demands, 'what does that mean?' His question not stemming from exasperated disbelief but borne out of a desire 'to know' and to 'understand' and thus to colonize the irrational with reason, to

[22] Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
[23] My choice of this phrase is directly influenced by the Channel 4 documentary Cutting Edge: Cult Killer: The Rick Rodriguez Story (originally broadcast 21 August 2006), typifying the populist depiction of deviancy associated with NRMs.
[24] Messiah V. Episode 1.

make it speak to him on his terms so that his rationale as an investigator is consolidated—the murderer no longer leading them but, instead, the murderer pursued by the knowing police. Hughes brings back news from the other side of reason. Walker may have understood that there was method in the madness that confronted his colleagues and him but only Hughes, the cultist, could speak of it. Walker's rationalizing instincts led him to the brink but he required Hughes to speak from beyond it. Hughes details the signs that he perceives within the murder scenes:

> Hughes: Breakdown in family relations, hedonism, a society in despair [.. .] there are seven common signs of the end; these are first three.
>
> Walker: The end of what?
>
> Hughes: You, me, all of this, everything we know. It's right here on your map. Megiddo is another name for Armageddon.

With equal gravity and disbelief, Walker proclaims, 'Our killer thinks it's the end of the world.'[25] What is crucial here is that only Hughes is able to provide this information. As stated, the knowledge that he carries is stigmatized knowledge, a communication from beyond the pale of reason and, crucially here, a knowledge that becomes loaded with danger in its shared use by the cult leader and the psychopathic killer. Here we see a dramatization of the threat to English empiricist discourse from external discourses, framed by an opening shot of a suicide bomber, the program unfolds around the relationship between the sureties of English rationalism and its others.

The second part opens with a consolidation of the Apocalyptic belief of the killer. DCI Walker opens this section, addressing the assembled investigative team, 'History has a beginning and an end. That end is signaled by seven signs.' He is supported in his presentation by the NAC leader, Hughes, who adds, 'Common to the Abrahamic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam—they each trace their roots back to Abraham—the signs will act as a guide, as a signal. They will act as a warning.'[26] Walker adds further detail by showing how the murders embody the first three of the seven signs. The scene opens with the camera positioned within the assembled team, listening to the presentation by Walker and

[25] Ibid.
[26] Messiah V. Episode 2, first broadcast 21 January 2008 by BBC1. Directed by Harry Bradbeer and written by Oliver Brown.

Hughes. We, as an audience, are being instructed in the seven signs of the end in which the killer believes; we are positioned in opposition to this knowledge and thus it is constructed as external to the 'we' that is implied through the perspectival unity between ourselves and the national state, embodied by the police in Walker and Hughes' audience.

Throughout this scene the dualism described by Easthope is personified by Walker and Hughes: Hughes, doubly marked as the exotic other through the connotative response to his Northern Irishness by an English audience and his leadership of the evangelist 'exorcism cult' while Walker characterizes the left-hand side of the binary of English/other. The police, then, are too English to conceive of the obscure and dogmatic theory that drives the murderer and they rely upon the stigmatized alterity of Hughes who must act as a native guide to the police, leading them through the unfamiliar lands of millennial belief. It is clear that the investigating police, typified by the 'average copper' character of DCI Terry Hedges, could not navigate these lands alone; their dedication to the facts alone being both their downfall and their blessing—for them all dangers are external—their rationality affirming their normative status.

As the interplay between Walker and Hughes continues, Hughes is asked by Hedges, 'So what's next?'

> Hughes: 'Violence and lawlessness. Seven out of the nine shall be killed, the innocent among them.'
>
> Hedges: 'Oh for Christ's sake…'[27]

Hedges' invocation of Christ signals a threshold—a leap beyond what is, for him, reasonable. From here only Hughes can continue,

> 'It's called the Rapture. A time of judgment. When those who shall be saved will vanish from the face of the Earth and go to an eternal dwelling place in Heaven and those who have sinned are left behind to face the final battle between good and evil. [pause] Armageddon.'[28]

[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

This could only have come from Hughes—he is an intermediary between reason and unreason. The eschatological theory he outlines being utterly removed from the common sense world of the 'coppers.' Hedges, for example, dismisses the clue of the sands of Armageddon at the scene of the first murder as having come from builders, working on a swimming pool for the Iqbals. This is a prosaic explanation providing the viewer with a common sense approach that is at once familiar and believable. Only Walker, touched by the seeming madness of extreme belief while in Palestine intuitively senses that the sand is more than that— he has, after all, walked upon this foreign sand and is consistently tied to Israel and Palestine by flashbacks of his final moments with his lover and her brother. Hedges provides a normative position to the viewers, reminding them of the real but Walker—in his encounters with that which is other—demonstrates the advantages of faith in the real, that the solidity of facts may still be found beneath the most obfuscating theories held within the wider world. His is an eternal return to English empiricism, a belief founded upon a faith in the facts. In a sense it is inevitable that he be a policeman—and here we find a bridging of the divide between the nation as state and the nation as culture. Walker embodies English empiricism as cultural practice in the service of the state.

Despite Walker's faith in English empiricism allowing him to walk upon foreign sands, he can only journey so far before his inevitable return 'home.' Again, Hughes is a necessary guide—Walker may realize that the facts point beyond the everyday experiences of the average 'British bobby,' but he still requires a native to show him the way: apocalyptic thought is too foreign, too distant for him to fully 'know'; to remain within English empiricist discourse, the English police must rely upon a representative of the irrational to make clear to them the madness that they can never truly 'know.' For the police—representatives of the state and, as subjects, bearers of the culture of the nation and thus the idealized unification of the impossible 'whole nation' that Easthope describes—cannot wholly understand the killer's misinterpretation of 'the facts,' for that would reveal the killer's epistemological framework to be reasonable (and it must be maintained as exotic).

It is the killer's obsession with his theoretical construct that leads to his downfall at the hands of the pragmatic agents of reason; it is, ultimately a remembered conversation that reveals the killer's identity to Walker and in this we find the triumph of practicality over theory and common sense over dogma, confirming the competing terms of Easthope's oppositions and confirming the inevitable victory of that English empiricism over the deviant from it. The

killer offers Walker a shared role in his apocalyptic quest but this is turned down and the killer meets an end, albeit a more individuated one than he had hoped for. In thwarting the apocalyptic killer, the English police save the name of reason and redeem the empiricist discourse. But it comes at a cost—Walker's love interest, Salma, with whom he had been reunited is the final victim and in this his status of 'insider' is clarified. That which marked him as not wholly located within the home culture is erased and his Englishness recuperated at a personal level.

Even here the drama cannot end because it has mobilized a narrative that is more than simply the delusions of an individuated psychotic killer. The killer's world is a shared one— more than one potential suspect is questioned—and a native guide is required to lead the investigating police through it. The killer may have been dispatched but the apocalyptic discourse he shared with Hughes and the cultic milieu that the NAC suggested is still an unresolved threat to the dominant empiricist discourse; indeed here the cultic milieu fulfills the ideational threat implied in Colin Campbell's description of it as, 'the cultural underground.'[29] Thus the full closure of the drama is guaranteed only through the final interchange between Hughes and Hedges.

The covered body of Salma, Walker's lover, is seen being wheeled past the three central police characters, DCI Walker, DI Hedges, and DS Mel Palmer. DS Palmer says to Walker, 'I'm so sorry . . .' To which Walker curtly replies, 'Thanks.' With that, Palmer drops back and Walker and Hedges walk closer together, filling the space briefly occupied by Palmer, she is obscured from view. With her, the feminine is also excluded. Palmer had carried two plotlines, both of which revolved around her emotional relationships. Again, here, her role is to fulfill the exclusion of the emotional from the empiricist discourse. A curt thank you and she disappears from view so that the men can talk and address the apocalyptic discourse raised through Hughes and the killer. And so Hedges and Walker close the piece,

> Hedges: It will happen one day.
>
> Walker: What will?

[29] Colin Campbell, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization' in J. Kaplan and H. Lööw, ed., *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Walnut Creek and London: AltaMira, 2002), 14.

Hedges: The end of the world. Five billion years from now, give or take. The sun implodes, boiling away the oceans and us with them.

Walker: If you believe in science . ..

Hedges: I'll take it over religion any day.

Walker: [. . .] See you tomorrow.[30]

And so Walker walks away while Hedges remains still. The certainty of the real is established as their shared anchor. Walker's tomorrows are guaranteed in his parting comment to Hedges.

This muted, mutual celebration of the real is the program's full closure; just as the murder case had a false ending and the real killer still eluded the police, the drama also had a false ending in which the demise of the killer signaled the completion of the story but not the closure of the production as text. After the case was solved and the killer dispatched, the apocalyptic discourse inhabited by the killer still remained—indeed the police were exposed to it most fully not by the murders but by their being guided through it by 'cult leader' Hughes, who, we are warned in the first part of the drama, is capable of 'brainwashing.' The killer was transformed through exposure to the same stigmatized knowledge and here the perceived threat of the irrational to empiricist discourse is exposed and the need for it to be counteracted is made evident.

The paranoid fear of the other that exists within the self (referred to by Easthope) is exposed and must be eradicated so that the 'whole self' may be maintained. And so the pragmatic Hedges reminds the viewers of the orthodox explanation of the end of the world while Walker's 'See you tomorrow,' acts to point to the unimaginable distance between our tomorrow and the tomorrow some five billion years hence that will signal the end. Messiah reveals to us the impossibility of an English apocalypse—it is something that is always going to happen to 'them': foreigners, the insane, or the misguided and which can always be defused through common sense and transparent facts.

[30] Messiah V. Episode 2.

Warm Beer and Honey for Tea Versus Cataclysm

While Englishness may reveal itself through a dogged and determined adherence to material reality it is also experienced as distinctly eccentric and it is in this mode of Englishness that the documentary A Very British Apocalypse depicts a range of apocalyptic beliefs. Easthope draws attention to the manner in which English culture is prepared to use its others as a means of shoring up its sense of certainty in itself. He gives examples of self-conscious 'silliness' which depend upon a shared common sense view of the world in order to make their 'silliness' apparent: Monty Python's Flying Circus, Alice in Wonderland, Edward Lear's works, Edwardian children's literature (The Wind in the Willows, Peter Pan) and so on. By purposefully deviating from the norm, they recognize and underline the prevalence of the empiricist, 'common sensical' norm. As Easthope has it, in a commentary on Alice's concern for her increasingly distant feet as she grows after eating the small cake at the bottom of the rabbit hole,

> But of course, all of this is a joke, deliberate absurdity, pleasurable and playful exaggeration and impossibility, fantasy known to be fantasy when seen from the viewpoint of common sense [. . .] English silly discourse recognises the norm of empiricist discourse by departing from it.[31]

It is in the silliness of English culture that 'the homegrown apocalypse' is constructed by A Very British Apocalypse. The difference here being that Lewis Carroll's protagonist was, as narrator of the speech cited by Easthope, aware of her absurdity whereas the subjects of the documentary, shown to have long since departed from 'the viewpoint of common sense' and are unwitting exponents of 'English silly discourse.' A Very British Apocalypse does not seek to overcome the incommensurability of an English apocalyptic narrative or even to attempt to address it as a serious belief but to confine it to 'English silly culture' and thus to underscore the seriousness, empirical basis of Englishness.

Originally broadcast on March 21, 2007 on Channel 5, the program is framed by the opening statement from the authoritative—even paternal—voiceover provided by Laurie Taylor, a former professor of Sociology who is also known in Britain for his media work. During a

[31] Easthope 1999, 109–110.

short excerpt of film featuring the channeling of 'Aetherius' by Dr. George King, Taylor asks,

> Puzzled? Well, let me help. This weird piece of historic film shows the Cosmic Master, Aetherius talking through the body of George King.[32]

The film cuts to show Taylor looking unsure, his eyes flicking from side to side among a groups of people with their eyes closed and chanting, 'Om Mane Padme Om'. Taylor continues,

> This is me fifty years later standing amongst Dr. King's devout followers as they endeavour, with their prayers to protect us all from some of the disasters that will, allegedly, precede the end of the world. Now I don't normally hang around with prophets of doom. Like, like most other solid British people I'm pretty sure the sun's going to rise tomorrow, there'll be sufficient honey for tea and, er, quite enough warm beer to last my lifetime.[33]

Taylor's 'let me help' evidences the audience's need for guidance through the bewildering world he is about to present. He suggests that although he is a non-believer he hopes to approach believers in the apocalypse in an open minded way. His opening statement belies this hope and clearly places himself on the side of the 'puzzled [. ..] solid British people.' It should also be noted that his use of 'warm beer' as a signifier of Britishness points to a somewhat colonial vision of Britain understood in English terms. His 'warm beer' calls to mind then Prime Minister John Major's 1993 vision of the future, 'Fifty years on from now, Britain will still be the country of long shadows on cricket grounds, warm beer, invincible green suburbs, dog lovers and pools fillers and, as George Orwell said, "Old maids bicycling to holy communion through the morning mist".'[34] The cricket grounds and 'invincible green suburbs,' here speak resolutely of England as opposed to Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland.

Taylor first meets Father Dom Benedict Heron, the author of Our Call to Holiness: The Reflections of a Sinner (2005), a Catholic apocalyptic awaiting the Parousia; Taylor

[32] A Very British Apocalypse. First broadcast 21 March 2007 by Channel 5. Directed by Ned Parker and written by Laurie Taylor.
[33] Ibid.

expresses surprise that this 'gentle' Benedictine monk holds such a belief and so he goes to meet Abi Freeman, a member of The Family International.

> Taylor: 'What's a nice girl like this believing a myth like that?'[34]

Taylor expresses some disappointment that Abi is unable to provide a date for the End but with little detail provided of the Family or their beliefs the audience is whisked along to a discussion of numerology. Taylor mentions Newton's obsession with geomatria which led him to the belief that the world was going to end on 15th July 2060 and then he further asks of Dr. Peter Lee, 'Mathematician,' 'What is the fascination with numerology? Is any of it credible?'[35]

The interview begins with an anecdote from Lee mentioning that he knew someone who divined the date of the apocalypse through numerology— 'Unfortunately for him it was during 1989.'[36] The bulk already dismissed as incredible, there seems little hope for the remainder, it is summarized, with a tip of the hat to Jeremy Bentham, that champion of objectivist English rationalism, as, 'nonsense on stilts.' Taylor's desire to be as objective as possible has rapidly been reduced to a survey of the silliness that exists beyond the cultural boundaries of Englishness. Taylor's tone here plays on a jokey tone that undermines his career as a professional academic and broadcaster; it situates him as the interested amateur whose dismissal of numerology should not, in any way, be perceived as being based upon intellectual snobbery; to the 'solid' Briton this, no doubt, would smack of a yearning for the abstractions of theory over 'common sense.' Again, Easthope's distinctive English empirical discourse can be seen to shape both the rhetoric of the presenter, the tone of the production and the response to apocalyptic beliefs. Solidly fixed to the right hand column of Easthope's binary oppositions, numerology's heightened silliness is cast as just one more fantasy by which England's others live.

Taylor's search for accounts of the end then touches upon geopolitical fears of the end and the fear of 'missing' Soviet nuclear devices. He then returns to the religiously based apocalypse and cites work by Bruce Lincoln that shows that the Biblical language that underpins many of Bush II's more bellicose speeches and describes his 'apparent religious

[34] A Very British Apocalypse
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

justification for [bringing about the end of the world].' While apocalyptic belief is hived off as 'nonsense,'[37] the potential for creating apocalyptic scenarios is manifestly foreign—missing Soviet nuclear devices in the hands of terrorists and a US president guided by divine revelation. This sense of the apocalypse as an imported, foreign phenomenon is further compounded when Taylor turns to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the Iranian president and his belief in the return of the Mahdi. The transition from Bush to Ahmadinejad is achieved via a cross-fade from Bush's face to Ahmadinejad. At the midpoint they merge, made the same in their dogmatic beliefs and utterly other to the rationalism inherent in the 'solid' British folk that Taylor speaks to and for.

Having seemingly depicted the source and potential actualization of these beliefs overseas, Taylor turns to adherents of Islamic understandings of the apocalypse in Britain (England). He prefaces the segment in the following way:

> Ahmadinejad reminds us that alongside the apocalyptic Christians in this country we have also become dramatically aware of another large group of people who take their holy book literally.[38]

The Christians are marked as being, 'apocalyptic Christians,' exterior to mainstream Christianity. Indeed we might take note that Taylor's first apocalyptic Christians are Catholic or cultists.

There is not the same demarcation for Muslims; the apocalyptic Christians are seen to be apart from orthodox Anglicanism and for the Muslim community less demarcation is necessary. Their beliefs are always exterior to the kind of England that Taylor is speaking to: John Major and George Orwell's vision of warm beer, honey for tea, and the eternal sunrise. Indeed, the signifier that Taylor employs to preface the segment on British Muslims is Ahmadinejad who he has already characterized as a dangerous extremist driven by apocalyptic beliefs.

From here we return to the Aetherius Society and their views are interspersed with shots of clearly faked 'UFO' photographs. With its headquarters set in the, 'tidy terraced streets,' and a leader who received his first extraterrestrial visitation while doing the dishes, we are led to

[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

a strong sense of the homegrown nature of the Aetherius society. This is at odds with the sense of the 'right-hand side' nature of the apocalypse that Taylor has hitherto presented and it is, in fact, the Englishness of the Aetherius Society that is stressed in the program.

Taylor finds himself 'Strangely reassured by the Aetherius Society, like a kind of cosmic Home Guard.'[39] Amidst the apocalyptic rhetoric of George Bush and Ahmadinejad the Aetherians are presented as a very parochial set of believers in the apocalypse; with the associative chain between the Home Guard and the eccentric and bumbling cast of Dad's Army[40] their apocalypse seems to resonate with a shoddy amateurism in comparison with the 'professional' pursuits of the numerologists, of political rhetoric. This then is the 'silly English discourse,' version of the apocalypse, far removed from the aggressive extremism of global apocalyptics, it reassures because, just as Fraser's panic-stricken Caledonian intonation of 'We're doomed!' in Dad's Army were always undone by the accidental successes of the Home Guard, we are led to believe that the Aetherius Society serve a similar function— they confirm the eternal fact of England by the ludicrousness with which Taylor presents their alternative.

Having met the seemingly very British, even very English Aetherians (for Taylor's vision of 'Britain,' as stated, is one more strongly associated with England), Laurie Taylor is moved to comment that, 'Some apocalypsts do seem nicer than others, not that I can believe a word they say.' He then asks if we are too complacent toward scientific predictions of the end because failed religious predictions had lulled us into a false sense of security,

> You can't beat the Americans when it comes to announcing the end so why don't the British take such matters equally seriously?[41]

To Taylor the long history of failed predictions means that we are unable to take these predictions seriously. What Taylor fails to address is that American apocalyptic culture has a comparable history of failed predictions of the end; indeed, Britain has little to compare to the Millerite Great Disappointment nor the subsequent expansion of millennial belief in its wake.

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[39] Ibid.
[40] Dad's Army was a television comedy produced by the BBC between 1968 and 1977. It centred on the amateur soldiers of the Home Guard (civilian volunteers ineligible for active duty) during the Second World War. The war seldom intruded upon the fictional coastal town of Walmington-on-Sea and the ill-preparedness of the Home Guard was the source of much of the programme's humour.
[41] A Very British Apocalypse

Taylor goes on to visit the Mill Hill Synagogue in order to gauge apocalyptic belief among Britain's orthodox Jews and finds its Rabbi counting the days until the Jewish Messianic Redemption, citing the, 'master cabbalists,' divinatory proclamation that we are in the end times. With little comment Taylor goes on to talk to Ras Keambiroiro, a Rastafarian, and 'devout follower,' of Christ returned, Haile Selassie. Taylor finds him, 'a long way from the African sun on the fifth floor of a grey,' scarred BNP-graffiti'd housing estate in South London[42] his alterity underscored in multiple ways by Taylor's introduction.

Keambiroiro is marked as at once alien ('a log way from the African sun,' and rejected by the indigenous population, (the 'BNP-graffiti'd housing estate'). Indeed Taylor seems to suggest that the poverty of Keambiroiro's surroundings discounts the fullness of his vision and in doing so demonstrates little attempt to understand the perspective of his interviewee. The short interview focuses on Haile Selassie's continued presence on Earth despite his apparent bodily death and the strict views of Keambiroiro regarding our living in judgment times. Having declared 'lucky Rastas' for their lives within 'their' end times, his informalism betraying his patronizing rejection of them, Taylor discusses the Rapture Index, returning to the mathematician, Peter Lee. Swiftly dismissed in laughter, the Rapture Index does not last long. There is no precedence for Lee, and so there can be no significance attached to the 'signs' thus indexed.

Once again Taylor returns to scientific apocalypticism from impact events to 'synchronous failure' of Earth systems with a focus upon human activity. Scientific believers are labeled as 'too extreme,' other apocalyptics as 'silly,' while Taylor continues,

> There is one other apocalyptic impediment, the well-known British inability to get things to run on time and that can really make a mess of an apocalypse.[42]

We end with the idea that the apocalypse is something that is incompatible with Englishness— it is something that will happen overseas. More than this, it is the very amateurish nature of Englishness, identified by Easthope, which will safeguard us from apocalyptic belief. This is the repeated refrain of the program: apocalyptic belief is something that exists in the margins. It is either too silly to contemplate or is imported by migrant

[42] Ibid.

communities. The program never asks, for instance, if mainstream British Protestantism currently interprets the Book of Revelation.

Conclusion

In both documentary and fictional forms the English apocalypse is rendered unthinkable within mainstream culture because that culture is founded on principles that cannot allow the recognition of apocalyptic thought. Just as the Aborigines in Where the Green Ants Dream are condemned by being given a voice within a discourse that rejects the claims made in that voice, so too do believers in the apocalypse face a similar fate within mainstream English culture. It is a culture that is based around a discourse that is at odds with the epistemic bases of apocalyptic culture and thus apocalyptic belief is characterized as, at best, 'silly,' or, at worst, murderous and mad. It is something best left to dangerous extremists, the insane, and Americans. Apocalyptic belief can only ever find a voice within English culture at its margins or within its underground, in the cultic milieu. DCI Walker's England will always be guaranteed in its eternal tomorrow, while the apocalypse must remain other, excluded from the social totality but always with it in the shadows. This is the implication that neither program fully confronts, that despite the inadmissibility of apocalypticism, for all its alterity, it is, nonetheless, the inadmissible exteriority that dwells within. Although shunned by mainstream British media culture these narratives are still present within the weft and warp of popular discourse, albeit at the margins. Therein lies the danger of ridicule and contempt for apocalypticism as has been shown.[43] It is in these circumstances of misrepresentation and perceived persecution that apocalyptic fevers burn brightest.

[43] See, for instance, John Walliss, *Apocalyptic Trajectories: Millenarianism and Violence in the Contemporary World* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994) and Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York and London: Seven Bridges Press, 2000).

Appendix B. (2011b) 'On the outskirts of the new global village: computer-mediated visions of the end.' In Rob G. Howard (ed.) *Network Apocalypse: Visions of the End in an Age of Internet Media*. Sheffield: Phoenix Press.

On The Outskirts Of The New Global Village: Computer-mediated prophecy and the digital afterlife

Andrew Fergus Wilson

Abstract

This chapter will argue that cyberspace, as a medium, offers a unique opportunity for the spiritual seeker to explore the syncretism that lies at the heart of the cultic milieu. The interlinked pages that constitute Webspace extend the 'circuit' shared by seekers into a global context and, further, provide an enhanced sense of community. In this context individual apocalyptic prophecies can flourish and become sedimented within the cultic milieu, strengthened by this extended circuit and enhanced communal potential.

The Light behind the Network

In *Children of the New Age,* Steven Sutcliffe describes adoption of a 'Network of Light' by Peter Caddy, the British spiritualist and cofounder of the Findhorn Foundation. Caddy, along with his wife Eileen, integrated the idea of a Network of Light (or 'spiritual energies') into the already syncretistic spiritual practices and beliefs of the Foundation during the 1950s and 1960s (Sutcliffe 2003). The concept, in the lineage borrowed by the Caddys, was an apparent amalgamation of ideas present in the writings of proto– New Age practitioner Alice Bailey during the 1940s and a similar concept referred to by a psychic worker called 'Naomi'/Anne Edwards, whom Peter Caddy encountered in the early 1950s. These Networks of Light were believed to resonate outward and downward through loosely defined but hierarchical spiritual networks with groups of psychic practitioners regulating and controlling the flow of 'light energy' (Sutcliffe 2003: 65). In addition to being a kind of psychic power grid, the Network

of Light was also capable of receiving messages and inspiration from higher divine powers including ‘Christ Forces’, ‘Masters of Ra’ and the ‘space brothers’. Thus, it acted as a communications network in addition to a grid through which psychic energies could flow; or, rather, the energies transferred through the network were also capable of carrying information. These messages might have borne inspiration, instruction, or (occasionally) warnings. Sutcliffe cites a message warning of a potential forthcoming apocalyptic conflagration received by the third cofounder of the Findhorn Foundation, Dorothy Maclean, during the early 1960s.

Although certain narratives embraced by the Findhorn Foundation reflected the rise and fall in fortune of popular discourses within the cultic milieu (Sutcliffe cites the passing influence of the UFO craze during the early years of the second half of the twentieth century), the concept of the Network of Light has remained a central pillar of the foundation’s beliefs. Gordon Lynch is right to relate Janice Dolley’s suggestion that, ‘since the 1970s, progressive organizations (such as Findhorn) [have] often developed clearer and more specific goals as they come to recognize the unlikeliness of achieving broad, and undifferentiated, aims for global spiritual transformation’ (Lynch 2007: 190). In the case of the Findhorn Foundation, one might point to their engagement with the United Nations as an official NGO (nongovernmental organization); the development of New Findhorn Directions, a trading subsidiary; or, Ekopia, a local community investment scheme with its own currency, the Eko.

Nonetheless, to focus on these material ventures would be to overlook the continued importance and centrality of the spiritual dimension in the foundation’s work. Thus, the Network of Light is the cynosure and subject of a daily group meditation held at the foundation’s communal ‘ecovillage’ in Scotland; it is invoked through meditation with the specific purpose of creating a ‘vessel to contain the energies of love, light and goodwill’ (http:// www.findhorn.org/about_us/meditation_new.php). Once this has been achieved and after a suitable period of contemplation, the group then proceeds to the Great Invocation, which has at its heart the figure of channels of love and light that characterize the Great Network:

THE GREAT INVOCATION

> From the point of light within the mind of God Let light stream forth into the minds of men Let light descend on earth.
>
> From the point of love within the heart of God Let love stream forth into the hearts of men May Christ return to earth.
>
> From the centre where the will of God is known
>
> Let purpose guide the little wills of men
>
> The purpose which the masters know and serve.
>
> [...]
>
> Let light, and love and power restore the plan on earth.
>
> Close with three Oms (http://www.findhorn.org/about_us/meditation_new.php).

In addition to the diverse points of engagement with the secular world in a variety of material efforts, the Findhorn Foundation is shaped by an ongoing spiritual model provided by and enacted through the Network of Light. It is the mechanism through which the foundation hopes to transmit the love and light required to transform the world in preparation for their idiosyncratic syncretized millennialism. The Network provides a useful model for considering how the Internet is understood and experienced by a number of individual spiritual seekers within the contemporary cultural milieu.

Belief and the Internet

In *New Media: A Critical Introduction,* Martin Lister suggests that there is little separation between our offline and online lives:

> As, over time, some new media have become unremarkable due to their familiarity and ubiquity, and others have been refashioned or displaced, we can

> see not a Narnia or Matrix-like division of virtual and actual worlds, but rather a complicated interweaving of mediated, lived, time and space (Lister *et al.* 2009: 237).

This is difficult to argue against, but the sense of wonder that earlier writers had in their engagement with cyberspace has not dissipated entirely. For some there is a real sense that they are, indeed, stepping into Narnia, for all the familiarity that the enabling technology may have acquired.

In *Give Me That Online Religion*, Brenda Brasher sketches a variety of ways in which religious groups have integrated computer-mediated communication (CMC) technologies into their practices. Frequently the integration amounts to little more than that; she points to the way in which traditional institutionalized religions have used digital technology's capacity to store information as a means of establishing openly accessible online repositories of documents and texts. She also points to the way in which the shared communicative spaces that the Internet has opened have been adopted by religious communities as communal meeting spaces. She cites the use of the Internet as a space of reflection and discussion by attendees at the Toronto Blessing following the event. Crucially, here, however, Brasher also points to the importance of interconnectedness for understanding the Internet as a medium with its own effects. For instance, she cites the way in which the use of links produces fresh affinities and alliances—however embryonic and fragile

> As an increasingly diverse collection of religious groups move into cyberspace, one significant effect is the incidence of new convergences and cooperation amongst them. It is not at all rare for the Website of a Christian group espousing strong millennial beliefs to be linked to a Jewish Zionist Website (2004: 29).

For many users, these connections are the *sine qua non* of the experience of Internet usage; while there may be a lack of clarity regarding the origins of the phrase 'surfing the net',[1] the intention behind it is clear: users browse the Internet, following links to one page and then the next. As will be addressed below, this dynamic pseudo-spatial engagement with cyberspace can produce a sense of an immaterial experiential dimension that is visited when online. Further, this mode of interconnected virtual experience has been credited with an extension of

[1] The frequently credited originator of the term, Jean Amour Polly, ascribes the first usage to Mark McCahill at http://www.netmom.com/about-net-mom/23-who-inventedsurfing-the-internet.html.

humanity's spiritual being. Brasher cites the earlier work of Jennifer Cobb and finds in Cobb's work the 'fascinating if unprovable theory' that '[i]n building these communications technologies, we have merely hardwired our pre-existing interconnectedness . . . in cyberspace we have externally actualized our evolving psycho-spiritual ties with one another' (cited in Brasher 2004: 40). It is here that the use of the Findhorn Foundation's Network of Light as a metaphor for the extension of the spiritual milieu into cyberspace becomes apparent. Thus, we can see how, in certain spiritual understandings, particularly those inflected by the ceaseless syncretism of New Age thought, the Internet becomes the primary bearer of 'the Message' in an electronically mediated age rather than simply a digitized repository. Naturally, there are limitations to this. The embodied self cannot maintain its virtual presence without recourse to physical needs— Douglas Cowan points to this near the end of *Cyberhenge: Modern Pagans on the Internet* and reminds the cybertopian, 'everyone of us returns to the reality of the off-line world that is defined at least in part by our bodies' (2005: 201). Nonetheless, Cowan makes earlier reference to pagans whose paganism is almost wholly virtual. While these 'exclusively online modern Pagans' are described as being less invested in the participatory elements of offline paganism and thus less invested in the day-to-day practices that are typically held to define *being* pagan (2005: 160), what is crucial here is the recognition that the Internet provides the setting in which a semblance of pagan identity can be performed. Indeed, it can be suggested that rather than an incomplete form of *real* pagan identity, what is developing is a mode of engaging with religious identities that allows an ongoing 'project of the spiritual self' in which the formal trappings of offline paganism are being elided by the kind of contingent and informal online religiosity described by Morten Højsgaard: '"Cyber-religion", at its basis, is mediated or located primarily in cyberspace, its contents reflect the main features of the postmodern cyber culture, and it is only sparingly organized as well' (2005: 62).

Whereas, on the one hand, Cowan allows us to consider cyberspatial religious life as being related to and developed by 'authentic' offline religious practices, Højsgaard, on the other, presents a model of a religiosity that is particular to cyberspace. Both, however, contain the assumption that there is a 'there' that is mobilized by CMC technologies, that cyber-worshippers engage with a location—or, at least, a space—when they log on. It is being argued here that this space, this 'network of virtual light', encourages particular modes of knowledge acquisition that serve to make more likely the dissemination of, among other marginalized beliefs, apocalyptic beliefs and/or visions. This is, in part, due to the peculiar

psychogeography of cyberspace and in part due to the way in which knowledge is sought on the Internet.

The Space in Cyberspace

Terms used to describe the Internet during its initial phase of mass adoption in North America and Western Europe relied heavily on the spatial metaphor, a metaphor that has remained dominant. The short-lived sobriquet 'information superhighway' (or, depending on one's real-world location, *Infobahn*) spoke of high-speed travel toward a destination, of movement from a 'here' to a 'there'. 'Cyberspace', a term borrowed from the fiction of William Gibson,[2] captures in its evocative vagueness the digitization of space that seems to occur when we log on to the Internet: the 'there' beyond the screen.

Gibson's neologism originates within the 'cyberpunk' subgenre of science fiction that characterizes much of Gibson's early work. Tied to the birth of 'cyberspace' as a concept, cyberpunk can be thought of as the fiction of a historical moment (while also being the product of previous works of science fiction such as those of John Brunner or the New Wave science fiction authors of the late 1960s). By mapping out the 'psychogeography' of a new sociocultural frontier, cyberpunk performs the role that Raymond Williams refers to as a 'structure of feeling': 'a mode of social formation, explicit and recognizable in specific kinds of art, which is distinguishable from social and semantic formations by its articulation of presence' (1977: 135).

Thus, cyberpunk as a structure of feeling uses 'new semantic figures' to map out an emergent social formation. It is the emergent generation of which they write—a technologically literate generation with the capacity to treat technology equally as a means of social being and a means of intervention and disruption—which inhabited the conceptual spaces and identities that cyberspace narrated (Williams 1977: 135). Equally, the virtual environment in which CMC transactions occur is provided with a signifier in William Gibson's 1984 novel *Neuromancer*:

[2] See the short story 'Burning Chrome' (Omni, 1982) collected in *Burning Chrome* (London: Gollancz, 1986) and the novel *Neuromancer* (New York: Ace, 1984).

> The matrix has its roots in primitive arcade games … in early graphics programs and military experimentation with cranial jacks … Cyberspace. A consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of legitimate operators, in every nation, by children being taught mathematical concepts…A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data. Like city lights, receding … (1984: 67).

The concept thus draws within it the presumed infinitude of knowledge that the human mind is capable of reckoning (the 'clusters' and 'constellations' of data, stretching outward, 'receding') in addition to the experientially familiar mystery of 'the nonspace of the human mind'. The tension between the knowable 'city lights' and their outward explosion into the infinity of the cosmic void characterizes early attempts to consider the spatial form of cyberspace, for instance, William Mitchell's use of the figure of the city to 'map' cyberspace or Marcus Novak's evocative call for an architecture of poetic dimensions as a means of understanding the apprehension of cyberspatial dimensions.

Tautologically, cyberspace is considered in spatial terms. We have an idea of there being a space beyond the screen through which we travel. Whether that movement is from Web page to Web page, the movement of an avatar within a MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-playing Game), a programme, movie, or song downloaded via a P2P (peer-to-peer) application, or a virus or worm spreading out and burrowing through the electronic ether, cyberspace is considered to be a space through which movement is achieved. It is not, however, spatial organization as we are accustomed to it.

Gillian Skirrow points to its entrancing qualities in 'Hellivision: An analysis of video games'; she goes on to suggest that young male gamers explore unconscious projections in the virtual worlds they engage with (1986). Cyberspace is something that is constituted not only through linked networks but also through the users of these networks and the content they produce—Sherry Turkle finds depth to the screen and projects her work across multiple points of interface with it; thought becomes disseminated and spread out into multiple points of engagement with an unidentified but palpable entity behind the screen:

> Why is it so hard for me to turn away from the screen? The windows on my computer desktop offer me layers of material to which I have simultaneous

> access … When I write at the computer, all of these are present and my thinking space seems somehow enlarged. The dynamic, layered display gives me the comforting sense that I write in conversation with my computer. After years of such encounters, a blank piece of paper can make me feel strangely alone (1996: 29).

Further, these users and contents change with great rapidity. It would be possible to map servers around the world, but this does not give an indication of the use being made of them at any one time. It would, for example, be possible to describe the physical location of the BBC News Online server as being in London. It is, however, simultaneously 'serving' pages around the globe. It is at once local and global.

That globality is not, however, static: the specific locations around the world from which information is being requested change by the second. This suggests that we cannot record the topography of cyberspace by conventional means: we cannot simply draw a map of it. To begin to understand how cyberspace can be considered in spatial terms, we must employ metaphors that draw upon conventional and familiar reckonings of space. One of the more successful attempts to produce a familiar spatial reckoning of cyberspace can be found in William J. Mitchell's *City of Bits: Space, Place, and the Infobahn*. As the title suggests, Mitchell employs the city as a figure by which we can understand the spatial (non)presence of cyberspace. Mitchell uses the metaphor of the city as a means of familiarizing those unacquainted with cyberspace with the various forms it took at that time. In many ways, *City of Bits* is concerned with fixing the spatial organization of cyberspace in terms that domesticate its unfamiliar spaces while retaining something of the adventure of roaming the city. Indeed, early on in the book Mitchell claims, 'My name is wjm@mit.edu (though I have many aliases), and I am an electronic *flâneur*. I hang out on the network. . . . The keyboard is my café' (1995: 8). In evoking Baudelaire's *flâneur,* Mitchell is suggesting the pleasure of cyberspace as a space for roaming, exploring, seeing and being seen: it is a realm in which alternative versions of the self can be presented in virtual anonymity. Mitchell is 'wjm@mit.edu', among other aliases, and from his café keyboard he can watch the virtual world go by, participating as he pleases. Also worth commenting on here is that Baudelaire was the observer of profound social change as Paris was redesigned and the lives of the citizens were radically transformed through the practices and discourses of modernity.

Despite reincarnating Baudelaire's definitive city-dweller within an electronic plane, Mitchell is quick to stress that fundamental differences exist between spatial reckonings of the city and of cyberspace. He suggests that it is 'profoundly antispatial': it is 'there' but it is not possible to describe 'there' or point someone in its direction; in his words, 'You do not go *to* it; you log *in*' (1995: 8). So, rather than a place that one visits, it is a space that one enters: it is ambience rather than location.

Throughout *City of Bits*, Mitchell continues to employ the metaphor of the city for cyberspace and of the *flâneur* for its users. He recognizes the global nature of it and the further production of time–space compression but insists on reproducing the local within the global or on providing examples of its iterations such as in the structure of the Cleveland FreeNet, which was identifiably organized around the institutions of the physical city. Mitchell also speaks of the ability to 'condense' scattered rural communities and draw their inhabitants together into a shared, electronic, public space. In these examples Mitchell is accurate in his description of cyberspace as a city but his analysis is weaker when he attempts to argue the same case for the World Wide Web, MUDs (Multi-User Dungeons or Domains) and their variants.

The Web is identified primarily through the use of a particular protocol for the transmission of information ('http' or Hypertext Transfer Protocol). In this sense it is a medium that is conceived of in spatial terms, but not one that corresponds well with the anthropomorphic organization of city space. The planar shifts from Web page to Web page suggest movement not within a city but upon a vast and chaotic plane that is, it is arguable, experienced purely through the imagination. However, what is of value here is the ability to 'condense' not scattered rural communities but scattered communities of believers; this theme shall be returned to later.

The second point of interest that can be found in Mitchell's work—like much writing on cyberspace during the 1990s—is an eagerness to understand human interaction with the new medium. Later work can tend to concentrate on human interaction within the medium, its integration into daily life,[3] or the impact of the medium on social structures.[4] This is, of

[3] For instance, Barry Wellman and Caroline Haythornthwaite (eds.), *The Internet in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
[4] See Armand Mattelart, *The Information Society: An Introduction* (London:Sage, 2003) or Manuel Castells, *The Internet Galaxy: Reflections on the Internet, Business, and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

course, valuable work, but there is still a need to understand how the medium in itself is used and engaged with, and at the heart of this is a need to explore the multiple ways in which its unique spatiality is understood.

Rather than attempt to project current understandings of social space(s) onto cyberspace, it is more appropriate to reconsider our understanding of space. Marcus Novak does this in the essay 'Liquid Architectures in Cyberspace' (1991). He does consider the figure of the city as a means of understanding cyberspace, but he sees as it as limiting insofar as cyberspace can be considered an extension of the city form, a para-city if you will. Fundamental to Novak's position is the idea that cyberspace allows us to extend subjectivity into virtual form. His argument is that the mind and the body are thoroughly linked, that the Cartesian split was a convenient thought tool only. Novak follows the idea that knowledge is embodied and that the mind affects our bodily presence and experience of physical reality: what we perceive as real *is* real, with objective reality being little more than 'a construct of our mind'.

In a sense, then, our reality can be seen as a series of fictions, fluid and open to change. This becomes evident in cyberspace and what we choose to take of ourselves into it. Our 'self' is defined through pure representation rather than perception, and it is representation over which we have complete control. Novak suggests that the architecture of cyberspace (that is, the organization of space within cyberspace) *is* anthropomorphic but that the human figure at the heart of anthropomorphism has become fluid and subject to change.

With a 'liquid' body around which to build the architecture of cyberspace, the self becomes, for Novak, liquid. This liquidity of self and space is akin to poetry and magic for Novak, for they exemplify 'the promise of control over the world by the power of the will'. Novak comments, 'Cyberspace is poetry inhabited, and to navigate through it is to become a leaf on the wind of a dream' (1991: 229). For Novak, cyberspace is a series of dream cities built and explored by their inhabitants. These are not merely the bringing to bear of our meanings onto the cities surrounding us (something akin to the psychogeographies of the Situationists) but the production of our own multiple and tidal spaces.

From Turkle's presence behind the screen to Novak's inhabited poetic spaces via Mitchell's wandering electronic *flâneur,* the extra-human experience of cyberspace offers glimpses of a world beyond, in which technologies of communication seem to hold out the promise of modes of dialogue that facilitate new creative and existential possibilities. In the context of

this kind of reading of cyberspace, the act of logging on to the Internet can be understood of as a form of active sacralization if we accept Bobby C. Alexander's (admittedly general) definition of ritual: 'Ritual . . . is a performance, planned or improvised, that effects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context within which the everyday is transformed' (1997: 139). We are close, here, to the cosmological encounter with technology that can be found in Marshall McLuhan's work. He is better known for his suggestion that new media are capable of transforming perception; nonetheless, McLuhan's Catholicism is evident in the expansive and ultimately redemptive role that his depiction of technology offers. His is a viewpoint of technology united with the poetic spirit of humanity, itself an immanent realization of that which is divine in nature and in humanity.

Thus, McLuhan is highly conscious of the amorality of technology but simultaneously aware of the possibility for it to be used in conjunction with the best impulses of humanity. As much as technology might be an extension into an external world, it is also, for McLuhan, an extension into the human world of the external. In this exchange of being, the presence of divine Being in the external world is revealed in the inner workings of humankind: an epiphany through technology.

> In ordinary human perception, men perform the miracle of recreating within themselves—in their interior faculties—the exterior world. This miracle is the work of the *nous poietikos* or of the agent intellect—that is the poetic or creative process. The exterior world in every instant of perception is interiorized and recreated in a new manner. Ourselves. And in this creative work that is perception and cognition, we experience immediately that dance of Being within our faculties which provides the incessant intuition of Being (2002: 80).

Following Arthur Kroker's reading of this aspect of McLuhan's work, we can understand that McLuhan's idea of a united and spiritually replenished humanity, freed from the imperial tendencies of the world of print and the visual register (nationalism), bonded in a true democracy of spirit, and full mutual recognition is realized in the mediated global village (2005). Thus, technology is a key component in humanity's spiritual development. As our technology advances, we become more adept at knowing ourselves; we are advancing our potential for discovering ourselves. It is not without risks, in an atomizing world in which we each become a nodal point of a globalized utopia; the very freedom offered to self-realize may become a frightening empty space to some. When the categorical structures of the

tyrannical visual give way to a tribalized global oneness, in which meaning must create itself anew in each of us, the fear of an infirmity of meaning reveals itself. It is, ultimately, McLuhan's Catholicism that allows him a transcendent truth from which to circumvent the falling away of the reassuring empiricism of the visual range; the epiphany of the senses is at once personal and spiritual, a union of internal and external worlds.

Although McLuhan's account is part of a broad thesis, the figure of the potentially lone figure overcoming the existential loneliness in the awareness of a constant globalized electronic presence is a compelling one. It evokes, again, Mitchell's electronic *flâneur,* Turkle's presence, or simply the shared informational spaces of Gibson's cyberspace. It is here that the use of the Findhorn Foundation's Network of Light becomes a working metaphor for the environment into which some users of cyberspace may conceive themselves to be entering. This emergent mode of worship is alluded to by Gwilym Beckerlegge in the essay, 'Computer-mediated Religion: Religion on the Internet at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century'. He writes:

> The relatively new concept of cyberspace now exists alongside traditional religious views of the cosmos, in which hierarchies of beings have been placed in different realms or levels … technology offers the prospect of an increasingly intimate relationship between human beings and their computers, which may appear to realize some of the goals traditionally held out by religious systems (2001: 257).

In what follows, a narrow selection of Web pages that integrate the late Diana, Princess of Wales, into prophesied apocalyptic scenarios, will be explored as markers of an invigorated and extended cultic milieu. As will be discussed, the concept of the cultic milieu relies on the figure of the 'seeker', and it is in this figure that we encounter a model of information consumption that is ideally suited to the engagement with cyberspace that is outlined above.

The Digital Afterlife of Diana, Princess of Wales

Century 10, Quatrain 35 of the prophecies of Nostradamus reads:

> Women's apparel in the temple of Diana:

> Going to be murdered by the unknown one from Marne.

According to Michael McClellan, author of *Nostradamus and the Final Age* (which is in the process of being published through his Web site, 'Nostradamus and the New Prophecy Almanacs'),[5] this foretells the transformation of Diana, Princess of Wales, into a goddess. The page dedicated to Diana by McClellan is a simple hypertext page with purple text on a black background interspersed with McClellan's collages of Diana—these are mostly stock images of Diana superimposed on classical Grecian backgrounds. McClellan explains the first line cited (the third of the full quatrain) as a reference to a room given over to 'Style and Fashion' at the permanent exhibition 'Diana: A Celebration', held in six rooms at Althorp House.

For McClellan, Althorp and, clearly, its gardens represent the 'temple of Diana' and the 'women's apparel', 28 of Diana's outfits housed in the 'Style and Fashion' room. The second (fourth) line of the quatrain indicates to McClellan the unknown driver of the white Fiat described at the crash scene, while he notes that the Marne is a tributary of the Seine— the Seine being the river under which Pont d'Alma tunnel passes. Leaving aside his transformation of the more frequently cited Greek Artemis into the Roman Diana, it is worth noting the emphasis that McClellan places on the apotheosis of Diana. He asks, 'Are you ready for the return of the goddess Diana?' (http://www.newprophecy.net/diana.htm).

His question is more than rhetorical and is linked to an overarching series of related prophecies that have, ultimately, an eschatological significance:

> Nostradamus prophesied the death of Princess Diana, her 'temple' at Althorp, and her reappearance to the world as a miraculous apparition. This final event may take place in October near the eve of World War III (http://web.archive.org/web/20080821232336/http://newprophecy.net/).

This failed prophecy has become consigned to archive.org and the relevant passage on the home page of prophecy.net now reads:

[5] On McClellan's Web site, the almanacs are divided by year. The years noted in parentheses in the following paragraphs refer to the links in his almanacs to individual years.

> Nostradamus prophesied the death of Princess Diana, her 'temple' at Althorp, and her reappearance to the world as a miraculous apparition. This final event may have been presaged by a strange, pink glow in the sky above London in October 2008 and will ultimately occur near the eve of World War III (http://www.newprophecy.net).

Diana's return is detailed more fully on the subpage 'Revelation', which draws on the work of psychic medium Jeanne Dixon and numerologist/ astrologer Cheiro (born William John Warner) in addition to McClellan's own interpretive initiatives. For McClellan, the death of Diana and Dodi takes on biblical significance, with their deaths being the work of satanic forces set on thwarting the immanentization of the Christian eschaton as foretold in Revelation. He understands them as figures from the 1962 prophecy of American psychic Jeanne Dixon (1904–1997), which predicted the coming of a child born to Nefertiti and a pharaoh; after Nefertiti is betrayed (literally, stabbed in the back in the prophetic dream), the child is adored by all peoples of the Earth.

For McClellan, it is clear that this refers to Diana and Dodi: 'Is it not clear who Princess Diana and Dodi al-Fayed are and were? They were none other than Nefertiti and Ahknaten' (http://www.newprophecy.net/queenson .htm). Not only were they reincarnations of Nefertiti (and Diana alone had already 'passed through' Marie Antoinette, Isadora Duncan and Marilyn Monroe) but Diana was pregnant with Dodi's (Ahknaten) child, a child that was due to be the new messiah. In a further biblical flourish, McClellan turns to Revelation 12 and the woman of heaven whose child will rule with a rod of iron; the woman, of course, is Diana and the child the son she was due to have with Dodi Al-Fayed. In the biblical exegesis, we are told that Diana's Merovingian blood links her to the twelve tribes of Israel just as her spirit is linked with Nefertiti. Not only that, but we are also informed by McClellan:

> Now, because of the murder of Diana and Dodi, he must be born from different parents and will be born, I believe, around the year 2040. Satan and his principalities interfered with God's plan in 1997 (Revelation 12 is part of God's plan), but he will not succeed next time (http://www.new prophecy.net/queenson.htm).

The site is largely the work of Michael McClellan, author of *Nostradamus and the Final Age* (which is published for free through New Prophecy Web site, www.newprophecy.net). The New Prophecy Web site benefits from the interlinked nature of cyberspace with a number of

other Web sites linking to it. Figures vary from ten (Google) through 121 'inlinks' (Yahoo Site Explorer) to 2,420 (Bing)[6] separate links to New Prophecy; it is also a highly popular site, with an estimated forty-three thousand US citizens visiting it per month.

These US visitors are ethnically diverse (73% Caucasian, 9% African American, 6% Asian, 10% Hispanic), from a range of income groups (24% earning less than $30,000 per year, 27% between $30,000 and $60,000, 27% between $60,000 and $100,000 and 22% over $100,000), male (54%), and adult (18–34, 31%; 35–49, 33%).[7] It exemplifies a prophetic strand in the cultic milieu, as described by Colin Campbell, and demonstrates the syncretism at its heart. The prophetic sources cited by McClellan include but are not restricted to: Srila Prabhupada (1896–1977), best known for founding the International Society for Krishna Consciousness; the Boer Christian-patriotic seer Nicolaas Van Rensburg (1862–1926); apocalyptic Native American Hopi prophecies; Ursula Southiel, or Mother Shipton (1488–1561); the US evangelist healer A.A. Allen (1911–1970); Sumerian cosmology and modern prophecies of the return of the planet Nibiru; and other individuals and Judeo-Christian tradition. The otherwise conflicting sources of prophecy are unified in their being drawn together as strands in McClellan's belief system, and this unity of diverse mystic traditions and belief systems is typical of the cultic milieu. Campbell describes the cultic milieu as 'the cultural underground of society . . . it includes the worlds of the occult and the magical, of spiritualism and psychic phenomena, of mysticism and new thought, of alien intelligences and lost civilizations, of faith healing and nature cure' (2002: 14).

The syncretization of these diverse beliefs and practices is achieved in part through a shared recognition of their mutual stigmatization by mainstream culture; indeed, in the field of conspiracy research, Michael Barkun has reconceptualized the cultic milieu as 'stigmatized knowledge' (2003). This shared 'outsider status' not only underlines the perceived threat that the cultic milieu is to 'the Establishment' but also underlines a coincidence of interests and experience between cultic movements and their adherents.

[6] These figures were accessed through http://www.linkpopularity.com—Google and Bing's figures can be generated via appropriate manipulation of their search syntax. Although Yahoo's Site Explorer is normally available only to Web site owners, this requirement can be overcome by using linkpopularity.com.
[7] 7. The estimates of visitor statistics were generated by http://www.quantcast.com/ newprophecy.net/. The figures for low-income visitors and African American, Asian and Hispanic visitors were all above the representative average of all US net users.

Campbell identifies the sharing of a 'circuit' through openly available published materials and public lectures, which are inclusive and mutually supportive, as a further contributor to the syncretizing pressure within the cultic milieu. The final means by which the cultic milieu is drawn together is through the ideational trajectories of its participants; here Campbell uses the idea of seekership. Seekers are typically marked by a full or partial rejection of mainstream religious beliefs and institutions and, instead, they adopt an eclectic approach in their search for the spiritual 'truth' that traditional sources have failed to provide. Campbell points to the tendency among seekers, in their progression through the cultic milieu, to 'come to accept seeking itself as the primary end' (2002: 18).

Seekership is something that is evidenced in the multiplicity of what might be termed the 'healers and spiritual advisors' who surrounded Diana throughout her public life. Paul Heelas helpfully catalogues those mentioned by Andrew Morton in *Diana, Her New Life:* 'Advisor, astrologer, business motivator guru, clairvoyant, confidant, counsellor, exercise trainer, fitness teacher, gym trainer, homeopathic doctor, hypnotherapist, osteopath, psychotherapist, sleep therapist, soothsayer, spiritual advisor, tarot-card reader, therapist, and voice coach' (cited in Heelas 1999: 99). This list was published in 1995, and it does not necessarily provide a full picture of the healers and advisors drawn upon by Diana. It does however give the impression of a desire for guidance on matters mundane and spiritual, physical and mental, the past, present and future. It is Heelas's contention that Diana was undergoing a 'conversion career' and growing increasingly engaged in New Age beliefs and practices. Although an uncomfortable term, Heelas's use of 'New Age' is broadly analogous to Campbell's concept of the cultic milieu— it is capable of incorporating conflicting spiritual beliefs and outlooks—the world-affirming and the world-rejecting.[8] Drawing on Heelas's argument but recontextualizing it within Campbell's conceptual terrain, we can thus describe Diana as an active seeker within the cultic milieu. This seekership was and continues to be important; it is a crucial part of Diana's appeal within the cultic milieu itself. There is a recognition of shared experience within the cultural (if not material) capital particular to the cultic milieu. In an e-mail to the author on 23 June 2008, spiritual medium Sylvia Moon wrote:

[8] See Roy Wallis, *The Elementary Forms of New Religious Life* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 9-39.

> As a medium I was aware of other mediums helping and teaching her [Diana] to grow, and using her light and energy to help others. She became much stronger and left light where she went. I didn't look on her as a divine being more as a co worker who I sometimes feel with me when I'm working or when I'm talking to other mediums, yes, even on the Internet. I support anyone who is from any spiritual background as long as they do it with love and light.

Thus, for Sylvia at least, Diana was not simply a potential seeker within the cultic milieu but was also a practitioner, drawing on knowledge and skills gained within the cultic milieu and applying them 'with love and light'. Sylvia may well be described as a typical seeker herself and describes her spiritual beliefs as 'ever growing', and it is in this and as a 'light worker' that she finds commonality with Diana. This commonality continues to be shared after Diana's death, and it should be noted here that Sylvia is identifying Internet use as a sphere of activity in which her perception of her abilities is undiminished and in which Diana's spirit may become manifest.

For many within the cultic milieu, Diana lives on; she has not died but has simply 'moved on' to another sphere of existence, as is attested by the number of accounts of her spirit being channelled. There is, for example, a Web site dedicated to recording her channelled messages, Diana Speaks (http://www. dianaspeaks.com/). The Diana of dianaspeaks.com has completed Heelas's 'conversion career' and speaks as an enlightened being, extolling New Age platitudes focused on self-improvement. There are also conventionally published books such as Rita Eide's *Celestial Voice of Diana* and Hazel Courteney's *Divine Intervention,* which feature similar iterations of Diana's ascended spirit: she is presented as an insightful being with an enabling message of spiritual growth. Other channelled messages from Diana reveal as cultic tropes some of the themes raised by Michael McClellan: Diana as a reincarnated avatar of a particular formation of 'spirit energy'. The message, 'Wake Up to the Fact that Every One of your Choices are [*sic*] Divine', channelled by Gillian Macbeth-Louthan, for example, begins:

> I am she that is known as Mary. I have worn many veils, many names, many lives, but ultimately I am One Light and One frequency. My essence has incarnated as many, the latest being the Mother Teresa who has passed back into my body and Princess Diana who has also passed back into my body (http://www.lightparty.com/Spirituality/MotherNatureSpeaks.html).

Not only do we see the repeated refrain of Diana-as-avatar, but we also find a syncretistic gesture that unifies Diana and Mother Teresa as aspects of 'Mother Mary'. The coincidence of the death dates of Diana and Teresa and their association with charitable works resonated strongly both at a folk level and within popular culture. It was, by and large, primarily the academic community that expressed the greatest doubt at this equivalence or, indeed, the straightforwardly moral impulse behind the charitable gestures of either woman. Arvind RajaGopal, for instance, delineates the problematic presence of Mother Teresa and the Missionaries of Charity upon the Indian political landscape and their apparent self-promotion while indicating how 'media images' serve to draw Teresa and Diana together despite their evident differences. He suggests that their 'merging . . . in one trope of charity [may have been] a sentimental response to the problem of poverty . . . in one global regime of representation' (1999: 138). While Linda Woodhead highlights the religious differences between the pious, doctrinaire nun and the spiritual, heterodox princess, she also points to the extent to which institutionalized religion had failed to keep pace with popular conceptions of sanctity.[9]

Indeed, the cultic milieu has had little problem in reconciling the two; we can see how Diana and Teresa have been conjoined and re-embodied (and, let us not overlook, commodified) in a wand sold through www.crescentmoongoddess.com that is described as follows:

> DIANA-TERESA Crystal Wand
>
> Pink glass staff with rose quartz beads & a Goddess symbol, with rose quartz ends. 10 inches long. Includes a velvet bag.
>
> This wand was created in the memory of Princess Diana & Mother Teresa who inspired us globally to reveal our own hidden abilities to make a difference on our planet. Use this wand to see the beauty & strength within yourself. $90 (http://www.crescentmoongoddess.com/p121.htm).

As is becoming apparent, within the cultic milieu Diana was as much subject to the syncretic impulse as she was syncretizing seeker. In the Diana–Teresa crystal wand we see both women united and marked with 'a Goddess symbol', a further strand of the cultic milieu woven into the object. The wand reverberates across the fields of celebrity, Catholicism, and

[9] Linda Woodhead, 'Diana and the Religion of the Heart', in Richards et al., 1999: 119-39.

a generalized paganism (something we could read into the Marian Diana prophecy above). There are also overtones of nature worship in the following message channelled from Diana's spirit by medium Diane Tessman:

> Regardless of the cause of my passing on Earth, it was time on the cosmic clock, for me, The Angel, Diana Luminatis, to become fully empowered. I have awakened once again right as Earth needs me most. . . . Angel Diana is linked closely with the living spirit of Mother Earth. I, Diana Luminatis, am infinitely and proudly connected to Mother Earth (http://www.hammerwood.mistral.co.uk/tragic.htm).

Tessman now channels Tibus, a star person who communicates from 'future human consciousness', but her message from Diana Luminatis further emphasizes the polysemic nature of Diana within the cultic milieu: she is capable of sustaining multiple readings, and repeatedly we find her assuming a messianic or eschatological role, awakening or appearing, 'when we need her most'. Rather than her polysemy being emblematic of an unresolved and ill-formed spirituality—both hers and those who have found spiritual meaning in her life and subsequent existence—this multiplicity of potential 'meanings' maps the multinodal journey of the typical seeker within the cultic milieu.

For some, Diana is one stopping point on a complex personal journey through the cultural underground, a stopping point whose coordinates may be different for each visitor; and yet, to others, she is a guide on that journey. She has become, within the cultic milieu, emblematic of its heterodox and syncretic nature and part of the milieu itself. We should not however overlook the broader spiritual impact of Diana. Chris Rojek is keen to explore the idea that, in keeping with the secularization thesis, the presence and power of religious thought in everyday life have declined and that, in our secular age, celebrity has usurped the worship of the saints, divine beings and deities. While casting his response to this problematic as partial, Rojek is prepared to state, 'To the extent that organized religion has declined in the West, celebrity culture has emerged as one of the replacement strategies that promote new orders of meaning and solidarity' (2001: 98).

This allows Rojek the opportunity to thus see celebrity culture as being cast in the Durkheimian role as 'a significant institution in the normative achievement of social integration' (2001: 99). But this is a limited view of religion and sustainable only in the

instance of religious behaviour that is mediated through the institutions of organized orthodox religious beliefs; the cultic milieu seems to offer a model of religious practice that is countercultural and, in certain instances, world-rejecting. Although Rojek recognizes that aspects of our integration of celebrities into our cultural life worlds are modelled on rudimentary religious forms such as ascent, descent and redemption, there are further examples that the secular world has, in fact, been partially (re) enchanted through folk and popular responses to celebrity deaths.

Rojek comes close to this in passages dealing with what he refers to as celebrity reliquaries, for instance: photographs signed by celebrities, napkins, cigarette butts, or hotel sheets used by them—the ephemera of daily life transformed into sacred objects. These reliquaries are complemented by the use of their former homes or their final resting places as shrines: Elvis's Graceland home or Jim Morrison's Parisian grave, for example. Jeffrey Richards noted a similar sacralization process in the case of Diana.[10] He describes the manner in which Diana evoked echoes of the curative powers ascribed to the monarchy during the late medieval and early modern period and their ability to cure scrofula, 'The King's Evil', by means of the laying on of hands. Like Rojek, Richards describes the memorabilia and merchandise that emerged following Diana's death and casts it in the light of holy relics and their reliquaries. Also, like Rojek, he points to the emergence of shrines to Diana, particularly outside Kensington Palace, describing how it 'became an instant shrine, almost engulfed in flowers, candles, and simple childlike poems attesting to love felt for the dead Princess' (1999: 61).

Unlike Rojek, Richards describes this as being akin to medieval mourning for the passing of popular local holy persons, with the Catholic Church tending to canonize these figures in an effort to incorporate the popular feeling for them within its orthodoxy. This is, if you like, a recuperation of the cultic milieu in its most nascent form—'the popular mystical'—in which an acephalous cultic movement is contained within the orthodoxy through the institutional mechanisms of that orthodoxy. In the medieval period, the harnessing of folk cult movements for the assured maintenance of solidarity and social integration does not seem out of place, but to our ears it sounds distant—of that time and place alone.

[10] Jeffrey Richards, 'The Hollywoodisation of Diana', in Richards et al., 1999: 59-73.

Michael Taussig's *The Magic of the State*, a work of 'fictocriticism', narrates the complexity of national identities and rituals of spirit possession in modern Venezuela. In one emblematic passage he describes a scene in a shed behind a house in a lower-middle-class *barrio*:

> All of one wall was taken up by a huge *portal* or shrine. To the left there was a three-foot-high statue of *El Indio* Guaicaipuro. On the right was a similarly large statue of *El Negro* Primero, while in the center was a massive statue of the spirit queen. On the extreme right was a bronzecolored statue of the Liberator, about a foot in height. Densely occupying all remaining space were scores of candles, portraits, and figurines of spirits (1997: 59).

The national hero, the Liberator—symbol of the political enablement of the nation—thus takes up a position amid the oppressed and exploited peoples of the nation and, to map the cultural underground onto the spirit queen, the cultic milieu. Coupled to them through his simultaneous invocation with the spirit queen and the oppressed and exploited masses, the national hero is afforded a sacred destiny.

Taussig, through metaphor and details from the life, death and symbolic afterlife of Simon Bolivar, demonstrates how the national hero as a quasimythical-magical figure is a key element in the assurance of the nation-state as eternal and transcendent. Throughout the literature on Diana within the cultic milieu, she is repeatedly tied to the nation, and this motif is repeated in the online material within this literature. It is, of course, paradoxical that in a global and globalizing medium, the reproduction of a localized national mythos should be reproduced. It might be suggested that Diana's link to the nation was determined by her role within the British monarchy. This drawing together of Diana and the nation is, however, rarely done by the *de facto* means of her aristocratic background and her marriage into the British royal family; instead it is achieved through what Taussig calls 'the spirit queen'—the elusive idea of the nation as it exists in myth and legend. The Web page 'Deathwalking with Diana', which seeks to interpret a series of the author's dreams about her, suggests, 'It would seem, on reflection, that the old Arthurian myth of the Grail King, who is wounded because of the illness of the land, which has become the Wasteland, is being superseded by a Grail Queen myth, personified as Diana' (http://www.greatdreams .com/diana.html). The page is one of several that are featured on the 'Great Dreams' Web site (http://www.greatdreams.com). The site focuses on the dreams of its contributors but also

reproduces a wide variety of materials originating on other Web sites that constitute the digital cultic milieu.

This motif is oft repeated and, indeed, forms the basis of a number of conspiracy theories that have surfaced regarding Diana. Perhaps the most striking is 'Antichrist Conspiracy Revealed',[11] which seeks to demonstrate that Prince William is King Arthur reborn and is also the Antichrist foretold in the book of Revelation. To achieve these ends, 'a Merovingian Virgin was sought and found in the young and perfectly naive, Diana Spencer, the rest is history'. Diane Tessman's channelling of Diana's spirit revealed:

> I am much pleased that the song 'Goodbye, England's Rose' was written in such a way as to link Princess Diana with The Land, which is in this particular incidence, England. It is reminiscent of King Arthur's magical connection to The Land. As Princess Diana, I loved the land of England very much, and I still am a loving presence there (http://www.hammer wood.mistral.co.uk/tragic.htm).

Repeatedly the national hero is linked to the land and to the spirit queen; in fact we might suggest here that Diana represents the coalescence of the national hero into the spirit queen. Certainly we find her, like Taussig's statue of the Liberator, forever associated with marginalized groups and communities within the UK and yet always defined through her absence from the Royal Family. She is also always a princess, a royal sleeping beauty on an Avalonian island forever connected to the nation. The lyrics of 'Goodbye, England's Rose' bind together the national Diana and the mythic Diana. In borrowing from William Blake's 'Jerusalem', Elton John cast Diana in a messianic light:

> And your footsteps will always fall here,
>
> Along England's greenest hills; Your candle's burned
> out long before Your legend ever will.

In this Diana has legendary status conferred on her and, more pertinently here, while a large amount of material cited above may be considered cultural marginalia, we find in the hugely popular song performed at her funeral in Westminster Abbey an intimation of the eternal

[11] 'Antichrist Conspiracy Revealed', http://web.archive.org/web/20070323005548; http://www.angelfire.com/alt2/conspiracy/1.html (accessed 30 May 2008).

presence within England of her immortal soul. Diana the seeker in the cultic milieu is thus recuperated, and her heterodox spirituality provides the basis for her immortalization as England's spirit queen.

A New Home for the Spirit Queen

The Internet, as a medium, offers a realm of experience in which the immaterial self is projected into a setting that offers, via hypertext links and the endless crossroads of the search engines, infinite travel without movement. The philosopher Jean François Lyotard saw in the Internet the possibility for the production of a blueprint for humanity. He wrote:

> The electronic and information network spread over the earth gives rise to a global capacity for memorising which must be estimated at the cosmic scale, without common measure with that of traditional cultures. The paradox implied by this memory resides in the fact that in the last analysis it is nobody's memory. But 'nobody' here means that the body supporting the memory is no longer an earth bound body. Computers never stop being able to synthesize more and more 'times,' so that Liebniz could have said of this process that it is on the way to producing a monad much more 'complete' than humanity itself has ever been able to (1993: 64).

Facebook and other social networking sites record the disembodied self, preserving it within this near-complete monad. In offering the promise of a means to free the soul from living body and a digitized immortality, we can see the manner in which conceptual experiences of the Internet converge with those offered by traditional religions, as hinted at by Beckerlegge. The inhabitation of the Internet as described by Novak approaches the kind of mystical and spiritual forms that Ernst Troeltsch suggests that intellectuals and artists who are disenfranchised from institutionalized religions would find appealing (1976). Cyberspace is at once creatively enacted through engagement while simultaneously offering the potential for an endlessly interlinked repository of texts, dialogues, statements, positions and so forth.

It is, for some users, further charged with a spiritual vitality through its technological realization of the interconnectedness of humanity.[12]

This mode of experiencing cyberspace and the promise of entering a technologically novel realm of being in which stigmatized knowledge is freely disseminated without the editorial or productive limitations associated with traditional publishing allows the rapid, globalized, multiplication of the cultic milieu. It is a rich ground for the spiritual seeker. The quest for knowledge of the spirit, self, or deistic presence is greatly aided by linkedness and easily searched, thus bringing Campbell's 'cultural underground of society' far closer to the surface. Despite attempts to locate it in the everyday (see reference to Lister *et al.* above), it does, nonetheless, provide an imaginative setting for an Other world that is rife with mythological tropes, a world yet to come that, nonetheless, is among us. *The Matrix* does, still, take its cues from the technological separateness that we sense within the Web—that world of light on the other side of the screen (*pace* McLuhan) or Novak's architectures of the human imagination. Coupled with the seekership described by Campbell, we have a living cultic milieu in which seekership can be enacted and extended into an opportunity for expression. It is therefore an ideal context within which the apocalyptic imagination can flourish and in which prophecies can be shared, reformulated and re-presented in the way that 2008 became a transitional moment rather than the expected cataclysmic one for Michael McClellan.

This is the terrain in which Diana, Princess of Wales, is afforded a virtual immortality as a digitally prophesied redeemer, iconic object-level dream messenger, or particularly, an aspect of an enlightened being. The audience are seekers, and it is Web searches and links from other Web sites that lead them through the tangled web of the cultic milieu. With movement (the leaf on the wind of Novak's dreamer) directed by the seeker's range of interest, the hypertextuality of the Web traces the topography of individualized and syncretic pathways through the cultic milieu. In this sense, Google acts as a host for unending New Age 'fairs' with stall-holders never needing to pack up and go home unless they fail to pay their hosting fees. The search engines, then, become intermediaries through which like-minded fellows can discover shared narrative spaces. This is, of course, heightened by the advent of Web 2.0 and

[12] We might also consider the case put forward by Erik Davis in *Techgnosis: Myth, Magic and Mysticism in the Age of Information* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1999).

the widespread assumption of Web sites with interactive features, particularly message forums and the ability to leave comments.

Against this backdrop, the invigoration of dead Diana and her online transformation attest to the powerful capability of the digitized Network of Light to maintain an active afterlife for (the celebrity) dead. The forty-three thousand monthly visitors to the New Prophecy Web site —whatever their level of engagement—confirm its rationale as a disseminating node within the global village and contribute to the virtual apotheosis of Diana. To a global audience, Albion is an idealized homeland within the Virtual, and her renewal of it vouchsafes their shared replenishment through the networks of light and of wires. The end may be always imminent, but it is at least deferred until the next Web page and the next prophecy; the seeker's quest pauses but there is always one more link to follow, one more search term to submit.

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Appendix C. (2012) 'From Apocalyptic Paranoia to the Mythic nation: Political extremity and myths of origin in the neo-fascist milieu' in Marion Gibson, Garry Tregidga and Shelley Trower (eds.) *Myth, Mysticism, and 'Celtic' Nationalism*. London: Routledge.

14. From Apocalyptic Paranoia to the Mythic nation: Political extremity and myths of origin in the neo-fascist milieu

Andrew Fergus Wilson

Introduction

As the nation-state undergoes a continuous and complex unravelling by the forces of global politics, culture and capital, there is an increased tendency for communities to become mobilised around ideas of 'the nation' which are less reliant upon the structuring effect of 'the state'. The nation becomes increasingly, consciously, experienced in forms of cultural practice and tradition and it is these knots of solidarity that maintain the bonds that exist between the constituent members of national communities. Celtic nationalism can be considered in this way, the establishment of national assemblies in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland notwithstanding. From Yeats' aims in *The Celtic Twilight* to the resurgence of the Cornish and Breton languages, there has been a clear and conscious movement towards realising self-determining national identities which draw upon predominantly cultural resources to produce, in part, the particularities which circumscribe the resurgent national forms. Nonetheless, whilst such 'nations without states', to borrow Guibernau's conceptualisation (Guibernau 1999), may point to an increasingly common mode of transnational identity, they are also replete with the dangers of any form of nationalism. Indeed, to speak of any kind of European nationalism is to run the risk of calling to mind the belligerent strains of nationalism unleashed by the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite states or endemic in the emergence of neo-nationalist groups such as the English Defence League.

Whilst there are many examples of progressive uses of mystical or legendary 'pasts' within recent history, be it the cultural case for self determination within the former 'Celtic fringe'

or the appropriation of ‘witch’ identities and practices by feminist women and men there are also a significant number of instances of the use of mythic national or communal pasts for less progressive political or ideological ends. This chapter will explore the presence of themes of mythical or legendary cultural and communal origins within contemporary nationalist discourse as they are used on internet websites dedicated to extremist nationalism. White nationalist discourse typically draws upon a range of cultural markers which incorporate Celtic identities and others into a syncretic ‘Northern European’ heritage. The aim is to demonstrate the manner in which these sites draw upon the polyvalency of mythic symbols and how the syncretic tendency within the contemporary cultic milieu uncritically absorbs paranoid nationalist rhetoric thus problematising commonly-held national myths and legends. The opportunities for networking amongst and between nationalist groups afforded by the internet mean that white nationalism is, paradoxically, increasingly transnational; it is in this context that Northern European cultural traditions have become key in the attempt by these groups to formulate a shared identity.

Racialist Apocalyptic Paranoia

> Today, in the year 2005, approximately two percent of earth’s population is White female of child bearing age or younger. The White race is dead!!! Murdered by a coalition of Jews, Christian universalists, anti-nature dupes, opportunistic political whores, media moguls, over educated intellectuals, dogmatic nationalists, feminist fools, assorted misfits and cowards.
>
> The remaining whites are hopelessly integrated, terrorized, brain washed, miscegenated and are rapidly being overrun by six billion coloreds. As a viable entity with a means to survive, the white race is extinct. The few of us who resisted genocide are analogous to a few living cells within a corpse. (Lane 2005, §1–2)

The quotation above comes from David Lane, a figure whose status amongst white supremacists borders on that of a holy martyr. Lane died in jail whilst serving consecutive sentences totalling some 190 years for a variety of offences committed as part of the Brüder Schweigen (also known as The Order, or the Silent Brotherhood). In jail he produced a number of texts which have gone on to become highly influential within white supremacist

and nationalist circles. The extract above comes from a text entitled, 'Open Letter to a Dead Race,' in which Lane calls upon white males to throw off their inhibitions and to partake of a racial revolution with the aim of creating a new white homeland. The possible outcomes, he suggests, are total: glory or a glorious death. The enemies that he describes are non-whites, led by a Jewish/Zionist conspiracy which has pacified and shaped the coalition described above: 'Zionist control of the media, as well as of all essential power points of industry, finance, law and politics in the once White nations is simply fact' (Lane 1999, 3). He sees his home country, the United States of America, at the heart of this conspiracy, describing its state symbols as coded manifestations of the conspiracy:

> Over the eagle on the Great Seal are 13 pentagonal stars which form the Star of David, the clear symbolism being that the United States would finalize the World Zionist Empire. So we see that the Pentagon is the home of the police department for a World Zionist government of those who use the six-pointed star. (Lane 1999, 330)

What becomes evident in this is the rejection of the USA as the vehicle by which Lane's fantasies of a racially-segregated white homeland might be reached. While, say, the Southern Poverty Law Center, a leading US civil rights organisation, described Lane as a 'White Nationalist' (SPLC 2010) there is little consideration of what constitutes the 'nation' for a nationalist who forswore the nation. What, then, is the white supremacist nation? It is varied and contested.

Lane's separatist outlook typifies a strand of American white supremacism which marked a turning away from the patriotism of traditional U.S. far right white nationalist discourse. The strong strand of separatism was exemplified by the establishment of the Aryan Nations communities during the mid 1990s. Even so, in these self-defined redoubts of Aryan folk there were sufficient grounds for ideological conflict between the predominantly Christian Identity organisers and white supremacists of other beliefs. Lane's own spiritual history was one notably marked by a trajectory which shifted from the Christian Identity movement to a racist paganism. Lane is described as an Odinist (Gardell 2003; Kaplan 1997), or follower of Asatru, but he is quite precise in delineating between Odinism and his variant, Wotanism. Wotanism allowed him to stress the religio-mythical basis of a shared 'Northern European' mindset:

> So, I first chose the name Wotanism over Odinism. First because W.O.T.A.N. makes a perfect acronym for Will Of The Aryan Nation. Secondly because he was called Wotan on the European continent and only called Odin in Scandinavia. (Lane n.d.a, §24–25)

Thus Lane demarcates the broad, international but ethnically discrete boundaries and beliefs of the 'nation, culture, and way of life,' that underlines his ideological outlook. The 'racial imaginary' Lane's religious formation draws upon becomes vital in providing an historical re-tension for the 'people' he sought to defend. The tradition that is alluded to must be established in order to make possible the validity of the racial-cultural complex. The Northern European sagas, myths and religious constructs that Lane draws upon provide a geographic, ethnic and historical origin story for him. Many of the elements that are drawn upon are well-established tropes of white supremacist and neo-Nazi discourse with Lane's pan-Aryan mysticism a synthesis of a pre-existing racist mythos. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's work on esoteric Nazism attests to a continuity at work within the fascist milieu (Goodrick-Clarke 2003, 2004).

Myths of Nation

Myths of nation become crucial in this. National myths (as opposed to, say, legend or sacred history) are often overlooked in considerations of the 'lore' of a nation but it is argued by Misāne and Predīte that myths are 'authorized by traditions and by their specific relation to sacred time and space,' and thus are also active in the process by which 'the nation' is sacralised. In this way:

> Myths develop a sense of togetherness, they are the means by which human beings tie themselves to the world, feel at home there, and become the heirs of their ancestors. (Misāne and Predīte 1997, 160)

The collective conscience which this implies, however, in addition to organising itself around shared myths (and legends and a sacred history) also draws upon the religiosity of myth as a powerful, transcendent, legitimator of the nation and national community. Lane is clearly

aware of the pressures involved in maintaining a unity amongst a dispersed and (perceptually) disenfranchised community:

> 24. No race of People can indefinitely continue their existence without territorial imperatives in which to propagate, protect, and promote their own kind.
> 25. A People without a culture exclusively their own will perish. [...]
>
> The folk, namely the members of the Race, are the Nation. Racial loyalties must always supersede geographical and national boundaries. If this is taught and understood, it will end fratricidal wars. Wars must not be fought for the benefit of another race. (Lane n.d.b)

Although 'the Nation' is to be territorially defined, the actual location is not of great consequence because the Nation, here, is founded entirely through 'the folk'. But, again, even here, what is the nation that Lane and other white 'nationalists' appeal to? Clearly there is a strong sense of a shared Aryan/ Amanist destiny but the nation in which the race is realised is an imagined one, reliant upon a fantasy of blood purity and a 'race-soul'. Given the rootedness of Lane's 'nationalism' in images of Germanic heritage and spirituality and yet re-membered in a North American context and with the express purpose of becoming a 'Folk preserving religion,' (Lane 1999, 171) the nation is imagined at once as the awakening of a 'Folk' to their current and future racial destiny, but also legitimated through the appropriation of heathen forms as a means of providing a 'traditional' spiritualised ethnic identity to Lane's fellow racists. Simultaneously Northern European and Northern American, it provides a bridge to culturally disparate white nationalists.

Despite the emphasis that Lane places on blood and faith, his stark vision of an Aryan warrior race, 'fighting to save the future' is also one of a nation which seeks a territory, as the 24th precept, cited above, suggests. This search for a nation, couched in the fear-filled rhetoric of the paranoid spokesman, is one which is evident in much of the literature of the far right. English 'national anarchist' Troy Southgate evidences much the same paranoid nationalism as David Lane:

> The task we have set ourselves is a great one. The fight for race and nation – the renewal of the bond between blood and soil – is a cause that gives us a great sense of purpose and destiny. And yet, for those who are called to this fight in the immediate

> future, we can only offer a long and difficult road which is often characterised by disappointment and pain. (Southgate 2003b, §1)

The terms used by Southgate are strikingly similar to those employed by Lane: ‘race’, ‘blood’, ‘purpose’, ‘destiny’ and, indeed, the threat (or promise) of a potentially cataclysmic fight forever looming on the horizon of history. For all that Southgate espouses a broadly leftist ‘anarchist’ position, his politics are clearly racial and even in delineating his belief in the possibility of an anarchism that is informed by nationalism, the similarities with secessionist U.S. racial groups becomes increasingly evident:

> Q. Why ‘national’ anarchism? Surely nationalism is incompatible with anarchic principles?
>
> A. National-Anarchists do not support nationalism in the sense that we look to artificial nation-states or borders and boundaries [...] When we speak of nationhood we are referring to its tribal and organic implications. Therefore our concept of the word ‘national’ relates not to territory but to the racial identity which is a natural facet of all peoples. (Southgate 2006, §1)

The cultural tolerance which is implied in the recognition of the ‘naturalness’ of ‘all peoples’ is negated by the racial boundaries which are suggested to have supplanted the ‘artificial boundaries’ of the nation-state. Again, Southgate is writing in terms recognisable to participants in the white racist milieu because this image of racially-defined communal groupings living alongside but separate from each other is one that was common to racist ideologues and groups in the U.K. and U.S. during the latter half of the twentieth century. For Southgate, just as for Lane, the central purpose appears to be to sound a call to arms in defence of a threatened racially-defined but territorially diverse ‘nation’.

The Virtual Pan-Aryan Nation

Who constitutes this nation is not as simple as might first be thought. For sure, there are clear racial boundaries but the commitment invested in a racist identity will vary enormously between self-identifying ‘citizens’. In *Online Belongings: Fantasy, Affect and Web Communities*, Debra Ferreday cites the play of the ‘real’ and the ‘virtual’ in online

subjectivity and the role of fantasy for the cyber-subject (Ferreday 2009). This may well explain to some extent the 'play' of internet occult fascists who revel in the theatricality and transgression of the role whilst also being afforded the comfort of a supportive community in which to do so. Thus the 'not-real' status of virtuality provides an excuse for indulging in what would be 'rejected knowledge' (to borrow from Barkun) in any other form of mass communication. This gives a nebulous spectrality to the internationally dispersed but racially focussed white nationalist nations; around a hard core of 'permanent nationals' there flickers into and out of existence a tertiary nation of online-only self-identified members of the nation(s) who log on and log off from the nation. These 'virtual nationalists' are drawn to the discursivelyconstructed national 'space' which is constructed through the symbolically created and linked network of nationalist sites and signifiers. Speaking of web communities in general, Ferreday writes:

> By reading websites as texts, it is possible to track the precise means by which a 'sense of community' is constructed: through intonation, through explicit or implicit addresses to an 'ideal' reader, through intertextual references and hypertextual links, to name but a few. (Ferreday 2009, 54)

It is clear from both Lane and Southgate that the 'ideal reader' is white (and predominantly male) and the white Aryan nation is repeatedly explicitly addressed *en masse* and individually, whilst less overtly racist discourse relies upon the implicit intertextualities to which the myths of the Aryan nation are able to allude. Simi and Futrell describe the importance of internet communities to individual white supremacists for it is here that many geographically isolated racists coalesce into an indefinable social group (Simi and Futrell 2010). What is of key pertinence here is that they note that 'embracing the Aryan aesthetic and conveying the commitment to others online sustains members' identification with the collective "we" of the movement' (Simi and Futrell 2010, 89). Thus, the aesthetic realm becomes crucial in maintaining the idea of a shared (national/ racial) collectivity. Of course, the cultural dimension is a key informant of national identity and one of the means by which the idea of any nation is mobilised and maintained. For the disparate 'nationalists without a nation', however, it may become the sole means by which they are able to construct an identity out of affiliation as opposed to (racial) difference. In a different context, Douglas Cowan describes the possibilities that the internet offers for exploring the cultic milieu and aspects of the spiritual self. Of particular relevance here is his observation that 'two other

particular benefits [...] are the potential for community represented by the Internet and the stage for the experimental performance of identity that it provides' (Cowan 2005, 199). Thus, it is here that the appropriation of Northern European spirituality and myth become active in the construction of the tertiary virtual nationalist community. It is argued that the use of polyvalent myths of 'tradition' and 'spirit' are purposefully drawn upon by a primary core of Aryan nationalists to act as lures and fetishes for tertiary virtual nationalists and for potential converts. Before examining an example of how mythic archetypes of an Aryan nation are rehearsed within the paratext of white nationalist discourse, it is useful to explore further the intangible but always present 'spirit' of the nation.

The Spirit of The Nation

In *The Magic of the State*, Michael Taussig captures the irreducibility of the role of the 'spirit' of the nation in the popular imagination of a people (Taussig 1997). Based upon fieldwork in Venezuela, *The Magic of The State* is written from an intellectual space that sits between the academy and ethnography, documentary and fiction. The magic that the state draws upon to maintain the national 'whole' is conveyed well in the interplay between the nation's 'spirit queen', its other national archetypes, and its subjects. The spirit queen is appealed to by, and possesses, willing worshippers; she invests the landscape with meaning and power whilst revealing occult secrets of the nation, illuminating memory, 'the spirit queen, enigmatically smiling in her mountain with the spirits of the dead' (Taussig 1997, 147).

Taussig explores the use of the power of the dead by the nation-state and by its subjects in drawing upon the state's invocation of that power. He suggests that it is the reified mythos of the nation of the dead that underpins a nation state's claim to power. In an interview he makes evident this relationship:

> People today gain magical power not from the dead, but from the state's embellishment of them. And the state, authoritarian and spooky, is as much possessed by the dead as is any individual pilgrim. (Strauss and Taussig 2005, §7)

The Aryan nation-without-a-state does not have a dead-nation publicly preserved in war memorials, statues and the like; instead its shrines are frequently virtual, dispersed and largely hidden to all but the nation itself. Lane himself survives predominantly through repositories of his writing. Indeed, the sidebar menu of the main online resource for Lane's writings (David Lane's Pyramid Prophecy and Der Bruder Schweigen Archives) is headed by RIP notices for Lane and other key white supremacists, Bruce Carroll Pierce and Robert J. Matthews. The pages dedicated to them feature eulogies, personal memories and photographs of commemorative occasions (in some instances the term 'rituals' might be applied but in general would be too suggestive of a uniformity of event). In each instance the dead are described as heroes, martyrs; in Lane's writings similar epithets are used about earlier white supremacists and, of course, his appropriation of Wotanism borrows from long-dead (albeit recently revived) traditions. And so the Aryan nation to which Lane and others appealed and belonged becomes sedimented in these layers of death, of the dead Lane referring to yet more dead and, through them, the embellished dead provide the 'magical' centripetal forces that hold the virtual nation together. In these myths of dead heroes and Gods, the neo-fascist Aryan nationalists re-imagine a lost nation which is bequeathed a (borrowed, stolen) past that predates historical memory.

Taussig's work allows us to consider the ephemeral plane upon which the popular performance of the nation is sometimes staged. As such he is supplementing rationalist accounts of the nation with one that considers the mystic-spiritual dimension of 'belonging'. In a similar vein, so too does the work of Walker Connor, except he disassociates that sense of belonging from any consideration of the state and concentrates instead on the intangible bonds between the individual and the greater national community. So, rather than the bonds between a subject and the institutions and infrastructures that constitute the state, Connor's work places its emphasis upon the bonds between the people that constitute a nation. Connor's concept of 'ethnonationalism' is useful in that it foregrounds the 'deep emotional thrust' that unites a people in 'the irrational belief that, descending from common ancestors, we are all related and form part of the same "extended family"' (Conversi 2002, 2). Connor offers an account of nationalism as it is produced and maintained subjectively, that is to say that he demonstrates the emotional and imaginative work that is done to mobilise national identity. It is here that the role of myths of national belonging and destiny are at their most fecund. Further, by emphasising the centrality of ethnicity to nationalism, he underscores the familial metaphor through which nationalism is understood. This metaphor is part of the

fabric of national identity and he points to its use in successive phases of American history (independence and union – the failure of the English to recognise their consanguinous ties and the ancestral blood shared by the 'people' of the union; Connor 1994, 200–1).

Whilst being an important if unrecognised element in established nations, the emphasis upon ties of kin loyalty is evidently more keenly felt in racialist discourses of nation and comes to the fore in the narratives in which the nation is invoked or theorised. Lane's renown within the racist underground was founded upon his actions as part of the Der Bruder Schweigen; the kin affinity that lay behind their nationalist identities made evident through their nomenclature. The far right, in diverse ways, are actively constructing a mythic past from which destiny has borne them. The process is not unique to the current generation of mystic racialists as Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's work attests. Nonetheless, it is an endeavour that is currently augmented by the huge expansion of the individual subject's capacity to disseminate their views and materials pertaining to them on the internet.

It is here that we see the setting in which the subcultural drift of signifiers of the far-right milieu may occur. Increasingly, websites promoting the ideologies of the Aryan mystics are multi-faceted and incorporate elements that are bereft of overt ideological content. Although inactive since 'Walpurgis Night' 2009, Troy Southgate's 'SYNTHESIS: Journal du cercle de la rose noire' (http:// www.rosenoire.org/) is emblematic of this trend[1]. The site is presented as an 'irregularly-published intellectual and cultural journal devoted to Anarchy [...] Occulture [...] and Metapolitics' (Southgate 2003a) and features a RomanticGothic design ethic that is maintained throughout the site's various sections. These are given over to reviews, articles, essays, interviews and two sections of hyperlinks, one dedicated to links to individual books on amazon.com and the other to a range of subject material. In all sections there is a diversity of content that would belie the site's nature were it not that the preponderance of texts are by figures associated with the mystical fascist milieu such as Miguel Serrano and Julius Evola. On the surface, the choices of text might appear to be the accidental cultural drifting of a blogger with European New Right tendencies were it not for Southgate's active espousal of 'national anarchism' and a stated strategy of entryism:

> This new way is entryism, working within society's institutions and organisations with committed revolutionaries. At this stage in our development, it is the only logical course of action. In the long-term, it is the only possible road to victory. (Southgate 2003c, §18)

Thus familiar cultural texts become lures by which active seekers become immersed in an intertext that is predominantly formed from neo-Nazi cultural obsessions and icons. As will be discussed below, a semiotic drift from the cultural underground to the neo-fascist underworld occurs and, on the grounds of Southgate's statement above, it would appear to be a purposeful misdirecting of the seekers' curiosity. Despite competing visions of a racially 'correct' religious belief, Betty Dobratz indicates the manner in which perceived ideological alignment between religious identity and racialism can be used as a bridging technique by racist groups (Dobratz 2001); Southgate's aims affirm her analysis.

Of course, it can be suggested that neo-fascism is subject to the same cultural tides and patterns as other formations within a culture; that its intertext is formed from a syncretic tendency within its national source. In a discussion of a suggested predilection for violence in American culture, Denis Dudos makes the case that festivals of the dead with a strong Nordic origin (such as Halloween, *Alfablot*, and Yuletide) have embedded within the broader host culture an obsession with their themes and, ultimately, the deeply encoded remnants of Odinist warrior cultures. He states that:

> If the neo-Nazis and their 'intellectual' supporters have espoused a 'traditional' interpretation of these holidays, this should not hide the fact this secret obsession with death has arisen – to the point of permeating international culture – from the Gothic British novel and later from American syncretism and its fictional film versions. It was not by 'purist' Nordic-culture enthusiasts selling earthenware incense burners decorated with swastikas that this myth was introduced, but, more trivially, by the sale of Halloween gadgets and the international toy industry. (Dudos 1998, 150)

Leaving aside the ease with which Dudos equates 'neo-Nazis' with 'Nordic-culture enthusiasts', it should be noted that if Dudos is correct in this assertion then the semantic pathways which Southgate and his allies seek to exploit are already well-travelled and easily mapped. It will be suggested below that the heavy metal webzine *Mourning The Ancient* (http://www.mourningtheancient. com) exploits this shared semantic space to generate an association between neo-fascism, a David Lane-inspired Odinism, 'magick'[2] and heavy metal. To be sure, these associations are not unique, nor is *Mourning the Ancient* seminal, but what the webzine does attempt to do is to produce a visual manifestation of the neo-fascist national 'spirit queen': clearly, not intentionally, as such, but part of its operation is dedicated

to heavily stylised erotic images of (white) women in a variety of mythically-inspired scenarios.

Imagining the Mythic Homeland

The 'extreme metal' website *Mourning the Ancient* is divided into three sections. The main section, certainly the one with the most content, is dedicated to an eponymous webzine which features interviews with bands, music reviews, poetry, articles and other related documents; the second is primarily a collection of images of women in what might best be described as 'white nationalist archetypal scenarios'; the third section is dedicated to a band named 'Primitive Supremacy' which initially provided backing music to CD-based slideshows of images that visited the same themes as those featured in the second section of the website before recording a music-only CD.

The index page of the site presents visitors with a choice between the three sections with each one represented by a banner logo. [3] These banners offer pictorial and linguistic devices which reflect the website's repeated concerns: the colour palette is simplistic, echoing the colours of the Nazi swastika flag design: red, black and white; a slogan proclaims, 'Tomorrow belongs to us!' The webzine section is indicated by a blonde woman wearing an iconic German WWII *Stahlhelm* helmet emblazoned with the site's logo. The logo is repeated throughout the website and is described in suitable self-mythologizing terms as being the product of a 'vision':

> As the vision unfolded the coming winter, the symbol of our doings, the 'Expansion Rune' (the five pointed star with four points reaching outward) was born. We designed this using two ancient runes. The 'pentagram' and the 'expansion points.' While both can be found in a number of ancient cultures, the five pointed star was known in some as a 'symbol of truth.' The two runes combined can be defined as 'the expansion of truth.' (*Mourning the Ancient* 2001, §2)

The banner for the photography section features two images of a blonde woman, one with blood dripping from her mouth whilst in the other she looks more serene, wearing a tiara of ivy topped with a crescent moon. These frame a subheading which reads 'Where Beauty and

Barbarity Meet...' The third section, the band's area, has the slogan 'Melody and Madness' and is decorated with images of a mud-encrusted woman clutching a skull. These visual themes abound on the website and all of the images are taken from the photography section. Throughout the site there is an emphasis on loss, decline and a championing of a mythic past; this past is a syncretic amalgamation of Germanic, pagan, heathen, martial, magickal and Gothic visual tropes. This combination of themes provides a register of elements from which the aesthetic of a racially-defined, geographically-dispersed, neo-fascist nation is realised. That this register is composed mostly of polysemic signs which are not exclusive to the neo-fascist community points to the scope for the entryism that Southgate described. It must be said that this may well be one of the inherent dangers of a past unfixed from common knowledge; as possible readings of poorly understood beliefs proliferate and what is firmly known of them becomes overwhelmed by speculation, they then become increasingly available for appropriation and reductionist perversion by disparate groupings within the fascist milieu.

In the photography section of *Mourning the Ancient* a variety of images of nude and semi-nude female models are offered. It is within these images that the website produces an imagined iconography for their particular rendering of the mythical neo-fascist nation. With the over-riding theme of 'beauty' and 'barbarity', fifty galleries are filled with photographs of heavy breasted women in, for want of a better phrase, 'cultic tableaux'. The images are a curious meeting between 'glamour modelling' and atavistic primitivism with neofascist mystic overtones: gallery six ('Krieg') contains the original of the image used for the webzine banner, a topless model in *Stalhelm* and 'Expansion Rune' armband; gallery eleven ('Fallen') has the same model naked barring thickly encrusted mud, in this set she sports a set of wings, nipple rings and a sword and cavorts with skulls; unlike six and eleven, gallery sixteen ('Blut') is in colour and features a blonde, blue-eyed woman who is naked and smeared in what appears to be blood; gallery fourteen ('Magick') features, once more, a topless blonde model. In this set she poses with a sword and large book of antiquarian appearance within a two circles marked out on the floor and containing candles at the cardinal points, she also wears a pair of deer antlers. The images border on camp but the intent is clear: to invoke a mythical past which is marked by a primal simplicity in addition to tokens of the cultic and fascist milieux. The atavism is recognised by the authors of the website who state,

> Our photography, to us, represents many different thoughts and emotions, but primarily, anger and sorrow. It is those two emotions that have fueled us since day one. An anger and burning contempt for the lies paraded as truth in this tired world, and a bitter sorrow for the seemingly powerless position all of us stand. [...] 'Light' has always been seen as symbolic of truth, life and guidance. In this reckless age all three are reaching their points of extinction. [...] We long for the simple truths and freedoms of yesterday. Which is why our photography usually centers on more natural, antique themes. (*Mourning the Ancient* 2001, §5–6)

Their sense of loss carries the same melancholic apocalypticism that is found the writings of David Lane. *Mourning the Ancient* has clear sympathies with Lane's position and the repeated use of Aryan women in the website's imagery can be understood as representing the fertile vessels through which Lane's future, as demanded in 'the fourteen words', is to be secured. Additionally, the website includes an essay which recounts Lane's life and views and includes an interview with Lane (Mourning the Ancient 2003) and, although the website davidlane1488.org is the primary internet resource for Lane's writing, it is worth noting that the Wikipedia entry for David Lane's interpretation of Wotanism links to an article by Lane posted at *Mourning the Ancient* and not davidlane1488. org (Lane n.d.a). In addition to Lane's writing and links to websites sympathetic to him, *Mourning the Ancient* also features, amidst interviews with heavy metal groups of a variety of political leanings, interviews with the webmaster of racist Wotanist website, W.O.T.A.N. and with the current editor of the works of the Nazi mystic Savitri Devi. The romanticised ancient past that is being mourned is clearly a racially distinct one.

As stated, the images featured in the gallery pages of *Mourning the Ancient* are varied but thematically linked; visual tropes suggestive of mythic archetypes abound and, whilst neo-fascist belief is never overtly referred to in the images, the context of the website's political leanings frames the interpretative strategies open to the viewer. Typifying the tropic repetition is the ninety-seventh image from gallery forty-one ('Satori in Red'). In the centre of the image stands a blonde woman in a red micro bikini, a few strands of her fringe are dyed red, her face is made up in *kabuki* style, around her neck is an Iron Cross. Painted in red on a white backdrop, a series of runes frame the model. *Eihwaz* dominates the backdrop, five others encircle it and the model's crotch obscures the position that the spatial logic of the image suggests a sixth should occupy. The red of her thong mimics the red paint used for the

runes and suggests a pseudo-connotative chain (Eco 1995) which sets sexual desire and spiritual iconography in relation to each other, but not dependent upon each other, for meaning. Thus the viewer can drift (ibid.) between sexual and spiritual readings of the image, all the time contextualised by the white supremicism that underlines the rationale of *Mourning the Ancient*. The central rune, *Eihwaz*, is also known as *Wolfsangel* and associated with Berserker werewolves and, pertinently, a number of Nazi divisions including the late and post-war Werwolf guerrilla groups (Biddiscombe 1998). Boyd Rice, of Death in June, has made frequent use of the symbol and it is in this context that it is most well known in popular culture, although it is also an actively used sigil within the Church of Satan. These two currents converge in an online forum called '(The Satanic Network's) Undercroft'. In a thread dating from 2006, a Magister of the Church of Satan advertises the sale of a limited edition silver 'Wolfshook/ Wolfangle' ring. On the fourth page of replies and responses, the original poster makes a further post which includes an attached jpeg graphic file showing Boyd Rice wearing the *Wolfsangel* ring (Magister Lang 2007).

Conclusion

It is in this fertile co-mingling of popular culture and the cultic milieu that *Mourning The Ancient* operates. At once drawing upon the national-spiritual resonances of appropriated Scando-Germanic heathenism, whilst resetting them within a sexualised subcultural context, *Mourning the Ancient* satisfies both post-pubescent fantasies of available and objectified women and the imagery of the subculture. Fecund and flirtatious, the spirit queen that Taussig identifies in a Venezuelan *barrio* is here transtemporal, emerging from a long lost (read: newly invented) past, shrouded in myth and magic and bearing an ancient knowledge. It is in this nexus of myth, longing and desire that the neo-fascist nation is imagined and it is heavily charged with a spirituality that becomes embodied in the warrior-woman imagery of *Mourning the Ancient*. The valkyries ride out to heavy metal in neo-fascist corners of the world wide web.

The imagery of *Mourning the Ancient* lends weight to the neo-fascist appropriation of Northern European heathenism. It recasts the runes, already much abused by Nazism past and present, in a self-mythologising setting of sexualised spirit queen and subcultural alterity. This is, however, more than a superficial toying with transgressive imagery as might

sometimes be associated with subcultures. *Mourning the Ancient*'s sympathies with David Lane are evident and Lane is in no doubt of his 'destiny' in shaping a modern day racial heathenism:

> To that end I began teaching an updated form of our most common indigenous religion about 20 years ago. Its major deity is called Wotan, or Odin or Woden. Updated to be racial rather than tribal, and to remove any conflict with modern science. The Gods, Goddesses and myths of Wotanism represent the forces of Nature. [...] History shows that a religion must have a founder, often called a "prophet." Since no one else assumed that role, I have done so. (Lane c.2002, §4)

Through an association with Lane's messianic atavistic racism, *Mourning the Ancient* becomes a virtual safehouse for racist ideas as well as a cultural resource for dreaming the Wotanist nation into being. The webzine section co-mingles relatively well known heavy metal bands, such as Deicide and Carcass, with more obscure ones, many of the latter, such as Pagan Hellfire and Capricornus/ Thor's Hammer, being identified with far-right politics. The bleak outlook shared by many heavy metal artists, intensified in the lyrics and imagery of what Keith Kahn-Harris describes as 'extreme metal', is here used to provide an apparent coincidence of perspective between the better known acts and the obscure nationalist groups. Whilst a band such as Deicide, described by Kahn-Harris as typifying extreme metal's 'discursive transgression' (Kahn-Harris 2007, 34–43) are certainly bleak, if not apocalyptic, in their lyrics they could not be characterised as subscribing to the kind of racial apocalypse that David Lane espoused. Nonetheless, bassist and vocalist Glen Benton's 1998 interview with *Mourning the Ancient* touches upon his wish to limit immigration to the U.S., on excessive taxation, surveillance and the kind of anti-federalist conservatism that would now be associated with the Tea Party (Benton 1998). His political views are conservative, certainly, however it is only in the context of interviews with avowed fascists such as Sturmfuhrer that the reader's interpretation becomes framed within a neo-fascist register.

Although there is no concrete connection between Southgate and *Mourning the Ancient*, this interweaving of subcultural texts and spiritual belief with racial nationalism on the *Mourning the Ancient* website intertextually insinuates neofascist values into broader cultural consumption. This then is the cultural tactic proposed by Southgate and described by George Macklin as an attempt to 'forge the 'political space' necessary for political and racial hegemony' (Macklin 2005, 319) and also described elsewhere by Cristoph Fringeli as an

attempt by ‘elements of the organized far right who are trying to use a “metapolitical” strategy of intervention to fight their fascist kulturkampf’(Fringeli 2011). The recent motion picture *Thor* (2011), itself an adaption of the popular Marvel Comics strip, further sedimented a germinal idea of the Norse pantheon in the popular imagination but the neo-fascist right has been active in digging over the ground within which these seeds can grow. Here, at the heart of the neofascist project, is an attempt to colonise the past and to reinvent the religion and myths of a people long dead. David Lane reinvented and recontextualised those beliefs within a violent racism whilst projects such as *Mourning the Ancient* have promulgated Lane’s modern myths of ‘Wotan’. In doing so, the waters of what constitutes Northern European paganism become increasingly muddied by the neo-fascist jackboot. For instance, the well-established Danish neo-pagan community Forn Siðr has been forced to make a statement distancing itself from neo-fascist use of its symbols.[4] The building of a deterritorialized neo-fascist nation is a project that draws upon and colonises existing cultural constructs, forcing them to be re-read within the terms set by the virtual nationalists. It is thus that a set of beliefs which are recognisable but poorly understood slowly become eclipsed by the black sun and neo-fascist groupuscules are able to build myths of their own. It is clear here, then, that myth is always an ongoing project, it is re-visited, reworked, and revised and, crucially, must be contested and rewon when attempts are made to appropriate it in ways that would crush its polysemous pleasures into a solitary, bleak, vision.

This, then, is the dilemma faced by a resurgent Celtic nationalism. On the one hand there is the call to redeem marginalised and silenced cultures and yet, on the other, is the dangers of tarrying with an embittered rhetoric which intersects with the exclusionary outlook of extremist nationalism. The stakes are clear: for those national communities, be they existing nation-states or ‘nations without a state’, whose past is being pilfered by extremist nationalist projects, there is a need to consolidate their cultural history in terms which reduce the polyvalency of the symbols drawn upon extremists. For nations supported by the institutions of a state have at their disposal the means to shore up the parameters of their cultural vision through galleries, museums and educational curricula which narrate the national concerns but for nations-without-a-state, there are diminished opportunities to do so. In some cases, they must negotiate with institutions that reflect colonial cultural and linguistic dominance. Thus the importance of works such as the present one become much clearer: in revisiting and revitalising the spirit of the Celtic nation in ways which illuminate its richly diverse and, at times, contradictory heritage, the dynamism of these cultural visions prevent the ossification

of cultural tropes which might otherwise provide nationalist extremists with the basis from which to fashion *their* myths of nation.

Notes

1. *Synthesis* has been taken offline and Southgate's efforts appear to now be focussed upon 'National Anarchism'.
2. I have placed magick in inverted commas here to denote that whilst the website uses iconography associated with magickal systems, it does not do so within a framework which could be identified as belonging to any one magickal system and, as such, can be seen as a generalised 'populist magick'.
3. Since this chapter was written the website has modified a number of its images but the symbolic paradigm is maintained.
4. The English language homepage of Forn Siðr states explicitly, 'We wish to make it clear that Nazi activity, or misuse of pagan symbols for Nazi purposes IS NOT compatible with membership of Forn Siðr.' Available from HTTP: <http://www.fornsidr.dk/dk/17> (accessed 5 July 2011).

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Appendix D. (Wilson 2013) 'From Mushrooms to the stars: 2012 and the apocalyptic milieu' in S.Harvey & S.Newcombe (eds.) Prophecy in the New Millennium - When Prophecies Persist. Farnham: Ashgate.

Chapter 16. From Mushrooms to the Stars: 2012 and the Apocalyptic Milieu

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2012 and the Beginnings of the End Date?

The '2012 industry' continues apace and variations on the 2012 theme proliferate but they do so within the context of an existing field of prophetic activity. Despite a number of core texts which, in general terms, shape the scope of 2012 apocalyptic prophecy it is notable that a selection of narratival effects associated with earlier apocalyptic discourse formation are present within 2012 apocalyptic prophecy. This chapter, then, is an attempt to demonstrate the embeddedness of 2012 discourse within existing currents of apocalyptic prophecy and also argues the case for an 'apocalyptic milieu' which intersects a variety of North American and European Christian beliefs, popular culture and emerging religious formations.

In 1971, still enraptured with the hippie ideals of 1960s California, Terence McKenna, his brother Dennis and a small band of fellow travellers, embarked on a journey into fresh fields of physical and mental space. Travelling to La Chorerra in Amazonian Columbia in search of new psychedelic experiences they, 'were involved, [Terence McKenna] imagined, in a deep jungle search for … plants containing the orally active drug di-methyltryptamine (or DMT) and the psychedelic brew ayahuasca … the patterns of their use, which were unique to the Amazon jungles, had not been fully studied' (McKenna 1993: 2–3). With a desire to produce a visionary anthropology which McKenna termed 'ethnobotany', they sought innovative perspectives on the relationship between humans, consciousness, worship and psychoactive natural substances. In the midst of this journey, they experienced a series of revelations which they believed afforded them new understandings of history and its progress.

After their return, Terence revealed his theory of the zero time wave (McKenna and McKenna 1975), a cyclical conception of history which described the presence of 'novelty' in the world; 'Time is seen as the ebb and flow of two opposed qualities: novelty versus habit,

or density of connectedness versus disorder' (McKenna and McKenna 1993: 171). Upon returning to California he became transported by a series of revelatory theories based on his jungle experiences, his brother Dennis' mathematical knowledge and contemplation of the *I Ching*. McKenna describes a conception of history in which progress is spurred by successive, regular waves of 'novelty'; 'These waves are discrete periods of change … I came to realize that the internal logic of the timewaves strongly implied a termination of normal time and an end to ordinary history' (1993: 161). He suggested that at a number of rare but predictable points in history a heightened intensification of the flow of novelty would produce a dramatic alteration of human consciousness. This would usher in a new phase in human history, new forms of thought would emerge and humanity would be transformed; writing in the second half of the twentieth century he understood human history to be involved in, 'a long cascade into greater and greater novelty that reaches its culmination early in the twenty-first century' (1993: 161).

These revelations of the time wave concept are at the heart of one strand of the 2012 phenomenon and McKenna also provided inspiration to the author of the other central strand, José Argüelles' interpretation of the Mayan calendar: 'My meeting with Terence McKenna … contributed greatly to this understanding of the Mayan factor … So it was that I threw myself with renewed abandon into the Mayan Factor' (Argüelles 1996: 39). Although initially McKenna did not identify a clear date beyond the vague allusion to a point 'early in the twenty-first century', according to the second edition of *The Invisible Landscape*, and also in popular belief, Friday 21 December 2012 is one of those points and humanity is rushing towards a dramatic transformation. In its most basic structure this account fits a recognisable pattern of millenarian prophecy: a visionary or seer returns from a spiritualised space (whether it be a 'holy place' or mental construct) with a message of a soon-to-come moment in which humanity will experience profound and irreversible change in material and mental life. This transformative journey and redemptive promise is a familiar refrain and one which is used to offer hope to disparate communities of believers from across the spectrum of faiths, from the mainstream and diverse splinters and schisms of the world religions to small-scale groups of believers awaiting a variety of hidden masters, redeemers and/or paradisiacal living.[1] Although associated with religious belief it should be noted that secular beliefs can

[1] Continuum's three-volume set *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism* gives some indication of the global range and diversity of apocalyptic beliefs whilst also demonstrating the continuities and discontinuities between apocalyptic narratives over the course of the last three millennia (Collins 2000, McGinn 2000, Stein 2000).

also be understood within this apocalyptic framework. For instance, the inherent promise of Marxism is founded upon a teleology that has a strong whiff of the eschatological about it: a paradise on Earth (the dictatorship of the proletariat) will follow a period of cataclysmic change (revolution) brought about by selected 'messengers' (the vanguard party). So, for example, Hall (2009), Zimdars-Swartz and ZimdarsSwartz (2000) and Baumgartner (1999) consider the millenarian aspects of Marx whilst other writers also look at the manner in which, say, environmentalism can be understood as an apocalyptic belief (Lee 1995) or the widespread fear of nuclear war during the 1970s and 1980s (Beres 1980, Wojcik 1997). With the exception of Marxist utopian hopes, secular apocalyptic prophecy tends to be dystopian whereas faith-based prophecies of the end tend to have utopian outcomes for 'the faithful'.

2012 prophecy is rooted within ideas, attitudes and beliefs that tend to be associated with New Age belief and tends towards a utopian outcome with human consciousness having evolved and with this providing the basis for a coming golden age. The two primary sources of 2012 prophecy – Terence McKenna's time wave zero date and José Argüelles' reading of the Mayan calendar – are rooted in New Age tendencies and beliefs. Both suggest the kind of radical transformation that is implicit in what Paul Heelas (1996) describes as the spiritually purist and the counter-cultural tendencies within New Age belief. Being primarily syncretic in nature the New Age absorbs elements of faith traditions and secular beliefs and knowledge.

In general terms, the threads which form the weft and weave of the New Age can be characterised as 'stigmatised knowledge', to use Michael Barkun's formulation (Barkun 2003), that is to say beliefs and insights that are seen to have been suppressed, ignored or rejected by conventional wisdom. Whilst Barkun developed this idea to build upon Colin Campbell's (1972) earlier concept of the 'cultic milieu' it should be considered that the cultic milieu still has relevance to emergent forms of non-traditional religiosity in general and to 2012 prophecy in particular (see also Jean-François Mayer, Chapter 19, this volume). The cultic milieu describes the sharing and spread of new, or re-discovered, forms of stigmatised knowledge amongst an ever-shifting body of 'spiritual seekers' who consume, syncretise and constantly renew and disseminate the ideas they encounter. Whilst their origins can be traced to the cultic milieu, it is argued here that the 2012 prophecies are not wholly distinct from apocalyptic prophecy as a whole.

In the Soil of American Apocalyptic Millennialism

The Western world has seen its history shaped, to a large extent, by Judeo-Christian beliefs and values. Until relatively recently the expectation of the fulfilment of biblical prophecy was a prevailing motif within culture and belief across Europe and beyond. Norman Cohn (1957) inspired academic work looking at populist apocalyptic belief with his detailed study of millennial prophecy and chiliastic uprisings in Europe during the Middle Ages. Such beliefs were not limited to the dispossessed of the European Middle Ages; amidst the early stirrings of modernity and towards the end of the Middle Ages, the New World was encountered by European explorers partially inspired by the hope of discovering allies with whom to defeat an Ottoman empire that was identified with the Antichrist of Revelation (Baumgartner 1999). Christopher Columbus was a collector of millennial prophecies and believed he was engaged in God's work, fulfilling prophecy as, 'the messenger of the new heaven and the new earth of which [God] spoke in the Apocalypse of St. John … and he showed me the spot where to find it' (Baumgartner 1999: 120).

A century and a half later, Puritan settlers fleeing persecution in England brought radical millennial visions to the northern territories of the American continent. In seeking to escape the perceived tyranny of a Europe which they condemned for its intolerance towards their beliefs, their faith-based exile provided the inspiration from which a strong, geographically rooted, millennial desire could be drawn. Following an initial wave of apocalyptic preachers such as the Mather family and Samuel Danforth in New England, millennial discourse expanded along the Atlantic coast of North America during the eighteenth century and has ebbed and flowed within and across the US thereafter (see, for instance, Boyer 1992, Wojcik 1997).

With a post-aboriginal origin myth into which millennial prophecy is woven, the US has shown itself to be particularly prone to a continued susceptibility to belief in the impending immanentisation of the Christian eschaton. Although the recent doomsday prophet Harold Camping provides an example of the way in which Christian prophecy has, to some extent, fallen onto a less than fully accepting public ear it should be remembered that relatively recent US presidents such as John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan have drawn upon the symbolism of John Winthrop's 1630 'City on the Hill' speech. In each instance the America described is one to which other nations look for example just as the New Jerusalem of Revelation 21 is illuminated by God's light and leads the world: 'the nations of them which

are saved shall walk in the light of it' (Revelation 21:24). Indeed, it has been argued by Philip Jenkins that the American religious mainstream, 'remains what it has been since colonial times: a fundamentalist evangelicism with powerful millenarian strands' (Jenkins 2000: 5).

Just as Kennedy's Catholicism was not immune to the millenarian pull at the heart of American spiritual life, it is possible to see the extent to which an apocalyptic outlook has shaded numerous cultural expressions within the US. Whilst there is a very strong tradition of writing the apocalypse and the millennium into overtly Christian literature, film and other cultural forms it is also the case that secular popular culture has adopted apocalyptic tropes which proceed from and transform the Christian millennial tradition whilst retaining much of the imagery and structure of apocalyptic prophecy. This is a commonplace stance within much academic literature and rightly so for the fictional depiction of a wide variety of utopian and dystopian pre-, post- and mid-apocalyptic scenarios has been the basis of many popular culture texts (Forbes and Kilde 2004, Gribben 2009). The flow of ideas is not straightforwardly unidirectional and secular themes can feed back into religious visions of the end just as secular texts may produce worldly variations on religious end time stories.

Conrad Ostwalt (1998) makes a strong case for the extent to which popular culture reflects an ongoing fascination with apocalyptic narratives but in a form that is more suited to a culture in which secularisation plays an increasingly powerful role, '[S]ecularization has not done away with the apocalyptic consciousness. Rather it has assisted in creating a new apocalyptic myth, one that is more palatable to contemporary, popular culture' (Oswalt 1998: §19). Secular and religious fictions both spin around the apocalyptic centrifugal centre, their paths crossing endlessly. The receptivity to apocalyptic prophecy in, and of, the US is one of the currents in which 2012 prophecy emerges. Both genuinely held beliefs regarding a fast approaching end times and works of the imagination constitute an 'apocalyptic milieu' which permeates American cultural and spiritual life. The apocalyptic milieu is one that is well established and provides the intertextual framework in which the 2012 prophecies are rendered meaningful.

The New Age Milieu, 'Occulture' and the Spread of 2012 Themes

Christian prophecy is an on-going feature of American culture in general but there has also been a flourishing of prophecies which have emerged from the so-called New Age or 'cultic milieu' which has prospered in post-Second World War America, Europe and as the twentieth century closed, amongst cosmopolitan populations worldwide. Although indebted to nineteenth-century precedents such as Theosophy and currents of Victorian esotericism, the New Age flourished during the latter half of the twentieth century. It is deeply syncretic in nature and borrows from and blends a range of religious and spiritual beliefs. This constant absorption of diverse beliefs means that it is peculiarly open to new developments but it also remains, in essence, concerned with the development of a deep inner spirituality although, as Heelas suggests, this is manifest across a broad spectrum from world rejecting to world affirming (Heelas 1996, see also Sutcliffe 2003 on the limitations of the term 'New Age'). Whilst the 2012 prophecies are generally recognised to have their basis in the writing of Terrence McKenna and José Argüelles, their substance has undergone numerous reinventions as they have been embraced and resituated in a variety of spiritual frameworks within the broad, loose church of the New Age.

The manner in which Dorothy Martin's failed prophecies of the 1950s and her subsequent spiritual journey have been incorporated into several New Age understandings of the 2012 prophecies is typical of the manner in which ideas dormant within the cultic milieu can be re-invented and re-absorbed into dominant currents within the milieu. Over half a century prior to the current predictions of global cataclysm, Dorothy Martin (later Sister Thedra of the Association of Sananda and Samat Kumara) found fame of sorts as the source of a failed prophecy of the world's end on 21 December 1954. The prophecy was received in a series of psychic contacts between enlightened beings ('the Guardians') from the planet Clarion and Dorothy Martin during August 1954. It was claimed the world would be 'purified' by flooding before the formation of new land masses and the re-emergence of the lost continent of Mu. Humans who accepted and were responsive to the Clarion call would be saved by Guardians in UFOs. Two years later, in *When Prophecy Fails*, Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken and Stanley Schachter renamed Dorothy Martin as Marian Keech and recounted the development of Martin's prophecy and the moment of its failure (Festinger et al. [1956] 2008). Framing the experience of Martin and her small group of followers in Festinger's idea of 'cognitive dissonance' they provided an influential study of apocalyptic belief and, importantly here, the circulatory discursive currents of the milieus from which those beliefs emerged. With a background that included involvement or interest in Dianetics, the I AM

movement, post-Adamski UFO contact groups, psychic abilities and Theosophy, Dorothy Martin typifies many members of what was to become the New Age movement.

Whilst New Age syncretic tendencies are apparent in the mix of beliefs that formed the fertile ground from which her own grew, it is interesting to note that Dorothy Martin's principle contact amongst the Clarion Guardians, Sananda, was understood to be an ascended form of Jesus. Whilst this view of Jesus as an initiate of esoteric knowledge is present in Theosophy (Blavatsky [1938] 1952), the figure of Jesus-Sananda grew increasingly key to Martin as her channelling of messages from him developed; after her initial failed prophecy she published a pamphlet of messages from him which underlined not only her dedication to him but also Jesus-Sananda and the Guardians' continued concern for humanity (Martin 1962). The syncretic nature of the cultic milieu is apparent in the varied sources which contributed to Martin's beliefs and this is further underlined by the subsequent use of the messages that she channelled from Jesus-Sananda.

In turn Martin's messages resonated with others in this milieu; her messages are featured in Mark Amaru Pinkham's (2002) *The Truth Behind the Christ Myth: The Redemption of the Peacock Angel* as support for his thesis that the figure known as Jesus Christ (and Jesus-Sananda) is, in fact, Sanat Kumara, a Venusian master, and central figure in Theosophy and related spiritual movements. This link between Jesus-Sananda and Sanat Kumara is frequently cited as evidence of spiritually enlightened benign aliens with a protective and interventionist interest in humanity with a number of sources referring to Martin's claim that Jesus-Sananda introduced himself to her with the following words, 'My name is Esu Sananda Kumara.'[2] Amongst them is Alexandriah Stahr's, *Star Essenia – 2012 and Beyond* which claims to represent Ashtar Command Healing Division and to be 'sponsored by the Collective Christ: Lord Sananda, Commander Ashtar, The Ashtar – Solar Star Command (formerly known as The Ashtar Command, The Galactic Command and The Intergalactic Command), The Ascended Masters of Light and The Angels of Light' (Stahr 2009). Sananda is central here and it is Martin's version of Sananda that shapes the vision of work which is dedicated to 'preparation for Return of the Christ Vibration on Earth and the 2012 Planetary

[2] For instance, the Wolf Lodge – Golden Braid native American ministry (http://www.wolflodge.org/), 'Joseph Almighty's Site – Firstborn Son of Almighty God' (http://josephalmighty.multiply.com/journal/item/642) and 'Amethyst's Garden's blog [sic]' (http://www.myspace.com/amethystsgarden/blog/308231975) (all accessed: 22 February 2012).

Ascension, now known as 13.13.13 Solar New Earth Reality Timeline' (Stahr 2009) and is authored by Rev. Alexandriah Stahr of the Star-Essence Temple. This short journey from Dorothy Martin's prophecy for 21 December 1954 to the set of prophecies converging on 21 December 2012 is illustrative of the circuitous, shared narratives of the cultic milieu and the tendency for this milieu to self-hybridise to such an extent that seminal texts can rapidly become secondary to emergent themes. This tendency is as true of the central works in 2012 prophecy as it is of other, less well known texts.

The link between the cultic milieu and the counterculture is strong. Both Partridge (2004) and Tramacchi (2000) describe the popularity of McKenna's shamanic anthropology with psychedelically spiritual ravers during the 1990s. With his roots in the psychedelic awakening of the 1960s but an active interest in ideas prevalent amongst later echoes of this moment, McKenna's appeal was crossgenerational. He had a resonance with both the first wave of baby boomer 'spiritual seekers' (see, for example, Roof 1993) and to their children, both literal and spiritual. His idea of 'time wave zero' and the significance of 21 December 2012 found a twofold audience within the New Age milieu and what Christopher Partridge (2004) terms 'occulture', the complex tapestry woven by the warp and weft of occult themes through the serried texts of popular culture. As has been mentioned, McKenna's idea of time wave zero emerged from a period of intense experimentation with psilocybin mushrooms in the upper reaches of the Amazon rainforest and this has given his work a counter-cultural audience of the type described by Partridge.

Like McKenna, José Argüelles has significant connections to the late 1960s counterculture. A professor of art history at University of California, Davis in the early 1970s, Argüelles was a key figure behind the Whole Earth Festival and engaged in and drew inspiration from the same milieu as McKenna. The evidence that Argüelles draws on borrows from similar strands of 'stigmatised knowledge' to those employed by McKenna: the *I Ching* and UFO lore, in addition to the Book of Revelation and the source for which he is best known: the Mayan calendar (Argüelles 1987). The syncretic weave of Argüelles' text typifies a New Age approach to spiritual enlightenment and demonstrates the textual richness of the socalled Mayan prophecies. 'So-called' because although the Mayan Long Count calendar reaches the end of a significant cycle on the 21 December 2012 and although Argüelles has done a great deal to popularise this fact, the range of evidence that Argüelles offers and the range of ways

in which the prophecy has been interpreted is too broad for the 2012 prophecy simply to be referred to as a 'Mayan' prophecy.

Certainly, Sitler (2006) is ready to point out that whilst a generalised apocalyptic current is present within a very few traditionalist Mayan communities, on the whole, currently living Mayans are being exposed to the 2012 date more by visiting New Age activists, celebrants, researchers and seekers than via tradition. As an inherited tradition, the current speculation fails to be definitively Mayan. The few academic treatments to consider the 2012 prophecy acknowledge the potential for archaeological evidence to point to the veracity of the 2012 date being the end of the 5,126 year Long Count (Sitler 2006: 25, 35, n. 4) but situate the current fascination with 21 December 2012 not with the Mayans, or even Mayanists such as Argüelles, but with the *I Ching* and hallucinogen-inspired Terence McKenna (Hannegraaff 2010), or with 1970s countercultural psychonauts in general: Hoopes rather dismissively wrote, 'If some assertions about 2012 sound as if they were imagined by people on drugs, it is because they were' (Hoopes 2011: 243). Hoopes also compares adherents of the 2012 prophecy with Creationists and cites a parallel, 'rejection of the "official" narratives … and with them the rejection of academic authority' (Hoopes 2011: 246). This is certainly so and Hoopes is also right to suggest that, 'the 2012 phenomenon may be far more interesting as a window into our contemporary culture … than for anything it reveals about the ancient Maya' (Hoopes 2011: 246). Unfortunately, he does not explore the relationship between these two statements and the extent to which the milieu from which 2012 prophetic discourse emerges is typified by rapidly hybridising and interwoven forms of 'stigmatised knowledge.'

Despite the central role in popularising and framing 2012 prophecy played by McKenna's zero timeline and Argüelles' popularisation of the Mayan calendrical cycles, the 2012 prophecies have developed beyond the concerns (if not outcomes) that McKenna and Argüelles describe. To a certain extent this was always an inevitable consequence of the adoption of their work within the New Age milieu. The narratival drift of 2012 prophecies away from the McKenna-Argüelles axis around which the core prophecies orbit is, in some instances quite marked with other prophecies being combined with their work to produce entirely novel combinations. A strong example would be the way in which Zecharia Sitchin's (1976) pseudo-astronomical prediction of the discovery of a lost planet, Nibiru, became combined with messages channelled from the binary star system Zeta Reticula by Nancy Lieder (1996). Sitchin suggested in a series of books that the planet Nibiru orbits the Sun in

an elliptical orbit which brings it into the inner Solar System every 3,500 years or so. With it come an advanced race of space beings, the Anunnaki, who visited Earth during the last close pass of their home planet Nibiru and inspired early human civilisation in Sumeria. Nancy Lieder identified Nibiru with Planet X, a planet that Zeta Reticulans ('the Zetas') warned would pass close enough to Earth to bring cataclysm and an end to current civilisations. Lieder initially suggested that this would happen in May 2003 but has subsequently stated that this was a, 'White Lie', designed to, 'fool the establishment' (Lieder 2010). Although Lieder still suggests that the event will occur during the early years of the twenty-first century she distances herself from the 2012 prophecy and sees it as part of an 'establishment' plot; 'When the 2012 craze first began, years ago, this was far into the future and thus considered safe by the establishment, who want first and foremost for their slave classes to tend to their jobs and not rush away from coastal cities' (Lieder 2011). Nonetheless, this has not prevented the Sitchin-Lieder hybrid narrative from being appropriated by believers in a 2012 cataclysm.[3]

The Proliferation of Endings in Apocalyptic Discourse

What is also fascinating is the way in which this astronomical anomaly has been co-opted by traditional faith groups in the US. The Christian-New Age hybrid has been mentioned above in reference to the cultural 'prophetic readiness' of US culture but here we see a reversal of the indebtedness of New Age prophecy to Christian eschatology in the adoption of New Age themes by Christian preachers and churches. For the most part these preachers are dismissive of non-Christian hermeneutical endeavours and seek to warn Christians against false prophets, particularly New Age ones (more of this shortly when would-be Christian prophets warn of a New Age/New World Order Antichrist conspiracy) but, for some, the New Age prophecy provides an opportunity to reveal the potential for the fulfilment of Christian prophecy. Unaffiliated Christian author Tim McHyde projects Revelation's 'Wormwood' onto Planet X/Nibiru and thus is able to develop an eschatological reading of the 2012 prophecy which reinterprets the New Age date as a potential point for the return of Jesus. He

[3] See, for instance, 'The Church of Critical Thinking' (http://churchofcriticalthinking.org/planetx.html) and 'Your Own World USA' (http://yowusa.com/planetx/) (accessed: 22 February 2012).

is, however, sceptical and in 2008 wrote that he was unconvinced that sufficient signal events had occurred to confirm that the end times were upon us. For instance we are yet to see,

> [T]he coming Middle East nuclear war predicted by an abundance of prophetic chapters, including Psalm 83. This particular event has to happen before Wormwood comes, for reasons I won't go into here. To make a long story short, since this war has not materialized, we can rule out 2012 as a year of any type of prophetic fulfilment (McHyde 2008: 16).

Instead his key dates are set later in the decade with Wormwood/Planet X passing the Earth between Pentecost and early summer of 2019 (McHyde 2009: 90–91). Whilst McHyde is able to incorporate Planet X into Revelation, the prophecy website *The 2012 Warning* is keen to warn its viewers, 'Don't trust the Maya – Trust the Messiah!' The website is clearly intended to appeal to casual 'web seekers' searching for information relating to 2012 prophecy. The title of the site is vague and could be interpreted as being written from any one of the many perspectives that are offered on '2012'; it is certainly not immediately apparent that the site is owned, and presumably authored, by Pastor Dan Kaighen of the Lighthouse Baptist Church. The Christian content of the website's 'warning' is, however, quite apparent to even the most casual browser; the warning is a warning not to turn away from Christ: the site pits 'Eternal Bible truths' against 'Mayan myths' and wittily warns, 'Everybody is talking about December 2012. They ought to worry about *Revelation 20:12!*' (Kaighen 2008: 1).

Although *The 2012 Warning* website is clearly using a popular interest in 2012 prophecy to attract potential converts to its prophecy-based beliefs it also contains content that sits closely aligned to the conspiracy theories which have incorporated the 2012 motif into their paranoid worldview. *The 2012 Warning* not only warns against the acceptance of false prophecy but it also warns against the origin of that false prophecy, namely what it refers to as the 'New Age Movement'; this refrain is repeated by *polarshift2012.net* which warns in an article entitled, 'Nibiru 2012 Planet X Barack Obama Evolution' that US President Barack Obama is, 'the next antichrists [sic]' (Jones 2009: 3).[4] And thus the 2012 prophecy is recontextualised within the contemporary nexus between conspiracy theory and millennialism described by Michael Barkun as 'improvisational millennialism' (Barkun 2003). Still further from McKenna and

[4] This site appears to exist in order to provide links to the home page for *Contact 2012* a self-published 2012 'survival guide' by Christopher Jones.

Argüelles but within the field of improvisational millennialism, David Icke (2011) recasts the 2012 prophecy as part of an incursive and nested conspiracy designed to distract the general population from the machinations of the hidden elite. Whilst elsewhere *Grailcode.net* purports to reveal Prince William as the antichrist and 2012 as the year of reckoning for both him and humanity as a whole (Ortiz 2008).

In such dark prophecies, and in other similar uses of 2012, McKenna, Argüelles, the Mayans and *I Ching* are long forgotten, if they were ever considered. In this discursive drift from novelty or ancient calendrical reckoning to antichrists and conspiracy, the field of our contemporary apocalyptic milieu is revealed. The Mayan element is a partial feature of 2012 prophecies; whilst it provides a mobilising element of the most well-known form of 2012 prophecy, it is not a defining feature of all 2012 prophecies. Hybrid prophecies in which Christianised New Age tropes and ancient astronauts constantly combine and recombine to become renewed abound and in this the Ancient Maya provide a jumping off point for fresh interpretations of Revelation, messages from the stars or offer clues of the plots of hidden elites. It is tempting to consider 2012 prophecies as emblematic of a moment in which 'New Age' beliefs have reached the cultural mainstream but to do so would be to overlook the extent to which the uses (and misuses) of 'karma' or 'the power of positive thinking' have passed into popular discourse. No, instead 2012 should be considered as evidence of the surprising vitality of the apocalyptic milieu; of the readiness for significant sections of the Western population to hope for profound, indeed cataclysmic, change. The promise of transformation, of the dawning of a new era and the waning of old influences and tyrannies of evil is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of the West and whilst the content and detail of prophecies will be constantly renewed and recontextualised the pull of an impossible promise delivered from beyond the mundane world will always resonate across divided communities and with disconsolate individuals.

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Appendix E. (Wilson 2017a) 'Postcards from the Cosmos: Cosmic Spaces in Alternative Religion and Conspiracy Theories'. *The Journal of Astrosociology* Volume 2.

Postcards from the Cosmos: Cosmic Spaces in Alternative Religion and Conspiracy Theories

Andrew Fergus Wilson

Abstract

If conspiracy theory is the narration of fears of existential dread, of a potentially apocalyptical plot against 'us', then we can understand alien conspiracies as a dread of the coming of 'cosmological humanity' and the end of 'geostationary man'. In escaping gravity's hold a terminal velocity is achieved by a species ready to mythologize, even sacralise, its achievements and to enchant the Heavens once again in terms more suited to the technological age. Virgiliu Pop's astrosociology will provide a means for framing the uniqueness of post-Gagarin conspiracist spiritualities within the particular religious cultures of cosmic humanity whilst Raymond Williams' concept of structures of feeling will be drawn upon to understand the cultural significance of these spiritualities.

Keywords: Alien, conspiracy, Gagarin, conspirituality, religion, space

Introduction

This article will provide a commentary on the 'cosmic turn' taken by marginal beliefs following humanity's discovery of space flight. Yuri Gagarin's successful orbit of the Earth in 1961 will be used for its symbolic value as moment in which the possibility of the 'space age' was realised through the presence human life beyond Earth's atmosphere. There is no claim as to it being a direct inspiration for the movements discussed here but rather that its connotative resonances provide a means for understanding the context that has given rise to these religious constructs. Certainly, the founding of the Aetherius Society predates Gagarin's flight and there are earlier examples of 'cosmic new religious movements': Ron L. Hubbard's

Dianetics movement, and subsequently, Scientology; or Dorothy Martin's Chicago believers group (made famous in Leon Festinger's study When Prophecy Fails) are two well-known examples. From Joseph Smith's time onwards, various forms of Mormonism have made claims that life was created on other planets and this has led to speculation within the church about the concept of a populated multiverse.[1] Additionally, there are many antecedents of a supranormal meaning being attached to material cosmic incursion into the human sensory range. For instance, since at least Aristotle's time, Halley's Comet has been associated with signs and divination[2]. During the last century, post WWII UFO 'scares' have mobilized diverse public responses and the most notable have left an enduring cultural legacy. George Adamski's claims to have encountered alien 'Space Brothers' began in the late 1940s, predating the well-known story of the alleged crashed UFO at Roswell, New Mexico during July, 1947. In some ways, the Roswell account might have served as an alternative to Gagarin's flight as a powerful symbolic moment in the proliferation of cosmic new religious movements given its influence on the UFO flap of the late 1940s and 1950s.[3] Nonetheless, Gagarin is used here because, as shall be argued, his flight represents the breaching of a barrier that no human had previously physically crossed and ushered in a new relationship with the cosmos.

Yuri Gagarin's spaceflight of 1961 extended the range of humanity in a way that profoundly rewrote our relationship with the heavens. Pioneering sociologist Emile Durkheim wrote, regarding the incommensurability of the sacred and the profane, that "[t]he sacred thing is, par excellence, that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity. This prohibition surely makes all communication impossible between the two worlds; for if the profane could enter into relations with the sacred, the sacred would serve no purpose."[4] Whilst Durkheim's observation is more honoured in the breach, it provides a spatial understanding of sacrality that helps to convey the *religious* implications of Gagarin's flight. First Sputnik and then, most profoundly, Yuri Gagarin took humans into Heaven and revealed it to be vast and apparently indifferent to humanity. His voyage revealed the fragility

[1] Kirk D. Hagen, "Eternal Progression in a Multiverse: An Explorative Mormon Cosmology", *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, vol. 39, no. 2 (Summer 2006) pp. 1–45.
[2] For an excellent overview see Sara J. Schechner (1999) *Comets, Popular Culture, and the Birth of Modern Cosmology*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
[3] David Clarke & Andy Roberts (2007) *Flying Saucers: A Social History of UFOlogy*. Loughborough: Heart of Albion Press
[4] Émile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, trans. Carol Cosman.(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 39

of the divide between the sacred and the profane; Earth and the heavens were materially in reach of one another. Prior to Gagarin's flight human journeys into 'the Heavens' had been out of body, in spirit form alone, but his flight took humanity – in body – into the realm of the Gods. In this paper, Gagarin's voyage is used as a highly-charged symbolic moment that demarcates between man-beneath-the-heavens and man-in-space. Clearly, it is part of a longer history of space flight and human exploration but the drama of the moment carries a semiotic ripeness that provides a focus for a key period of human expansion.

It is argued here that humanity has, since then, failed to reconcile itself to the idea of being a cosmic species, that the capacity to incorporate this expanded awareness of humanity's 'place' into human cultures – and beliefs – is yet to become fully manifest. Virgiliu Pop[5] and Carol Mersch[6] both chart attempts to transport human efforts to export Earthly religions to space: to fill the Heavens with Earthly religions, the Russian and American space programmes contained within their scientific practices the seeds of earlier forms of belief. Mersch concludes that this was reflective of NASA astronauts as explorers, wishing to take the old world into the new, of a "spiritual expression that is intrinsic to human beings in the act of exploration;"[7] whilst Pop described cosmonauts decorating the walls of the Mir space station (and, later, the ISS) with icons in the wake of the post-Communist revival of Russian Orthodoxy. Compellingly, Pop weaves Gagarin into the fabric of Russian cosmism[8] and, particularly, the cultural vacillation of the figure of Gagarin between Communist atheism and Russian Orthodoxy. With its roots in the technological utopia in space imagined by Nikolai Fedorov and the spaceward trajectory of human evolution predicted by Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, cosmism represents an early sacralization of 'secular space'. In his concluding comments Pop describes the duality of Gagarin's legacy in a way that points to the manner in which Gagarin can be understood to have simultaneously demystified but yet re-enchanted the cosmos:

> Aboard the ISS, close to the Orthodox Icons, lays the photograph of Gagarin. He deserves to be there, not as a demigod of the atheist faith, but as the first human being

[5] Virgiliu Pop, "Viewpoint: Space and Religion in Russia: Cosmonaut Worship to Orthodox Revival," *Astropolitics: The International Journal of Space Politics & Policy* 7, no. 2 (2009): 150-163

[6] Carol Mersch, "Religion, Space Exploration, and Secular Society," *Astropolitics: The International Journal of Space Politics & Policy* 11, no.1-2 (2013): 65-78.

[7] Mersch, "Religion, Space Exploration, and Secular Society," 76

[8] Pop, "Viewpoint: Space and Religion in Russia: Cosmonaut Worship to Orthodox Revival."

> having stepped upon the celestial path. His picture may be an icon for the cosmists and for the atheists, yet for those believing Christian Orthodox, Gagarin holds a special place. The human being, made according to the image of God, is himself a "living icon of God." Unaware of this, by sending Gagarin to outer space, the godless communists were the first to launch an Orthodox icon aboard a spaceship.[9]

Pop captures the paradoxical multivalency of Gagarin as a symbol of space exploration. A living icon on the 'celestial path', his flight into the Beyond was achieved through the efforts of the 'godless communists'. In a moment of transcendence, Gagarin revealed humanity's material basis and longing for something beyond the material. Elsewhere Pop articulates the unpreparedness of the bulk of humanity to expand their conceptual range in order to accommodate this moment.[10] He characterises this as humanity being caught between 'future shock' (Alvin Toffler) and 'cultural lag' (William Ogburn). Pop's account sketches a pattern of responses within folk cultures around the world in which 'cosmological humanity' is blamed for crop failure, natural disasters and a damaged ecosystem:

> "Because of what you have done"—said Richard Nixon to the Apollo astronauts—"the heavens have become a part of man's world." to those who deemed the Moon as the realm of divinity, the human conquest of outer space and of the Moon meant their literal desecration, their passage from sacred to the profane. Such an act of taking into human possession what was before heaven, of depriving the Moon of its sacred character, could not go unpunished.[11]

Durkheim provides a useful conceptual metaphor here: the profaning of the sacred in a moment of transcendence. The evolution of humanity into a space-faring species, then, is the source of both and fear and wonder – of living icons and cataclysmic threats. And it is the human world, of culture and belief, in which this is played out. Here then, in this article, the context of the journey from the profane into the sacred provides the context in which spiritualized UFO conspiracies can be understood.

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[9] Pop, "Viewpoint: Space and Religion in Russia: Cosmonaut Worship to Orthodox Revival," 160

[10] Virgiliu Pop, "Space Exploration and Folk Beliefs on Climate Change," *Astropolitics: The International Journal of Space Politics & Policy*, 9, no.2 (2011): 50-62

[11] Pop, "Space Exploration and Folk Beliefs on Climate Change," 59

Apocalyptic Spaces

Moshe Barasch's consideration of the role of space and location in Western apocalyptic discourse identifies the importance of the vertical plane in depictions of apocalyptic space and it is this verticality that Gagarin traversed.[12] Barasch provides a powerful summary of the complexity of this vertical dimension,

> [T]he ascension to heaven is the manifestation of celestial origin [and yet] carries soteriological connotations. The ascension to heaven is a formula for salvation […] The narration of a dramatic descent into hell leading to a struggle between the "superior" and the "inferior" forces and ending with the victory of salvation, is of course a typical apocalyptical motif.[13]

In that flight, humanity broke free of gravity's fetters but also re-enacted this bi-directional motif that Barasch also describes as "an essential component of the [apocalyptic] theme."[14] Gagarin's flight is thus symbolically charged with the cataclysmic dimension that Pop identified among global folkloric cultures. Further, it precipitated an outpouring of cosmically oriented new religious movements (NRMs) and spiritualities and these space age religions retain the eschatological verticality, that is to say the possibity of thinking about the unravelling of collective destiny in spatial terms, that Barasch identifies. The figure of spiritualised space is contradictory; to journey into it is simultaneously heretical and transcendent. Barasch delineates the topology of apocalyptic space and we can map Gagarin's flight within it.

Gagarin's flight is apocalyptic: revelatory and cataclysmic, it profanes the Heavens and reveals the end of one history of humanity and the initiation of a new, unbounded humanity. The pre-Gagarin heavenly spaces are brought closer and the traditions with which Barasch is primarily concerned still shape post-Gagarin reappraisals. Space continues to be the source of both judgment on humanity and also its subsequent punishment; accordingly, the Judaic

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[12] Moshe Barasch, "Apocalyptic Space," in *Apocalyptic Time*, ed. Albert I. Baumgarten, 305-326. (Leiden: Brill, 2000)

[13] Barasch, "Apocalyptic Space," 322

[14] Barasch, "Apocalyptic Space," 322

motif of a powerful entity punishing those lacking commitment to the faith continues to shape a number of post-Gagarin NRMs.

The motif was present in the beliefs of Heaven's Gate. The Heaven's Gate group was a small new religious movement based in California. The group was co-founded by Marshall Applewhite and Bonnie Nettles in their native Texas and grew as they spread their hybrid message of a UFO-enabled Christian millennialism. Following Nettles' death in 1985, the group became increasingly focused on the charismatic leadership of Applewhite. Leaving one member to maintain their website, 38 members ('the crew') and Applewhite took their own lives during the third week of March, 1997 in the belief that they were ready to evolve to a higher level of consciousness. They claimed that they were ready to attain 'The Evolutionary Level Above Human' and would be reconstituted on an alien spacecraft hidden in the tail of the Hale-Bopp comet as it passed close to Earth. They would remain there whilst the Earth was 'recycled'. This transit to an imagined spacecraft behind the Hale-Bopp comet was, at once, a transcendence to a new level of consciousness and also – through this quasi-Rapture – an escape from a cataclysmic judgment on Earth. Benjamin Zeller's account of the awkwardness of the New Age Biblical hermeneutic, the interpretative framework, driving Heaven's Gate points to the difficulty of negotiating the culture shock and cultural lag described above.[15] The premillennial dispensationalism that shaped the structure of Heaven's Gate eschatology[16] represents the old world of Christian discourse, whilst the environmental factors and the UFO technologies behind the translated rapture event reflect the shockwaves of the culture shock described by Pop. 'Avenging space' in new religious cosmologies is a place of fear but also redemption. Heaven's Gate were a product of the cultic milieu but, nonetheless, shared structural similarities with Judeo-Christian eschatology and the apocalyptic vertical plane that Barasch identified.

Alien creators

[15] Benjamin E Zeller, "Extraterrestrial Biblical Hermeneutics and the Making of Heaven's Gate," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions,* 14, no.2 (2010): 34-60.

[16] For example, Christopher Partridge, "The Eschatology of Heaven's Gate," in *Expecting the End: Millennialism in Social and Historical Context*, ed. Kenneth G. C. Newport and Crawford Gibbons, 49-66. (Waco, Tx: Baylor University Press, 2006) and Zeller, "Extraterrestrial Biblical Hermeneutics and the Making of Heaven's Gate,"

Alongside this structurally familiar depiction of destructive deistic space entities there are contemporaneous forms of sacralized near and outer space that describe space as the source of life on earth and the physical and spiritual location of the 'truth' of existence. In these accounts, Earth's fragility is still evident but so too is its integration into the 'cosmic whole'. It is in these that post-Gagarin spiritual forms are most clearly articulated. NRMs of the enchanted cosmos vary widely but are unified by situating Earth within a narrative of an inhabited universe in which terrestrial life is at an uninformed and undeveloped stage. Typically, cosmic truth is 'out there' and revealed to chosen ones via direct visitation or psychic revelation. Raëlianism and the Aetherius Society typify both revelatory traditions.

On Thursday, 13 December 1973, Raël (b. Claude Vorilhon, 1946) claims to have been visited by an 'alien' on a dormant volcano top in the Clermont-Ferrand region of France. During this and subsequent evenings the humanoid aliens ('Elohim') allegedly recounted the truth of humanity's creation to Raël and then, on Tuesday, 7 October 1975, he claims to have received another visitation. On this occasion he believes he was taken to the home planet of his otherworldly contacts. In Raël's account, he makes the claim that the Elohim are advanced scientists from another world who had used Earth as a laboratory; the details of their experiments were recorded in Genesis and other books of the Old Testament. The Raëlian philosophy is presented as if it were a true account of life on Earth's material, extra-terrestrial origin. Whilst Susan Palmer (2004) straightforwardly describes Raëlianism as a religion,[17] George Chryssides describes themas 'scientific creationists'.[18] This is, perhaps, a more representative appellation as it combines the scientism that Raël directly makes claim to whilst connoting the theological resonances of his creation story. Raël's philosophy is certainly atheist and eschews occult forces; the Raëlians describe themselves as an, "atheist religion," stressing the role of their movement in creating a link between humanity and 'the Creators'.[19] Raëlian space is infinite, so too is life in the universe: "The universe being infinite, there is an infinite number of inhabited planets and an infinite number of Elohim and creations."[20] The ambiguity of Raël's position is made evident in his continued use of the

[17] Susan Palmer, *Aliens Adored: Raël's UFO Religion*. (New Brunswick, NJ & London: Rutgers University Press, 2004)
[18] Chryssides, George D. "Scientific creationism: a study of the Raëlian Church," in *UFO Religions* ed. Christopher Partridge, 45-61, (London: Routledge 2003)
[19] International Raelian Movement, "FAQ #8: Do Raelians consider Raelianism as a religion?" Message from the Designers, last modified, 20 April 2013, http://www.rael.org/e107_plugins/faq/faq.php?cat.1.8
[20] Raël Maitreya, in a Facebook message to the author, 11 July 2014

Hebrew term for Gods or gods, *Elohim*. Although he is keen to stress the secular materiality of his universe, his ongoing use of the term charges it with a connotated divinity. The Raëlian universe is also multiple with a series of infinitely recursive nested realities: the cells of our bodies are, themselves, separate universes.[21] Here, then, the enchanted cosmos has entered the fibre of our being; we are not just revealed to be part of the greater Cosmos but contain the Cosmos within us.

Esoteric Aliens

The Aetherius Society typifies a world-accommodating NRM and also one that has successfully sustained its membership after the death of its founder. With an indebtedness to Theosophy, Aetherian belief provides continuity between pre- and post-Gagarin NRMs and develops a vastly enlarged iteration of Blavatsky's system. The Aetherius Society were founded in 1955 by Dr. George King (1919-1997). King claims to have received a psychically transmitted auditory message from Master Aetherius, an advanced extraterrestrial intelligence who first contacted King in 1954. In King's account, Aetherius was the Venusian representative of a cosmic organisation called the Interplanetary Parliament, a non-political advisory council made up of representatives from within and beyond our solar system and which convened on Saturn.. In King's account, Aetherius contacted King to name him as the voice of the Interplanetary Parliament on Earth and to spread its spiritual and technological messages.[22]. Where Raëlianism is idiosyncratic, Aetherianism is typical of post-WWII UFO religion in its indebtedness to Theosophy; it developed Theosophy's 'cosmic evolution' and exported the hidden masters to other worlds. Like Raëlianism, a populist understanding of science is a key element of Aetherian philosophy and King espoused a 'fuller' version of science and religion that fused both. In Aetherian belief, each of the solar planets are inhabited but at different levels of vibration. These cannot be perceived by humans as our senses are only attuned to 'level 1' vibrations. Cosmic Masters are capable of perceiving multiple frequency vibrations "because of their highly sensitised or psychic senses as well as advanced instruments. Because of their advancement they are able to move through one

[21] Raël, Facebook message to the author

[22] For more detail on the beliefs of the Aetherius Society see John Saliba, "The Earth is a Dangerous Place – The World View of the Aetherius Society", *Marburg Journal of Religion*, 4, no.2 (1999): np https://www.uni-marburg.de/fb03/ivk/mjr/pdfs/1999/articles/saliba1999.pdf

realm of existence on to another frequency both on this Earth and outside of it with great ease."[23] 'Ordinary' souls ('lifestreams') can evolve up, or devolve, to other planetary existences with each planet in the solar system being characterised by distinct forms of intelligence that souls acquire through experience. The lifestreams on Earth were made homeless by their destruction of their home planet, Maldek – now the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. 'Mother Earth' took pity on the lowly lifestreams and provided them with a home. Here, again, it is possible to discern the spatial reckoning of cataclysm and salvation as described by Barasch. The apocalyptic spatiality that he describes is reiterated in a new, cosmic setting. Like Raëlians, Aetherians are unthreatened by scientific advances seeing them as confirmation of prior revelations:

> [W]e welcome such discoveries. We have been told that if we are to really advance in such discoveries, more than we have done to date, we have to change our motives and become more spiritual. [...] Discoveries outside of this planet are important but what is more important is to put right conditions on this planet.[24]

Intrusive Aliens

On their own terms, the beliefs of Raëlism and Aetherianism render space knowable, acting as a bridge between human perception and cosmic truth; the spiritualization of space is a projection of human narratives onto the inhuman. Alien NRMs reflect a changing relationship with space. Where heaven was a distant endpoint, sacred space is proximate, dynamic and prone to intersect with terrestrial experiences. Following Auguste Comte, Durkheim provided a useful framework for understanding religion as the deification of society by its subjects; from this understanding it can be suggested that as the extent of the social comes to incorporate the cosmos we deify and worship our own capacity to inhabit and to 'know' space.

For Jodi Dean, UFO abduction narratives hold a similar effect; whilst not disputing the perceived reality that the abduction events have for the abductees, Dean delineates the source of the fascination that the abduction narrative has within wider culture. She describes a

[23] Ayub Malik, Aetherius Organizer, in an email to the author, 16 July 2014
[24] Malik, email to the author

particular modern sense of diminished agency and an unrepresentative politics in which power is always outside of the body politic but always operative within it.[25] The abductee thus encapsulates this feeling of powerlessness. They are taken against their will, manipulated, experimented upon, vital fluids extracted, alien objects inserted. Their bodies and minds are familiar and yet not wholly their own. She writes,

> In abduction, the alien takes away our agency, and the sense of security and certainty upon which our agency was predicated. This theft of agency is manifest not just in the power of the alien to paralyze us and abduct us at will, but also in its technological superiority.[26]

In Dean, alien abduction narratives encapsulate the anxiety of an age in which agency and the boundaries between once accepted norms of belief, self, identity are under continuous assessment and negotiation. Further to this, not only does alien abduction spatially dislocate us and rob us of our capacity to be self-determining but it also intervenes in and reformulates our bodies. For Dean, the consistency we invest in our place in the world is undermined as is the blueprint of our identity; our sense of belonging in what were 'our' exterior and interior worlds is no longer guaranteed. Barbara Brown makes a similar point. Her concerns are similar to Dean's and she recounts the symbolic qualities of Betty and Barney Hills' archetypal abduction experience.[27] In 1963, whilst under hypnosis, the Hills 'recovered' memories of being abducted by aliens two years earlier. During their time on the alien craft the Hills claim to have been made the subjects of medical experimentation with Betty recounting having a range of samples taken and the insertion of a large needle into her naval and Barney being anally probed and his semen being extracted.[28] Brown interprets the Hills' experience in a similar way to Dean's treatment of alien abductions in general: she sees the abduction and examinations as a powerful articulation of the limited nature of agency in late modernity.[29] Brown explicitly links the emergence of alien abduction narratives to advances

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[25] Jodi Dean, *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outerspace to Cyberspace.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998)
[26] Dean, *Aliens in America*, 174
[27] Bridget Brown, ""My Body Is Not My Own": Alien Abduction and the Struggle for Self-Control," in *Conspiracy Nation: The politics of paranoia in postwar America*, ed. Peter Knight, 107-129, (New York: New York University Press, 2002)
[28] John G.Fuller, *The Interrupted Journey: Two Lost Hours "Aboard a Flying Saucer",* (New York: The Dial Press, 1966)
[29] Bridget Brown, ""My Body Is Not My Own": Alien Abduction and the Struggle for Self-Control"

in medical technologies, particularly technologies of reproduction. She describes, “The collective anxiety expressed by these abductees about the encroachment of technology into “natural” human functions;” an encroachment which is simultaneously, “alienating and awesome,” but which reveals the disconnectedness of medical subjects from the processes enacted upon them, sharing with abductees a subjectivity characterized by feelings of being “confused and powerless non-experts.”[30] The spatiality of abduction is vertical but unstructured: the trajectory is the same but the journey here has little of the willed coherence of Gagarin’s and also fails to contain any salvific promise. Instead it offers lost memories, a loss of autonomy and a sense of diminished agency in light of an overwhelming and distant power.

The role of conspiracy theory

The loss of agency that alien abduction is treated as a cypher for is also a theme in academic treatments of conspiracy theory. Fredric Jameson, for example, suggests that conspiracy theories mark a populist mapping out of the experiences of powerlessness and a desire to confront and comprehend the totality of a global system that is otherwise impossible to understand.[31] In the face of the complexity of an ever-expanding global capitalism, Jameson argues, there is little by way of a popularly available critical stance or culturally common systems of representation that are able to render current global realities meaningful. Jameson suggests that it is only in war and colossal natural disasters that we are able to consider our globality; all other representative systems are otherwise geared to the national-local. Jameson suggests in *Postmodernism* that our systems of representation have broken down and the very possibility of referentiality has become undermined.[32]

Conspiracy theory is therefore, crucially, an attempt at representing the ‘total logic of late capital,' where no other means are available. This situates conspiracy as a narrative – a representational mode – essentially a story, by means of which the excess of signifiers which proliferate in postmodernity can be tied to a small and manageable number of signifieds. So it

[30] Bridget Brown, “”My Body Is Not My Own”: Alien Abduction and the Struggle for Self-Control,” 116

[31] Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, 347-360, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988)

[32] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,* (London: Verso, 1991)

is, then, that for Jameson accounts which narrativize and provide coherency to an otherwise incomprehensible situation provide the opportunity for meaning regardless of how limited and apparently irrational that meaning may be. The seven feet tall shapeshifting lizards of David Icke's cosmic conspiracy are easier to grasp than the intangible, overwhelming and evershifting movement of global capital. In other words conspiracy forces all complexities and contradictions to resolve themselves within the hermeneutic framework established by the terms of the conspiracists' narratives. In this sense we can understand the usefulness which Jameson saw in the figure of 'mapping' as the conspiracists draw a map of the conditions of life in postmodernity. In Jameson's understanding this is not the universal agency loss found in Dean and Brown but particular and class-based: "Conspiracy is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system,"[33] (Jameson 1988, 356). Degraded it may be but despite this and in spite of the total system of alienating domination, Jameson still recognises a utopian impulse in conspiracy. Mark Fenster confirms Jameson's approach and recognises the political structuration of the conspiracy narrative's organisation of a totalised and fully integrated economic, cultural, social, political totality.[34] Because of the importance that conspiracy theorists allot to revealing to the alienated 'sheeple' the conspiracy orchestrating this totality, there is a claim to agency, of the reinsertion of the individual subject into history:

> [I]n its attempt to reveal a hidden truth that challenges the alienated social conceptualized within classical liberal thought, the conspiracy represents a utopian desire to reflect upon and confront the contradictions and conflicts of the contemporary democratic state and capitalism.[35] (Fenster 2008, 128)

Conspiracy betokens a lack of understanding and a naïve utopian impulse in Jameson's reading, however, here Fenster extends this to consider conspiracy as an enabler of agency. Just as in Dean's assessment of alien abductions, Fenster draws out the crucial element of narrative building that conspiracy theory provides whilst also being cognizant of its capacity to insert the conspiracy theorist as an active agent of resistance, at least within the terms set out by the conspiracy theorist. Fran Mason counters Jameson's take on conspiracy theory by

[33] Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," 356
[34] Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*, 2nd edition, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008)
[35] Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories*, 128

suggesting that there is considerable room to doubt the plausibility of a means of accurately representing the postmodern: to accurately produce a cognitive map, the Jamesonian subject must be able to escape the impoverished position that produces the conspiracy theory.[36] Essentially, Mason asks, if the totality of the conspiracy is a product of the working of the political unconscious, a projection of the felt but unrepresentable inter-relatedness of globalised postmodernity, then to what extent can an enriched, whole, cognitive map be produced? Mason's depiction of conspiracy is clearly concerned with the same questions of agency as Jameson, Fenster, Dean and Brown but where they describe a crisis she suggests that conspiracy typifies an increasingly normative position:

> The conspiratorial subject represents a postmodern self incapable of critical distance, the result of which is a self-reflexive subjectivity that is itself a reproduction of postmodern culture. […] Conspiratorial subjectivity is a paradigm of a scattered postmodern and global subjectivity.[37]

Paradigmatic of an epoch characterised by shifting boundaries, inequitable balances of power and subjectivities that are simultaneously radically expanded but which experience a diminishment of agency, conspiracy theory is, for Mason, a narrative form that exemplifies a discursive tendency away from traditional markers of subjectivity. We might consider here the literary theorist Raymond Williams' observations on 'structures of feeling': patterns of textual activity – tropes, figures, genres – that signal protean responses to shifts in patterns of social experience; in other words, they delimit emerging social forms that are yet to coalesce into more formal and overt structures.[38] So, where Mason describes the narrativization of an emergent social, cultural and political paradigm, it is possible to consider this in the form suggested by Williams.

From conspiracy theory to conspirituality

[36] Fran Mason, "'A Poor Person's Cognitive Mapping'", in *Conspiracy Nation: The Politics of Paranoia in Postwar America*, ed. Peter Knight, 40-56 (New York: New York University Press: 2002)
[37] Fran Mason, "'A Poor Person's Cognitive Mapping'", 54
[38] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford: OUP 1977)

The context of post-Gagarin religiosity described above provides a useful starting point for understanding the paradigmatic uncertainty – future shocked and culture lagged – of recent conspiracy theories. The interweaving of narratives concerned with bodies, limits, science, domination, loss of representation, political cynicism, hidden elites, secret knowledge, concealed technologies, alien agendas and a crisis of subjectivity and agency are the tropes and 'semantic figures' that characterize the conspiratorial milieu but they are also present in an increasing number of emergent spiritualities. Ward and Voas have characterised this convergence of conspiracy theory and spirituality as 'conspirituality'.[39] (Ward and Voas 2011).

Conspirituality is a fitting descriptor of the spiritualised post-2002 online communities that Ward and Voas describe. The defining characteristics reflect the two discursive tendencies: from conspiracy theory comes a belief in a malevolent "shadow government" that manipulates mass populations for hidden, and frequently apocalyptic, ends; and from new age spirituality is the belief that personal transformation has the capacity to transform the world and a critical mass of transformed individuals have the collective power to overcome the negativity of the evil machinations of the shadow government.[40] In this context they refer to the centrality of the idea of 'paradigm shift' in the rhetoric of conspirituality and the behaviors and values that typify it:

> We [Ward and Voas] argue that conspirituality is a politico-spiritual philosophy based on two core convictions, the first traditional to conspiracy theory, the second rooted in the New Age:
>
> (1) A secret group covertly controls, or is trying to control, the political and social order (Fenster).
>
> (2) Humanity is undergoing a 'paradigm shift' in consciousness, or awareness, so solutions to (1) lie in acting in accordance with an awakened 'new paradigm' worldview.[41]

[39] Charlotte Ward and David Voas, "The Emergence of Conspirituality," *Journal of Contemporary Religion,* 26 no.1 (2011): 103-121

[40] Ward and Voas, "The Emergence of Conspirituality"

[41] Ward and Voas, "The Emergence of Conspirituality," 104

Again, Williams' figure of a structure of feeling is fitting here and the repeated refrain of a new paradigm, or structure of experience, underlines the purposive attempt to reimagine social relations in a way that reinserts the subject into history with purpose and the agency to realise that purpose. Moreover, in the context under discussion here – emergent post-Gagarin UFO NRMs – these two "core convictions" are consistent elements in conspiritual beliefs that incorporate alien lifeforms and alien worlds. Ward and Voas are attendant to the inchoate and nebulous variety of standpoints incorporated in conspirituality. The groups being described here as 'post-Garagarin NRMs' are diverse and their beliefs are contradictory but those beliefs share certain key themes; not least amongst those themes is an attempt to provide a space from which a technologically-informed spirituality can confront the complexities of being human in an age of space travel. In so doing they produce an aggregate of exploratory statements, that attempt to re-orient humanity in a spaceward direction. It is an aggregation of fear and hope and, markedly, an attempt to reconcile a sense of a discontinuous narrative in which the boundaries of 'the human' are undermined. In other contexts, Donna Haraway delineated a similarly fatal trajectory for 'the human': "It is certainly true that postmodernist strategies, like my cyborg myth, subvert myriad organic wholes. In short, the certainty of what counts as nature is undermined, probably fatally."[42] The certainty of what constitutes the human – and religious – subject is the basis of the continual reflexive assessment and reappraisal; a reappraisal that continually vacillates between the natural and the technological, the Earthbound and the space-age. Again, the twin poles of the salvific and cataclysmic are replicated in these oppositions. Lee Quinby recognises this bifurcation and the liberatory heart of this dialectic - it is the Utopian impulse discerned by Jameson, Brown and Mason, Barasch's upward apocalyptic trajectory:

> Whether salvific or catastrophic, apocalyptic rhetoric about technology is exhilarating and persuasive because it triggers deeply entrenched desires for the millennialist dream: transcendence of human limitations.[43]

The conspiritualist desire for spiritual transformation encapsulates the exhilarating transcendence amidst a fear of the future as described by Quinby. At once the cultural lag and

[42] Donna J. Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, (London: Routledge 1991), 152-3

[43] Lee Quinby, *Millennial Seduction: A Skeptic Confronts Apocalyptic Culture.* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press: 1999), 127

future shock described by Pop is incorporated into a meaningful narrative[44] (Pop, 2011) and it is this narrativization of an unmapped social territory that locates conspirituality in the politicised sphere described by Jameson, Fenster, Mason and Brown.

The Galactic Conspiracy

Typical of this second wave of conspiritualism is Laura Magdalene Eisenhower. Much like, say, David Icke, she speaks at public events within the cultic milieu whilst also giving solo lectures across much of the English speaking world. Her website describes her as an

> Intuitive Astrologist, Global Alchemist, Cosmic Mythologist and is the great-granddaughter of Dwight David Eisenhower. She is on a profound mission to reveal our true origins connected with the 'Magdalene' and 'Gaia-Sophia' energies of love and wisdom and works to liberate us from the Military Industrial Complex, the Archonic systems and false power structures.[45]

She is emblematic of this spiritualized, spaceward looking conspiracy theory in which Barasch's vertical movement is simultaneously upward (Salvation), outward (of the world) but down (cataclysmic) and inward (the spiritual domain of self-transformation). Whilst sharing the interior quest for enlightenment with earlier New Age inflected UFO NRMs such as the Aetherians, what was a quest to ascend the hidden dimensions of being becomes here a battle for survival and self-determination against the totalizing and dehumanizing efforts of machinic aliens and to define and characterize enchanted space whilst saving the Earth. The relocation of this conflict away from the material to the spiritual represents a shifting terrain of agency confirming Eisenhower's narrative as conspiritual rather than straightforwardly conspiratorial. Typical of the epistemic nebulosity identified by Ward and Voas, Eisenhower is highly syncretic in the elements from which she combines her belief system. Illustrative is the following conceptually-loaded paragraph from an autobiographical position statement

[44] Pop, "Space Exploration and Folk Beliefs on Climate Change"

[45] Laura Magdalene Eisenhower, 'About,' Cosmic Gaia: Into the world soul, last modified 5 February 2015. http://www.cosmicgaiasophia.com/about.html

entitled, ‘2012 and the Ancient Game: Venus–Sophia and Recruitment to Mars’.[46] Here alone she refers to:

> Post-Gagarin readings of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic scriptures; feminist spirituality; ecologically aligned spirituality; millennialism; conspiracy by a global elite; the current and ongoing colonization of Mars; multi-dimensional being; “global transformation”; secret technologies; psychic readings; 2012 as a, “shift date”; a shared human destiny as, “galactic voyagers,” in touch with currently hidden potential; “the false-matrix”; stargates; Goddess archetypes “Hathor, Isis, Inanna, Kali, Persephone, Magdalene, Guinevere, Morgaine, Ariadne”; alien abduction; predestination; the secret colonization of Mars; Templars; hybrid alien-human lifeforms; the Anunnaki and the planet Niburu.

This list is indicative rather than exhaustive. The battlegrounds and symbolic structures are multiple and complex but the “negative agenda” she alludes to as the enemy of awareness and human fulfilment is repeatedly characterised as patriarchal, aligned with the Archonic entities, and responsible for the destruction of the environment and a forced colonization of Mars. The destruction of the Earth is a planned event designed to eradicate the creativity and female oriented energies of the divine feminine. The incorporation of a feminist agenda here is novel but not original (one might think of Zsuzsanna Budapest’s Dianic Wicca or Starhawk’s ecological feminist paganism) but the threatening space technologies conform to post-Gagarin UFO conspirituality.

Again, attention is focused on the threat and danger of technologically enabled journeys along the ‘celestial path’ whilst the redemptive possibility of spiritual transcendence is offered as a counter-measure. These spiritualities seem to revolve around science and technology but are never quite able to escape their orbit. Writing about Heaven’s Gate in *Prophets and Protons: New Religious Movements and Science in Late Twentieth-Century America*, Benjamin Zeller draws attention to the central role that technology played in their development.[47] He finds in Heaven’s Gate a tendency common to UFO religions – for the

[46] Laura M.Eisenhower, ‘2012 and the Ancient Game: Venus−Sophia and Recruitment to Mars,’ Cosmic Gaia: restoring the balance between humanity and nature, last modified 6 September 2014. https://sites.google.com/site/lauramagdalene/home/2012-and-the-ancient-game

[47] Benjamin E. Zeller, *Prophets and Protons: New Religious Movements and Science in Late Twentieth-Century America*, (New York and London: New York University Press, 2010)

groups to characterize their beliefs as either non-religious or to see themselves as being a new stage in the development of human thought that transcends what is for them the false dichotomy between science and religion. What is of relevance here is the emergence of religious expressions that not only look beyond the Earth but which also have a strongly materialist orientation – those that would seek to place science and religion on the same continuum. I argue that it is here, in the commingling of religious and secular thought primarily focused on transformation of humanity in the context of an enchanted and populous cosmos, that the potential for these religions to overlap with conspiracy theory becomes most profoundly fecund. The post-Gagarin religions become embroiled with the conspiratorial elements of the cultic milieu at the point at which there is the attempt to construct an account of reality that can – within the terms stipulated by the beliefs themselves – be tested as opposed to being a question of faith. Certainly, this changes the terms of the debate around any such religion's veracity; where they are disproven by science the response is that the failure to detect, say, the presence of alternate levels of existence on planets within the solar system is a limitation of our current equipment, as the Aetherians would have it. Or, more pertinently, in the case of Laura Eisenhower it can be suggested that evidence of the planned evacuation of Earth by the 'Global Elite' is being suppressed and that its revelation would amount to eschatological fulfilment – the whole syncretic melange of beliefs would be confirmed by this affirmation of this keystone. Thus the status of knowledge has become a vital part of the conspiratualist world picture. Rather than science being an opposing form of knowledge it can be an ally that is waiting to fully realize its potential. It is in this contestation over objective reality that situates the UFO religions within a shared discursive space with conspiracy theorists. To borrow from Barkun's schema, the UFO religions derive their discursive status in relation to, and tandem with, other forms of stigmatized knowledge, namely suppressed knowledge and rejected knowledge (Barkun 2006).[48] Indeed, Barkun uses examples of UFO conspiracy theories to illustrate these two sub-categories. The more organised and structured UFO religions provide narratives that are sufficiently internally consistent for them to eschew external sources for further support or proof (Rael, for instance, dismisses other claims of human-alien contact: "there is [sic] no other Messengers and any group claiming such things are just imposters."[49] In contrast, highly syncretic emergent religious forms which lack the structured beliefs that foundational texts provide will often

[48] Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 2nd Edition, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)
[49] Raël, Facebook message to the author

align themselves with well-established truth-claims from within the conspiratorial milieu. For both structured and unstructured UFO religions the stakes are the same: the stigmatization of their epistemic foundations calls into question their belief system as a whole.

Conclusion

Nonetheless, the treatment of this stigmatized knowledge is not consistently the ridicule and rejection that Barkun's position would suggest. Recent coverage of both Laura Eisenhower and the Raelian movement has been largely sympathetic. Both have been covered by news outlets: *The Examiner* (US, Eisenhower) and *The Daily Mail* (UK, Raelians). Neither are looked to as mainstream, news sources but both tend toward a normative, culturally conservative line, so it is perhaps surprising that they both show little hostility toward Eisenhower and the Raelians. *The Daily Mail* ran a predictably sensationalist headline ("We're creating an embassy to welcome the Elohim back to Earth!' Inside the wacky world of the Raëlians - a cult who think humans are descended from ALIENS") but provided a relatively open platform to Glenn Carter, head of UK Raëlian operations.[50] *The Daily Mail* has since drawn on Raëlian spokespeople to comment on stories reporting purported UFO sightings.[51] *The Examiner* was even more sympathetic to Laura Eisenhower and ran a story titled, 'Whistleblower Laura Magdalene Eisenhower, Ike's great-granddaughter, outs secret Mars colony project' which interviewed Eisenhower and provided links to recorded web radio broadcasts and her webpages.[52] Although of little consequence in the wider public sphere these stories show a greater tolerance for UFO spiritualities within the cultural mainstream than might be otherwise expected. The mass media is here not generative of stigma in the way that Barkun suggests. Whilst the publications do not embrace Eisenhower's position, nor that of the Raëlians, they are provided space amidst celebrity gossip and reactionary editorials. They are presented as part of the fabric of current cultural expression

[50] Ruth Styles, "'We're creating an embassy to welcome the Elohim back to Earth!'," *The Daily Mail*, 9 May 2014. http://dailym.ai/2deGwlU

[51] For instance, see Keiligh Baker, "What is this mysterious purple disc flying over Peru? TV host interrupts interview so cameras can focus on 'UFO' hovering over city," *The Daily Mail*, 25 February 2015. http://dailym.ai/2dM80mI

[52] Alfred Lambremont Webre, "Whistleblower Laura Magdalene Eisenhower, Ike's great-granddaughter, outs secret Mars colony project," *The Examiner*, 10 February 2010. http://bit.ly/2e01wkT

and so it is argued here that this is because of the inherent tendency for new semantic figures – be they evidenced or fantasy – to convey the protean fears and hopes of an age: typifying Williams' structures of feeling and Jameson's impoverished cognitive maps. UFO centred conspiritualities are part of a discursive field that incorporates the New Age and its antecedents, Gagarin and conspiracy theories; indeed, UFO conspiritualities are vital to providing the shade and nuance through which perceptions of the impact on human subjects and agency by our first, faltering steps along the celestial path can be explored and integrated into a hesitant culture overwhelmed by the cosmic scale of our emergent space age subjectivities. Certainly, these perspectives described are not general or mainstream. These are minority beliefs. The following table shows web traffic to the homepages of Laura Eisenhower, the Aetherius Society and the Raëlian Movement. Superficially, the 83,000 visitors to the Aetherius represent a considerable number of visitors but, by the same measures, the most popular religious websites reveal these to be relatively low visitor numbers with the visitors staying for less time and viewing fewer pages.[53]

	Visits per month (September 2016)	Length of visit	Pages viewed	Origin of visitors
Cosmic Gaia (Eisenhower)	3900	1:57	1.54	US (35%), New Zealand (23%) Canada (17%) +7
Aetherius Society	83200	1:14	1.58	US (49%), UK (9%), India (7%) +36
Rael	46700	1:47	2.38	France (13%), US (11%), Turkey (9%) +35

By comparison, the most frequently visited religious websites, the official Jehovah's Witnesses website, received 73.9 million monthly visitors in the same period with visitors looking at, on average, six pages for just over a seven minutes. Other popular religious websites reporting similar figures. Not only do the cosmic NRMs not attract comparable numbers but they do not achieve the same level of engagement. Nonetheless, these groups represent an emerging tendency within Western religious life. They also demonstrate a notable resilience. The Aetherius Society is unusual among NRMs for surviving, and thriving, following it's the death of its founder, George King. Laura Magdalene Eisenhower's number of web visitors is notably lower than the more established, institutionally grounded

[53] Although crude, these web statistics allow a comparison of figures gained through a consistent (if undisclosed) methodology. Webstats gained from <https://www.similarweb.com> on 14th October, 2016.

religious movements but she has been discussed as an exemplar of the multitudinous ‘light workers’ who incorporate conspiritual motifs in their practice and public statements. Her exposure in the mainstream news media in addition to her familial status in the US makes Eisenhower notable but her beliefs are not unusual within the milieu in which she operates. A list of comparable figures might include (but should not be limited to) Steve and Barbara Rother, Ivo A. Benda/Universe People, Ascension Research Center, Church of the Cosmos, Sandy Stevenson, Cameron Day, Greg Prescott and the in5D media initiative. The examples discussed in this articles exemplify an aggregated inclination toward a cosmically-informed spiritual outlook. The key point is that whilst this article does not purport to identify a general trend within human religious thought and recognizes the limited spread of the ‘cosmic NRMs’ it is intended to demonstrate that the space age has effected change within human religious thought. It must be acknowledged, then, that this phenomenon is marginal but this is a change that is sufficiently resonant with current sensibilities to attract believers around the world and wider coverage in the mass media.

Appendix F. (Wilson 2017b) 'The Bitter End: Apocalypse and conspiracy in white nationalist responses to the ISIL Paris Attacks'. *Patterns of Prejudice* 51(5), 412-431.

The Bitter End: Apocalypse and conspiracy in white nationalist responses to Islamic State terrorism

Andrew Fergus Wilson

Abstract

This paper will examine how apocalyptic thinking converges with the use of conspiracy theory in white nationalist worldviews at a time of crisis. Apocalyptic thinking is, typically, a religious response to secular threats to the faith community prophesising, or attendant on, 'the End'; these millenarian outlooks provide communities in crisis a promise of confirmation of the object of their faith, the vanquishing of enemies, and, crucially, continuity for the community in a better world to come. In the latter half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first, apocalypticism and conspiracy theory have tended to coincide. The tendency toward a binary distinction between terms of absolute good and absolute evil and the revelation of secrets relating to human destiny through prophesy or 'truth-seeking' provide a broad transposability between the two interpretative strategies. An increasing amalgamation of political paranoia and eschatology have given rise to what has been termed 'conspirituality'. Much recent white nationalist rhetoric can be understood to be produced from this discursive position and this analysis will demonstrate how one white nationalist we community drew on conspiratorial apocalypticism in its response to the multiple IS attacks in Paris on 13-14th November 2015.

Keywords: Racism, conspiracy theory, millenarianism, apocalypse, Islamic State, anti-semitism

Introduction

The apocalyptic is a milieu informed and shaped by a teleological understanding of human societies: all things will pass. In rare instances (some deep ecology) the non-human is positioned at the heart of the 'end' but, primarily, the concern expressed is one with the end of human history, or, in certain instances, a section of humanity. What constitutes the end is moot but, with few, again largely ecological, exceptions, the source of events is generally extrinsic and prophesised from within a community of believers. With the exception of secular accounts of environmental or cosmological disaster (global warming, asteroid impact) a small proportion of humanity will typically survive; these are invariably cast as fulfilling the principles, characteristics or zeal of the community from which prophecy emerges. This survival, in most cases, provides the surviving remnant of humanity a new chance of creating a society reflecting the values of the chosen community or, more usually, a prophesised paradise on Earth. This general structure of apocalyptic prophecy is fluid and adaptive, drawn upon primarily, but not exclusively, by religious communities. Importantly, though, it is crucial here to retain the idea that apocalypticism is not the preserve of religious thought, so, for instance, there is a literature that points to the millenarian structures of Marxist teleology[1] (Hall 2009; Zimdars-Swartz & Zimdars-Swartz 2000; Baumgartner 1999). As this paper will seek to show, the apocalyptic outlook of current white nationalist thinking demonstrates the potential threat implicit in the seriousness with which the extreme far right consider their position. Here, then, the religious and political potential within apocalyptic thinking will be shown to merge and amplify the potency of each position.

The following identifies trends within the messages posted to the white nationalist web forum *Stormfront* in the wake of the Islamic State (IS) attacks on Paris during the night of 13th November and early morning of 14th November 2015 and frames an analysis of the messages in millenarian terms. The November attacks were the culmination of a wave of IS violence in France during 2015 that began with a fatal attack on the offices of satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January. On the evening of November 13, three groups of terrorists launched a series of attacks on public spaces in Paris including a football match between France and Germany at the Stade de Paris, a music concert at the Bataclan, and streets known for their nightlife. 130 victims were killed and over 350 injured with the majority of deaths coming at

[1] Fredric J. Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1999); John R. Hall, *Apocalypse: From Antiquity to the Empire of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009); Sandra L. Zimdars-Swartz and Paul F. Zimdars-Swartz, "Apocalypticism in Modern Western Europe," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism, Volume 3: Apocalypticism in the Modern Period and the Contemporary Age*, ed. S.J. Stein (London: Continuum, 2000), 265–92.

an Eagles of Death Metal concert during a siege and mass shooting of the assembled crowd. The IS statement claiming responsibility for the attacks was clear in its framing of the attack as part of an ongoing attack on secular, 'Western values'. It described Paris as the, "capital of prostitution and obscenity," and the French and German football teams as representing, "Crusader," countries.[2] In doing so it revealed a dichotomous staging of religious values and cultural exclusivity that depends upon the same binary logic of identity drawn upon within white nationalism. This reductionist view of identity was evident in the responses to the attack by white nationalists.

Stormfront was chosen as it provided an opportunity to observe a community responding to a period of crisis in which culture and race (intrinsically, in racist discourse) are used as the loci through which the community mobilise their shared identification as a defence against a perceived external threat. It is in moments such as these that politically paranoid groups are at the greatest likelihood to perceive the immanence of 'their' apocalypse and so they are most likely to be most rigorous in determining the boundaries of their identity. Given the inchoate nature of an international community of 'nationalists' negotiating a shared understanding of 'whiteness' it is in this perceived time of crisis in which, for them, 'the end' is coming soon that we are most immediately able to map the current dominant forms of belligerent nationalism and the cultural worlds they operate within.

Social Context and the End of the World

It is common to much of the literature on apocalyptica that the social context of prophecies of 'the end' is a primary influence on the formation of an apocalyptic outlook. So, for instance, the seminal Norman Cohn, in *The Pursuit of the Millennium* (1970) suggested that the Jewish and Christian apocalyptica served a social function, '[A]ll these prophecies were devices by which religious groups, at first, Jewish and then Christian, consoled, fortified and asserted themselves when confronted by the threat or reality of oppression.'[3] He identifies Daniel's dream in the Book of Daniel (c.165 B.C.) as 'the earliest apocalypse,'[4] (*Ibid*, 20). For Cohn, it was composed in response to a time of oppression and strife for the Jews of Palestine

[2] Rukmini Callimachi, 'ISIS Claims Responsibility, Calling Paris Attacks 'First of the Storm", *New York Times*, 14 November, 2015
[3] Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 19.
[4] *Ibid*, 20

following the attempted outlawing of Judaism during the Seleucid takeover of Palestine (175-163BC) and offered the oppressed community a promise of hope in the form of divinely ordained improved circumstances. Nonetheless, Daniel's vision is not straightforwardly of a life paradisiacal but instead only offers paradise following a period of intense and violent strife in which a 'false prince of peace' brings suffering for the powerful and to the faithful whilst revelling in his own pride:

> 23. And in the latter time of their kingdom, when their transgressors are come to the full, a king of fierce countenance, and understanding dark sentences, shall stand up.
> 24. And his power shall be mighty, but not by his own power: and he shall destroy wonderfully, and shall prosper, and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people.
> 25. And through his policy also he shall cause craft to prosper in his hand; and he shall magnify *himself* in his heart, and by peace shall destroy many: he shall also stand up against the Prince of princes; but he shall be broken without hand.
> Daniel 8:23-25 (*KJV*)

Despite allowing his pride to set himself against God, the false Prince's death is preordained; the historical context would suggest, then, that the Jews who kept their faith and resisted the Hellenization of Palestine under Antiochus IV Epiphanes will see their oppressor struck down by the will of their God. And so, in the primary Apocalypse the cast is set: after a time of suffering, the chosen people will be freed from their suffering. Following the book of Daniel, the Tanakh/Old Testament of the Christian Bible incorporates a number of other apocalyptic prophecies. At times of persecution or of worldly challenges to the faith there is, typically, an apocalyptic prophecy promising the return of a vengeful form of God who saves or assures the continuation of the people of the faith. These themes can be found in Isaiah, Ezekiel (in which we find the Gog and Magog of Revelation 38-39) and Zechariah. In *The Method and Message of the Jewish Apocalyptic* (1964), D.S. Russell points to passages in Ezekiel that refer to earlier OT texts and demonstrates, although not in these terms, the intertextual borrowings of the Jewish apocalyptic traditions[5].

[5] See, for instance, David Syme Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 190–195.

If we are to follow Russell, the apocalyptic, before the time of Christ, was developing into a resource of ideas, motifs and promises that were drawn upon and recontextualised according to the demands of the moment. Russell is clear on this point and argues for a well-established apocalyptic tradition before the time of Christ,

> The apocalyptic books constitute a record of [the inter-testamental] years, not in terms of historical event, but in terms of the response of faith which the nation was called to make. They cannot be understood apart from the religious, political, and economic circumstances of the times, nor can the times themselves be understood apart from these books whose hopes and fears echo and re-echo the faith of God's chosen people.[6]

Although certainly the products of an imaginary archive of hope, what is crucial here is the idea of the apocalyptic as a response to worldly conditions; prophets should not be considered as the bearers of a sanctified pathology but as faithful representatives of a community of believers seeking the means to galvanise or renew their communities. The rich symbology of the early Jewish apocalyptica did not fade away with the rise of Christianity, far from it.

As will be discussed, the Jewish prophetic canon is still used today as a prophecy resource but was also a key informant of the structure and content of early Christian apocalyptic prophecy. The influence of Jewish apocalyptica is evident throughout the Revelation of St. John. Again, from Russell, '[F]amiliar features of Jewish apocalyptic are evident throughout the whole book – fantastic imagery, symbolic language, angelic powers of evil, the resurrection, the judgment, the messianic kingdom, the world to come.'[7] Despite the flamboyance of the language and the dramatic imagery the tendency is to interpret it as being primarily of its age and this tendency in academic responses has been in evidence for some time, as this following observation from Martin Kiddle's (1949) *The Revelation of St John* is testament to,

> John has baffled his later commentators, it seems, much more than his original readers. Of one thing we may be quite certain; John had not the slightest intention of including in his book curious apocalyptic material with no bearing on the central problem of contemporary affairs. His first and last concern was with the churches;

[6] *Ibid*, 16
[7] Ibid, 35

> Revelation was a life and death message to the faithful [...] John was writing to those about to die for their faith.[8] (Kiddle 1949, 193)

Since its (disputed) composition by John of Patmos during the mid-90s CE, *Revelation* has been the object of a ceaseless proliferation of interpretations and applications. In almost every instance, the unifying tendency has been to see the unfolding of the prophecy as immanent and real. Similarly, in addition to speaking to a community suffering a crisis during a time of persecution, Baumgartner emphasises the role of John's *Revelation* as an evangelical tool, calling upon the faithful to be steadfast in their faith,

> The primary millennial work in Christianity, the Revelation of John of Patmos, also was a product of persecution in the form of exile, to which he refers in his introduction. Far from dampening millennial expectations as Paul sought to do, John was clearly intent on inflaming them.[9]

Eugen Weber describes Christianity's first couple of centuries as being rife with chiliastic movements full of fervour for Christ's return but points to the growing conservativism of the early Church as a foil to this fervour[10]. For Weber, it is Origen's 3rd Century intervention that diminishes the importance of *Revelation* in the canon with Origen painting the dangers of taking it literally as evidence of 'Jewish tendencies'. This diminished status has been long lasting but whilst the Church has reduced its apocalyptic tendencies for this – and other ecumenical reasons – *Revelation* has continued to be used by popular movements and a variety of sects and schisms from the violence of John of Leyden's Anabaptists in Münster to the Great Disappointment of the Millerites. More than this, though, it is not just *Revelation* that inspired Christian radicals but also the Jewish books of prophecy. As Wojcik points out many of these prophecies from the Jewish canon are still being cited today as descriptions of current or coming events[11]. For example, he points to 'prophecy believers [who] searched the bible for possible allusions to nuclear conflagration,'[12] and found evidence in *Zechariah* (14:12), *Malachi* (3:19) as well as New Testament sources. The search for signs of prophecy is not something that belongs to the past and has by no means been usurped by reason. More

[8] Martin Kiddle, *The Revelation of St. John* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1940), 193.
[9] Baumgartner, *Longing for the End: A History of Millennialism in Western Civilization*, 26.
[10] Eugen Weber, *Apocalypses: Prophecies, Cults and Millennial Beliefs throughout the Ages* (London: Hutchinson, 1999).
[11] Daniel Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997).
[12] Ibid, 33

recently than Wojcik's examples, Ed Kalnins, pastor of the Wasilla Assembly of God Church, cites conflict in the Middle East, America's dependence on foreign oil and the depletion of energy reserves as evidence that 'storm clouds are gathering'. He told *The Times* in 2008, 'Scripture specifically mentions oil instability as a sign of the Rapture. We're seeing more and more oil wars. The contractions of the fulfilment of prophecies are getting tighter and tighter.'[13] Kalnin's significance and a spur to his exposure in *The Times* is that his church congregation once included Sarah Palin, the 2008 vice-presidential candidate of the U.S. Republican party and current pro-Donald Trump political commentator.

The Politics of the Right and the Endtimes

The American political right wing has had a long-standing relationship with conservative Christianity. The indebtedness to the 'silent majority' of politically and theologically conservative Protestantism of the New Right project of the 1970s and 1980s is well documented and does not need rehearsing here. Instead, a few salient points regarding the nature of the congregations whose beliefs find representation the outlook of the Republican party should be noted. Kalnin's reference to 'the Rapture' is not figurative but reflects a Rapture readiness amongst US evangelical congregations. The majority of these are dispensational premillennialists – dispensationalism indicating a belief in history being composed of a series of dispensations, or tests, of the chosen people and premillennial referring to a belief in the physical return of Christ in advance of a thousand years of Christian dominion on Earth. Postmillennialism (Christ's Second Coming occurring following a thousand years of perfected living) had dominated for much of the early history of the US Postmillennialism but from roughly mid-nineteenth century onwards premillennialism has come to dominate U.S. Protestantism. A hermeneutic imperative drives much DP (Dispensationalist Premillennialism) and underpins the highly rationalized approach to Bible study undertaken by Dispensationalists. There is a consistently applied interpretation of the world as it unfolds around them guiding the outlook and lives of DPs. As has been stated, DP is based upon a literal reading of the Bible and, more particularly, a reading of *Revelation* which seeks to locate the events which will develop into the Seventh

[13] Alexi Mostrous, "Sarah Palin, the Pastor and the Prophecy: Judgment Day Is Not Far Away," *The Times*, September 10, 2008.

Dispensation in current History. Thus, world events are woven into the fabric of Biblical prophecy and 'signs of the End Times' are frequently perceived in the world around us.

Cohn warns against this commingling of apocalyptic prophecy and politics; indeed, he saw in the model of a society removed of all inner contradictions and 'agents of corruption,' a means by which the Utopian social violence of Lenin and Hitler could be understood[14]. And it is in the impression of an achievable fulfilment of prophecy that the promise of the apocalyptic is at its most potent and dangerous. This danger is evident in Dan Cohn-Sherbok's (2006) *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism*[15]. In this, he demonstrates the complex relationship between dispensational premillennialism and Judaism. For DP readings of prophecy to be fulfilled the Temple on the Mount must be rebuilt in Jerusalem. The site is currently occupied by the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock - both significant sites within Islam. The dispensational eschatological necessity thus has a profound and potentially dangerous political dimension. Cohn-Sherbrook notes the influential and powerful networks in which the Christian Zionist movement circulates,

> Christian Zionist organizations and the pro-Israel lobby are among the special interest groups whose concerns have converged since Bush was first elected president. These interest groups include the right wing of the Republican Party; neo-Conservatives; multinational construction firms; the petroleum industry and the arms industry; the pro-Israel lobby and think tanks; and fundamentalist Christian Zionists.[16]

Christian Zionism is not the only tendency within DP believers and it should be noted that not all are as prepared to immanentize the eschaton to the extent that Christian Zionism appears prepared to. Wojcik usefully points out that within dispensational Christianity there are arguments against direct intervention in worldly matters - and thus politics[17]. Part of the rationale is developed from a position of a deep distrust toward politics and statecraft. This distrust is due, in no small part, to Hal Lindsay's 1970 work of populist eschatology, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. In this, Lindsay interprets Biblical texts and draws from them the suggestion that an expanded European Economic Community – the forerunner to the EU – would, as a revived Roman Empire, be the grounds from which the Antichrist of *Revelation*

[14] Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium*.
[15] Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *The Politics of Apocalypse: The History and Influence of Christian Zionism* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2006).
[16] *Ibid*, 166
[17] Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America*.

would emerge. Notably, *The Late, Great Planet Earth* was a huge commercial and evangelical success; it was, according to the *New York Times*, the bestselling non-fiction book of the 1970s whilst inspiring a hugely successful industry in populist premillennial speculation[18] (Shuck 2004). Lindsay's powerful rhetoric and willingness to map Biblical prophecy revitalised the US evangelical movement and bred within it an interest in but distrust of political life. So, for instance, Wojcik points to the fatalism that spread within dispensationalism,

> [There is a] widespread dispensationalist belief that international peace efforts are the work of satanic forces, with organizations such as the European Community and the United Nations, as well as various governmental and church institutions, considered to be part of a worldwide, evil conspiracy. Human efforts to improve the world are considered not only useless but possibly satanic, and believers are freed from moral obligations to save it from annihilation because the world's problems and ultimate destruction are part of the divine plan.[19]

Here, in raising the spectre of an evil conspiracy guiding world events, it becomes evident that the populist apocalypticism of premillennial dispensationalism lends itself readily to the rhetoric of conspiracy theory. Each relies upon the figure of a vast, hidden network of 'evil': in DP it is the work of the Antichrist, in conspiracy it is invariably a secret cabal working toward (global) domination and the downfall of the community to whom the conspiracy theorists belong. The more typically political outlook of conspiracy might not, on the surface of things, appear to lend itself

Although Lindsey does not advocate political activism there is clearly a political dimension to his analysis, indeed, his support for the Reagan White House would seem to belie his apparent fatalism. Lindsay's influence in the White House during the Reagan presidency was extensive; his consultancy was hired to by the US Congress and the Pentagon whilst Lindsay was invited by Reagan to speak at the Pentagon[20] (New 2002). Whilst impatient believers in

[18] Glenn W. Shuck, *Marks of the Beast: The Left Behind Novels and the Struggle for Evangelical Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
[19] Wojcik, *The End of the World As We Know It: Faith, Fatalism, and Apocalypse in America*, 58.
[20] David S. New, *Holy War: The Rise of Militant Christian, Jewish and Islamic Fundamentalism* (Jefferson, NC & London: McFarland & Co., 2002).

the coming apocalypse may have seen their influence wane in US politics, they remain a significant proportion of the US population.

Apocalypse and Conspiracy

Mark Fenster notes the complex and contradictory position that Lindsey and other Christian conservatives take; it is constantly renegotiated as circumstances and fortunes change[21]. Satanic forces are ever ready in the world of DP but the extent to which the faithful engage with the world can change – as can the guise the Antichrist takes. So, after the fall of the Soviet Union, it could no longer take on the role of 'Gog' as it 'traditionally' has within the modern prophetic tradition. The fluidity of prophecy and the dualistic nature of the final reckoning mirrors the simplistic reflexive work done to reconfigure conspiracy theory as events overtake theory. Fenster suggests that Millennialism and conspiracy theory relying on a dualistic division of the world into 'good' and 'evil' establishes the portability of narratives from one milieu to another,

> One of the most important aspects of popular eschatology that works within many of the teachings and political views of conservative Christianity is the tendency to view historical and current events in terms of vast conspiracies led by knowing and unwitting agents of Satan. The tendency to divide reality into antitheses of good and evil, and to place such antitheses within a historical narrative that seeks to understand the natural through the supernatural, leads to a specific type of cognitive understanding and mapping that structures the interpretation and understanding of events.[22]

Clearly drawing on Jameson's description of conspiracy theory as, 'the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system,'[23]. In borrowing from Jameson, Fenster is making the case that millennialism draws upon an interpretative strategy which is

[21] Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture* (London & Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
[22] *Ibid*, 175-6
[23] Fredric Jameson, "Cognitive Mapping," in *Marxism and the Intrepetation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), 356.

not uncommon amongst dispossessed and threatened communities. And Jameson's observations on conspiracy theory are worth dwelling on: Here, conspiracy theory is an attempt at representing the 'total logic of late capital,' where no other means are available. This situates conspiracy as a narrative – a representational mode – essentially a story, by means of which the excess of signifiers that proliferate in postmodernity can be tied to a small and manageable number of signifieds. So it is, then, that for Jameson accounts which narrativize and provide coherency to an otherwise incomprehensible situation provide the opportunity for meaning regardless of how limited and apparently irrational that meaning may be. The forces of the Antichrist stirring in a federal Europe are easier to grasp than the intangible, overwhelming and evershifting movement of global capital. In other words, conspiracy forces all complexities and contradictions to resolve themselves within the hermeneutic framework established by the terms of the conspiracists' narratives. In this sense, we can understand the usefulness which Jameson saw in the figure of 'mapping' as the conspiracists draw a map of the conditions of life in postmodernity. These maps may be 'degraded' but despite this and in spite of the total system of alienating domination, Jameson still recognises a utopian impulse in conspiracy. To reiterate, Fenster confirms Jameson's approach and recognises the political structuration of the conspiracy narrative's organisation of a totalised and fully integrated economic, cultural, social, political totality. Because of the importance that conspiracy theorists allot to revealing to the alienated 'sheeple' the conspiracy orchestrating this totality, there is a claim to agency, of the reinsertion of the individual subject into history:

> [I]n its attempt to reveal a hidden truth that challenges the alienated social conceptualized within classical liberal thought, the conspiracy represents a utopian desire to reflect upon and confront the contradictions and conflicts of the contemporary democratic state and capitalism.[24]

Conspiracy betokens a lack of understanding and a naïve utopian impulse in Jameson's reading, however, here Fenster extends this to consider conspiracy as an enabler of agency or, at least, as a source of meaning. More than, though, Fenster identifies conspiracy theory as a means by which communities might reassert agency; there is something progressive about the way he describes it as demonstrative of the manner in which, 'religious, racial, ethnic, gender and sexual minorities and dominated groups must continually attempt to articulate their

[24] Fenster, *op cit*, 128

histories and versions of the historical process against the dominant, "consensus" history.'[25] The inclusiveness of the examples here point to a liberating role for conspiracy theory but it should be noted that conspiracy theories, whilst not exclusively stemming from reactionary sources, have tended to reflect conservative values; hence the appeal to the conservative Christianity of dispensational premillennialists. In his early study of conspiracy theory, 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics', Richard Hofstadter cast conspiracy as a style of political rhetoric characterised by a tendency to an exaggerated suspicion that unseen forces are secretly working against a particular group within society. He was careful to delineate between his use of the term 'paranoid' and its use as a pathology; in the following passage it is also clear that he sought to demonstrate the political paranoid style relied upon a sense of communal threat,

> [T]here is a vital difference between the paranoid spokesman in politics and the clinical paranoiac: although they both tend to be overheated, oversuspicious, overaggressive, grandiose, and apocalyptic in expression, the clinical paranoid sees the hostile and conspiratorial world as necessarily directed *against him*; whereas the spokesman of the paranoid style finds it directed against a nation, a culture and a way of life whose fate affects not himself alone but millions of others.[26]

In so doing, Hofstadter had identified a further path to the convergence of apocalyptic thought and conspiracy theory that has also been identified in the work of both Wojcik and Fenster. It is in this that the figure of the conspiracy theorist takes on a heroic cast and, in their position of 'heightened understanding', they position themselves at the heart of a vast historical struggle, 'The paranoid spokesman sees the fate of this conspiracy in apocalyptic terms--he traffics in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values. He is always manning the barricades of civilization.'[27] For Hofstadter, the conspiracist deals only in absolutes (good versus evil, survival versus destruction) so that defeat by the 'forces of evil' is also absolute and would mean the end for the conspiracist and his or her beleaguered 'nation'. Michael Barkun's (2003) more recent survey of conspiracy theory delineates a graduated typology of conspiracy[28]. Although all

[25] *Ibid*, 179
[26] Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 4.
[27] *Ibid*, 30
[28] Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, & London: University of California Press, 2003).

conspiracies share similar qualities Barkun is keen to make clear the differing forms of conspiracy theory; he identifies these as:

> *Event Conspiracies.* These are limited in scope and relate to a single event or a limited series of events with no general implications beyond those caused by the objective of the conspiracy. Barkun cites the Kennedy assassination and the plot to target African-Americans with the AIDS virus
>
> *Systematic conspiracies.* These are widespread conspiracies that have broader objectives than event conspiracies but are mobilised from within a single source: communists, Masons, Jews, the Catholic Church and so forth
>
> *Superconspiracies.* These are 'nested' global conspiracies that feature complex, multi-layered plots with conspiracies within conspiracies but ultimately controlled by a hidden group of evil conspirators.

This latter type has become increasingly pervasive over the past 30-40 years with an increasing complexity that seeks to contain the otherwise delimited plots of event and systematic conspiracies. The superconspiracy incorporates all other plots and fulfils the totalising resolution of contradictions that Jameson described. Barkun identifies in the fluidity and slippery exegetical elusiveness of superconspiracies a tendency toward *bricolage* that is also shared by what is, for him, an emerging form of millennialism: improvisational millennialism. A developed form of syncretism, improvisational millennialism draws disparate elements together into a contingent but holistic ordering of meaning within an apocalyptic framework. It transcends and incorporates the discrete worlds of religious and secular apocalypses. Barkun suggests that improvisational millennialism has emerged due to the simultaneous coincidence of two factors: (i) a wide range of resources in circulation from which the improvisations can be fashioned and (ii) weakened authoritative accounts of social, theological or scientific reality permitting the ready circulation of alternative explanations. In addition to a proliferation of other media, the internet has, in the absence of gatekeepers, permitted the sharing of extensive variations on what Barkun describes as 'stigmatized knowledge' and thus fulfilling this first criterion whilst no general system of knowledge is untroubled by challenges to its validity or ethics. It is in this space that competing millennialisms compete, each formation attracting, and sometimes sharing, its own audience. As stated, Barkun identifies the internet's ability to amplify the first condition but also, in the

ubiquity of 'information' offered through it, to also exacerbate the erosion of dependence of trust in what were previously held to be reliable sources; further, the capacity to disseminate information without prejudice similarly holds an allure for the 'truther' or the would-be prophet, 'one effect of the Internet is to obscure the distinction between mainstream and fringe sources, another is to bind together individuals who hold fringe views. The validation that comes from seeing one's beliefs echoed by others provides a sense of connection for otherwise isolated individuals.'[29] The first point is crucial to attracting new or potential converts and the second is crucial to the negotiation and maintenance of group and individual identities.

Apocalypse, Conspiracy and the Far Right

Barkun's study builds on these themes to explore the presence of anti-Semitism within UFO theory and cosmic apocalypticism. In this, he was delineating the field of conspiracy-informed spiritualities made up, in equal parts, of conspiracy theory, New Age UFOlogy, and improvisational millennialism that Charlotte Ward and David Voas would come to term, 'conspirituality'[30]. In the face of these outré bricolage beliefs, the imaginary of white nationalists might seem prosaic and dated. Barkun brackets nationalism in the archaic form of secular millennialism, seeing it as one of the,

> [I]slands of secular millennialism [that] appear in the resurgence of ethnic nationalism […] in the racist and xenophobic movements that are prominent in Western and Central Europe and, to a lesser extent, in North America […] they emerge in some antiglobalization rhetoric, with its implied nostalgia for a lost golden age of self-sufficient communities.[31]

Certainly, the nationalism of the far right can be considered in these terms and, for instance, Kaplan's consideration of the Christian Identity movement with its 'commingling of text and current events – the Bible and CNN'[32] reflects this but even prior to the widespread adoption

[29] *Ibid*, 20
[30] Charlotte Ward and David Voas, "The Emergence of Conspirituality," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 26, no. 1 (2011): 37–41.
[31] Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 18.
[32] Jeffrey Kaplan, *Radical Religion in America: Millenarian Movements from the Far Right to the Children of Noah* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 51.

of the internet and the conspiracy year zero event of 9/11, Christian Identity was somewhat dated and definitely of the 'old world.' Kaplan sees Christian Identity believers as being strongly reminiscent of earlier millennialists; although they reject the Jewish influence upon Christianity they still, nonetheless, and perhaps naively, embrace its embedded patterns of prophecy and redemption. But even in its archaic millennialism, the Christian Identity had combined secular and religious millennialisms and in so doing had problematized the distinctions. So, whilst it is understandable that Barkun would seek to maintain the integrity of these earlier forms of millennialism by casting racist nationalisms within the secular millennialist tradition to do so would be to overlook the extent to which it is rapidly becoming characterized by the flexibility (within the terms of belligerent racist discourse) associated with improvisational millennialism. The presumed dichotomy that separates religious and secular millennialisms is increasingly undone by the extent to which the divide has been undermined by Barkun's synthesising third term. Much recent white nationalism has been composed of the range of stigmatized knowledge Barkun describes as typifying improvisational millennialism. The hollow Earth, extra-terrestrial spiritual dimension escape route employed by Hitler coupled with yoga cosmic conflict and conspiracy theory that is described in the Nazi millennialism of Miguel Serrano[33] coincides with many of the touchstones mentioned by Barkun. Similarly, the blending of strands of white nationalism with new religions, especially neo-paganisms.[34] The blending of the secular with the religious and commingling of faith, nation and conspiracy has yielded a particular iteration of white nationalism that eschews traditional markers of national identity for a wider sense of belonging to, and apocalyptic fears for, an ethnonationalist 'spiritual homeland'. In *Millennium Rage,* Philip Lamy situates this kind of fear of communal disappearance in the context of white supremacist survivalists,

> To white supremacist survivalists, the new world order is viewed in terms of multiculturalism, cultural relativism, political correctness, and "polyglot mud people" - immigrants and minorities despised by the Aryan Nations and other white

[33] See, for instance, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Mattias Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism* (Duke, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
[34] Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*; Gardell, *Gods of the Blood: The Pagan Revival and White Separatism*; Anton Shekhovtsov, "Apoliteic Music: Neo-Folk, Martial Industrial and 'metapolitical Fascism,'" *Patterns of Prejudice* 43, no. 5 (2009): 431–57; Andrew Fergus Wilson, "The Invisible Empire: Political Extremity and Myths of Origin in the Networked Cultic Milieu'," in *Myth, Mysticism, and "Celtic" Nationalism*, ed. Marion Gibson, Garry Tregidga, and Shelley Trower (London: Routledge, 2012), 199–215.

> supremacists and viewed as henchmen to the Jews. They point to the *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* and to the belief in the mythical Jewish-led conspiracy to take over the world, a truly apocalyptic event.[35] (Lamy 1996, 249)

Stripped of the overt racism, this echoes much of paranoid rhetoric that characterises some threads in the general warp and weft of premillennial dispensationalism whilst also mirroring the content of much recent conspiracy theory. Nonetheless, it was an overtly racialist interpretation of Biblical sources by the Christian Identity movement that demarcated them from other Christian millennialists. So, typically, Montana Freemen, a sect within Christian Identity, described by Catherine Wessinger in *How the Millennium Comes Violently* held that their racial separatism was divinely inspired, that Europeans were the true Israelites and that other 'races' were 'the children of Cain'.[36] It is precisely in this admixture of racialism and religion that Barkun's improvisational millennialism is made manifest and, most pertinently here, with the heroic surety of the defenders of (a) civilization, a potentially lethal 'cognitive map' is drawn up by adherents. It is here that the all-or-nothing stakes of paranoid apocalypticism are at their most apparent. The violence of The Order (Brüder Schweigen/Silent Brotherhood), Frazier Glenn Miller, Jr. (Overland Park Jewish Community Center shooting), or Anders Breivik is rooted in the discursive fields that are still tended to by many nationalists and, as will be shown, these distinct manifestations of white nationalist violence and those described above retain a currency among internet active white nationalists.

White Nationalist Response to the Paris Attacks of 2015

Stormfront is one of the busiest WN websites and attracts an international audience. In the 90 days between 28th August 2015 and 25th November 2015, it attracted over two and a quarter million unique visitors and these visitors viewed just under eighteen and a half million pages. The majority of visitors were from the US (78%), the UK (14%), Canada (9%), Australia (5%), the Netherlands (4%), Serbia (3%), Brazil (3%), Spain (3%) with tens of thousands of visitors from a number of other nations including India, Sweden, Croatia, Mexico, South

[35] Philip Lamy, *Millennium Rage: Survivalists, White Supremacists, and the Doomsday Prophecy* (New York & London: Plenum Press, 1996), 249.
[36] Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven's Gate* (New York: Seven Bridges Press, 2000).

Africa, Argentina, Belgium, Finland, Poland and France[37]. It keeps the majority of the forum open without registration necessary to access it; there are multiple sub-forums covering a variety of topics and sub-fora dedicated to geographically specific nationalist scenes. The disparate locations and varied nationalisms in evidence on *stormfront.org* underline Barkun's observations regarding the echoing back to lonely individuals of their otherwise stigmatised viewpoints. There is a solidarity borne of a mutual awareness of their outsider status. *Stormfront* regulates statements of religious belief within its fora with the subforum dedicated to formal religious discussion accessible only to signed-up members and even then only by application and vetting. Members are restricted to invoking their deities for rhetorical emphasis only. Nonetheless, a palpable sense of apocalyptic longing is in evidence and the curbing of religious expression effectively forces forum members to express these apocalyptic perspectives in secular terms. However, these secular expressions of apocalyptic belief are invariably phrased in terms of superconspiracies that situate the white nationalist community in the heroic role of countering the civilization-threatening plots of the conspirators.

The Paris attacks yielded a dedicated thread, 'BREAKING NEWS: 18 dead in Paris terror attack' in the 'News/Newslinks and Articles' sub-forum; the title was sporadically updated as new information about the attacks became available. Within a week, it had attracted over 100,000 views and more than 1700 separate posts. It was evident that the majority of posters betrayed a conspiracist mindset. By the seventh post on the thread, the figure of a Jewish conspiracy had been invoked by a poster with the forum name, Varietas Caucasia,

> *Shooting is said to be continuing.*
>
> *Will whites wake up? If they blew up the stadium, I'd wager....*
>
> *The Ancient Regime were paragons of virtue and beneficence and the tribune of the French compared to the traitors in France today.*

[37] Website statistics available from http://www.seethestats.com/site/stormfront.org [visited 26th November 2015)

> *And on the topic of Jews, for guests, remember, just because some Jews died in Charlie Hebdo doesn't mean the Jews don't want this to happen and aren't participating. Information on Jews helping to destroy Europe RIGHT NOW:*

This is followed by a series of links to websites claiming to unmask a Jewish conspiracy to undermine Europe. The idea that Jews manipulated the IS terrorists is popular throughout the thread, post #238 typifying this,

> *False flag doesn't mean "holograms and laser beams" Remember that ISIS is Israel, so they could be the masterminds behind this attack, or maybe they gave some mentally unstable muslim a klashnikov and grenades and hoped for the best. And either way we know who is importing all these Muslims so it's still technically a conspiracy whether the Jews and their dumb goyim leaders planned this or not.*

In this post, Barkun's model of the superconspiracy is clearly evident with IS having acquired a managed autonomy within the nested conspiracies of the Jewish superconspiracy. This is a recurring and characteristic motif within responses. Thus, #494

> *It's disgusting listening to these leftist British newscasters shunting public understanding away from the true cause:*
>
> *The jewish government's and the jewish EU's opening the gates of Europe (and, in this case, France) to the brown and black and muslim invaders -- and probably arming them as well.*

Again, in the active 'shunting' of the public away from the 'truth' by British news media a perceived organised effort to silence this 'truth' is discerned. Typifying the conspiracy theorist's privileged vantage point, the poster simultaneously expresses their position whilst demarcating himself from the 'sheeple'. White nationalist intertextuality is drawn on at various points throughout the thread with external links incorporated into posts. So, post #549 incorporates an embedded Youtube video entitled, 'Europa Erwache! Europe Awaken! Европа вставай!'[38]. The video incorporates images of central European pastoral scenes, neo-classical and art deco architecture, and brief clips of Nazi propaganda with a soundtrack of martial industrial music featuring 'Europa' by Triarii. The lyrics are pompous and fanciful,

[38] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9p9QY3ejbBQ [Accessed 22nd November 2015]

painting Europe as, “my kingdom; This is my silver sun; This is my mother; Of ascension and decline.” Posted on the day of the Paris attack, the Youtube video description features more anti-Semitic rhetoric,

> *This is Europa, this is our ancestral home. Rise up my comrades, the time is NOW. Jews wont stop flooding us with non-Europeans until we are a tiny minority, so they can rule and enslave us without limit, as they do in other countries, like South Africa. We must fight the Jews, not the other non-Europeans, which don’t form part of the ruling families. JEWS are the cause, massive immigration is only a symptom. Don’t lose your time confronting Blacks, Pakis or Asians, that’s what the Jews want (Divide & Conquer). We must flood the streets and point out the JEWS every damn day. Stop White Genocide.*

The final phrase, ‘Stop White Genocide’, is a constant refrain in white nationalist web presences. In the *Stormfront* Paris thread, there are calls for its use as part of a social media strategy, as is evident in post #113

> *Get on Twitter people spread the #WHITEGENOCIDE message to copy paste this #Paris #ParisAttacks #ParisShooting #Whitegenocide*
>
> *Now.*

The apocalyptic terms of the perceived Jewish conspiracy is made starkly here. If the posters are to be taken at face value there is a generalised sense that race war is unfolding and that it is mobilised by Jewish conspirators. In this conspiracy it appears that Jews control Muslims, people of African descent, Western governments, mass media, the ‘international banking community’, and so on. Teenagers on Twitter expressing concern for refugees are seemingly also under the sway of Jewish media for the poster of #905 who is here responding to an earlier, quoted, post:

> *[Quote]Looked on Twitter. These teenage libturds are more sympathetic towards muslims than the actual victims. [/Quote]*
>
> *You are hearing the echo created by the jew voice. The jew voice is present in large numbers across all the internet. They control print and television media. The are working as hard as they can to contain the internet awakening. It is not going to work*

the dam has burst, and the awakening is pouring out. Their jew voice will be drowned out.

Like a number of posters, the poster above sees the Paris shooting as a catalyst for change. Borrowing from the terminology of new age improvisational millennialism the poster describes 'an awakening' through which 'the truth' shall be revealed; further confirming Barkun's analysis, the poster clearly believes that the potential for spreading 'stigmatized knowledge' via internet communication lies at the heart of this awakening. Further underscoring the presence of the syncretic tendency of new age religions within the white nationalist imaginary, the following post (#843) combines conspiracy with cosmological struggle, Judaeo-Christian apocalyptic language and imagery, and the self-development motifs of new age personal development,

Probably the sheeple will never wake up -- and what would they do about things they don't understand even if they did wake up?

[Lengthy call to arms and the destruction of Israel]

A world endlessly controlled by the satanic jews is best destroyed -- for the sake of the upward evolutionary path of the universe -- no matter the cost to planet earth and its inhabitants.

Given the epistemological confusion in evidence here, it is tempting to dismiss this kind of muddled mélange out of hand but to do so would be to confirm the persecuted ('stigmatized') status of the knowledge claims being made. Wessinger[39] makes evident the benefits of taking conspiracist apocalypticism seriously in her account of her involvement in the defusing of the stand-off between the FBI and the Christian Identity sect, the Montana Freemen. That is not to say that there is a concrete threat emerging from with white nationalist apocalypticism but there is certainly a widely held belief within the community that they are at a significant and potentially cataclysmic moment:

#25 Hang the traitorous politicians people who let Muslims into Europe! [angry emoji]

[39] Ibid.

#143 Time to deal with Islam once and for all. And at the same opportunity deal with Jews and blacks by deporting them all

#172 The plague of Islam has festered yet again! This is what's coming to ALL white nations, and thus why all of us must become able to fight the Mohammedans with any and all means at our disposal.

#301 RISE UP, EUROPA! [posted above a map of Europe dominated by a Reichsadler*]*

#362 I have chills running down my spine. You can feel it happening, a great awakening. I think our enemies will regret this day for years to come.

#400 I expect to see much more refugee housing centers burned down. Europeans cannot wait to just "vote" out the muslims; THE MUSLIMS HAVE DECLARED WAR. Stop letting the "moderate muslims" be their shield, kick them all out.

And so it continues. The danger posed here is an active apocalypticism that clearly draws on an adaptive improvisational Nazism (posts asking if Europe 'missed Hitler yet?' abound) and which feels that its 'time has come'. It is instructive here to recall the 'manifesto' of racially-motivated mass murderer, Dylann Roof. In this, he wrote that he felt,

I have no choice. I am not in the position to, alone, go into the ghetto and fight. I chose Charleston because it is most historic city in my state, and at one time had the highest ratio of blacks to Whites in the country. We have no skinheads, no real KKK, no one doing anything but talking on the internet. Well someone has to have the bravery to take it to the real world, and I guess that has to be me.[40]

An *LA Times* articles dated June 22nd, 2015 found that passages from the manifesto had earlier been posted by user, 'AryanBlood1488', in comments on news stories posted at *The Daily Stormer*, a racist news website. There are clearly psychological factors to take into account in such cases but the similarity in tenor, content and neo-Nazi symbolism in the

[40] Available from http://gawker.com/here-is-what-appears-to-be-dylann-roofs-racist-manifest-1712767241 [Accessed 26th November 2015]

chosen forum name provides a sobering comparison with the anger in evidence on *Stormfront*.

Conclusion

Thankfully, the literature provides multiple instances in which an apocalyptic faithful is let down by fate and the longed-for end and its promise of a better world to come never arrives. Festinger *et al*'s *When Prophecy Fails* is the seminal example.[41] What should be recalled, though, is that Dorothy Martin never abandoned her beliefs nor did many of her followers. The fervour on show amongst the white nationalist community is almost certainly temporary. Differences in value, religious belief and between national cultures ensure that the white nationalist communities remain inchoate; their shared apocalyptic ardour is insufficient to overcome more established differences within the community. However, what also is apparent is the manner in which the event provided an arena for the community to rehearse and determine the boundaries of the belief that incorporate members of the 'white nation'. One lone voice suggested that Jews had nothing to do with the Paris attacks; the community quickly rounded on this poster and ridiculed their suggestion. This is an apocalyptic community that is currently delineating its core beliefs. It is inchoate and lacks a foundational text through which to organise communal values more fully. That these values are retrogressive, irrational and couched in the overwhelmed and anxious fears of apocalyptic conspiracism are no barrier to their longevity. What requires further scrutiny is the ease with which these values and beliefs are capable of extending into the more populist and less marginal aspects of apocalyptic belief. Racist improvisational millennialists with social media strategies and a degraded but partially familiar map of the current situation pose a threat to domestic and international order; IS have demonstrated the value of social media to belligerent millennialists and whilst white nationalism does not have the resources of IS it has a shared belief in the absolute rightness of its position.

[41] Leon Festinger, Henry Riecken, and Stanley Schachter, *When Prophecy Fails: A Social and Psychological Study of a Modern Group That Predicted the Destruction of the World* (New York: Harper-Torchbooks, 1956).

Appendix G. (Wilson 2018) '#whitegenocide, the Alt-right and Conspiracy Theory: How Secrecy and Suspicion Contributed to the Mainstreaming of Hate.' *Secrecy and Society* 1(2).

#whitegenocide, the Alt-right and Conspiracy Theory: How Secrecy and Suspicion Contributed to the Mainstreaming of Hate

Andrew Fergus Wilson

Abstract

This article considers the relationship between 'hashtag activism' as it is currently being used by the alt-right and the tendency to draw on conspiracy theory that Richard Hofstadter identified as being prevalent among what he termed 'pseudo-conservatives' half a century earlier. Both the alt-right and Hofstadter's 'pseudo-conservatives' can be characterized by a pronounced populist nationalism that understands its aims as protecting a particular way of life whilst drawing on an aggrieved sense of injustice at being conspired against by an unseen enemy. That this "enemy" is typically foreign in actuality or in spirit confirms the cultural dimension on which their politics is played out. It is argued here that this paranoid populist nationalism has been figuratively drawn upon in the rhetoric of Donald Trump and that this apparent openness to the "pseudo-conservative" discourse on nationalism has provided a bridging effect via which far right elements are seeking to normalize extremist viewpoints.

Keywords: alt-right, conspiracy theories, hashtag activism, pseudo-conservatives, Richard Hofstadter, Donald J. Trump, white nationalism

Kellyanne Conway's phrase "alternative facts" has already passed into notoriety; the Counsellor to the President used the phrase when defending statements relating to the size of President Donald Trump's inauguration crowd made by the President's Press Secretary, Sean Spicer (Blake 2017). Whilst the phrase was largely ridiculed by the "mainstream media" (MSM) their scorn is unlikely to have had much impact on significant sections of Trump's support. Not only is the MSM trusted by less than a third of U.S. citizens (Swift 2016), but there has been a resurgence of the acceptability of conspiracy theory, or "the paranoid style"

as it was described by Richard Hofstadter during the 1960s. In his essay, published in *Harpers*, Hofstadter described the "dispossessed" feeling that characterized the right wing of American politics in 1964. Half a century later and Alex Jones, founder and frontman of the conspiracy clearing house *Infowars.com*, claimed that he was one of the first people that Donald Trump spoke to in his capacity as President (Haberman 2016) is indicative of the state of political discourse at the current time. Trump has ridden a wave of populist dissent into the White House and has done so using rhetoric that was drawn from recent conspiracy theory. The conspiracy theories publicly embraced by Trump include the idea that climate change is "a Chinese hoax" (Trump 2012), that Barack Obama was not a U.S. citizen (Krieg 2016), Barack Obama as the founder of ISIS (Siddiqui 2016), that vaccines cause autism (Trump 2014), and that Muslims celebrated the 9/11 attacks *en masse* in New Jersey (Kessler 2016).[1] This latter convergence of conspiracy, ethnicity and populist politics encapsulates the scope of this article.

This article will also examine the shared conceptual spaces of populist politics, conspiracy theory and the role of the Internet in facilitating the mainstreaming of the paranoid style. By looking at far right communications strategies within the conspiracy milieu it will be shown that the presence of conspiracy theories in the public sphere has allowed white nationalist discourse to gain increased exposure. It should be noted that the primary concern here is to concentrate on the effect on public discourse of demonstrably untrue conspiracy theories. That these currently proliferate and determine much of the discussion concerning conspiracies should not deflect from efforts to uncover the very real conspiracies that often accompany statecraft and political maneuvering; Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election is testament to that. Rather, the focus here is on those conspiracy theories that were formerly marginal and stigmatized due to their lack of verifiability.

Theories of Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy theory thrives in an environment of secrecy and necessarily so. Without the possibility of there being a mechanism by which any plot might be hidden there would be no

[1] It is worth noting Pasek et al's (2016) study that connected belief in the "birther" conspiracy with anti-Black sentiment.

opportunity to postulate the kind of hidden malevolent plots that fuel conspiracy theories. So, secrecy and conspiracy theories are not unrelated phenomena. Certainly, this is not the only causal factor in the production of conspiracy theory but, in general terms, a poverty of information can be understood to be productive of a tendency to 'fill in the gaps' in a simplistic and reductive manner. This is, in essence, the motive behind Fredric Jameson's (1988, 356) well-known description of conspiracy theory as 'the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital.' In Jameson's reading, class-based barriers to opportunity for knowledge acquisition and the development of critical reason are the limiting factors that reproduce information poverty. More typically, the extension of state mechanisms for the production, classification, and suppression of information are understood to be the primary factors in the development of the current conspiracy milieu. Whilst this atmosphere of secrecy contributes to a conspiracist tendency, as will be seen, status insecurity, fragile economic wellbeing, and global economic developments also contribute.

Secrecy does not automatically produce conspiracy theories, or, indeed, entail actual conspiracies. Daniel Hellinger (2003) quite rightly describes a number of scenarios in which the use of secrecy by the state or special interest groups may be required operationally, to facilitate frank discussion, or to protect national interests. All of these may be pursued legitimately in secret. However, they become conspiratorial when they operate outside of agreed frameworks or subvert the democratic process (Hellinger 2003). It should be noted here that conspiracy theorists can perform a valuable role; their investigative skepticism offers a vital challenge to the concealment or reduced circulation of information whilst also challenging the assumptions that contribute to the definition of 'the national interest'. As such, they can provide a means for redressing the asymmetrical balance of power that state secrecy contributes to (Maret 2016). Conspiracies do happen and are facilitated by an opaqueness in corporate and state business. It is easy enough to identify any number and discussion of conspiracies in the field of U.S. politics would only be controversial in selecting a single example over other possibilities: the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, Project MKULTRA, the assassination of JFK, Watergate, or the Iran–Contra affair might all merit consideration and bring to light distinct forms of information control. In an environment in which secrecy abounds and in which conspiracies are shown to occur after the fact it should be unsurprising that the public is ready to speculate about current conspiracies. However, as Fenster (2008) points out, the proliferation of conspiracy theories and the staggering diversity

and likelihood of their claims makes it difficult to assess the veracity of conspiracy claims. This, in turn, allows conspiracy theory to serve multiple political ends as a result of this indeterminacy; the hidden enemy is always secretly at work to undermine and destroy 'our' way of life and that 'we' must stand together to oppose 'them.' Oliver and Wood's (2014, 964) study of conspiracy theory belief found that within the U.S. adult population:

> Not only does half of the American population agree with at least one conspiracy from a short list of conspiracy theories offered, but also large portions of the population exhibit a strong dispositional inclination toward believing that unseen, intentional forces exist and that history is driven by a Manichean struggle between good and evil.

The readiness to believe in a hidden, Manichean battle as a hidden hand in the passage of history indicates a susceptibility to the kind of manipulation via conspiracy narratives outlined by Fenster. Nonetheless, Fenster situates conspiracy theory as a response to the development of a monopoly on information and the production of 'truth' and he is, ultimately, a celebrant of the kind of agency that the production of conspiracy theory offers. In this analysis, it is a way out of Jameson's information poverty motivated by a suspicion of the secret state. Fenster concludes his book with a narrative voice that is an unclear convergence of his own and the narrator of the 9/11 'truther' documentary *Loose Change*, a move he suggests is empowering to viewers bereft of their own, clear voices, 'gives the viewer meaning and agency, and offers a sense of adventure and fun as she attacks the stodgy, conspiratorial state with the latest information technology and Web portals. And the *conspiracy community* is the collective response that can rally the people and restore the nation. The truth movement, composed of great scholars and regular kids with laptops, can overcome' (Fenster 2008, 278). Fenster is capturing the seductive power of contemporary conspiracy theory and leaves open the possibility of a politically mobilized community of 'web researchers' enriching their cognitive maps and breaking down barriers to 'true' knowledge. As if in recognition of the lack of criticality this ending suggests, an afterword recognizes the limited opportunity for conspiracy theory to grow into a structured and productive politics that can, 'organize and respect people in the complex, diverse world that it simplifies' (Fenster 2008, 289).

Fenster makes an attempt to understand conspiracy theory as a search for agency in an information economy in which access to knowledge production is ostensibly limited but can

be extended and challenged by the communicative strategies of the Internet. Fenster's work, in its first edition (1999), was an important intervention that captured a moment characterized by an organic upswell of political awareness. Barkun (2003) offers a useful summary of the value of the Internet to the conspiracy theorist. He highlights the value of an open medium of communication that is free from gatekeepers to conspiracy theorists. Unlike the MSM's capacity to regulate and assess the quality of knowledge production, the Internet offers conspiracy theorists the opportunity to circulate their ideas freely without fear of their theories being dismissed as spurious, 'stigmatized knowledge subcultures are at a distinct disadvantage as far as mass media are concerned […] Consequently, those whose worldview is built around conspiracy ideas find in the Internet virtual communities of the like-minded' (Barkun 2003, 13). Nonetheless, that does not diminish widespread tastes for MSM treatments of conspiracy theory and within the cultural sphere the entertainment industry has exploited a generalized atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust. The most significant recent works on conspiracy theory bear witness to this and Knight (2000), Goldberg (2001), Barkun (2003), and Fenster (2008) all point to the influence of the television series *The X-Files* (1993-) in expanding public knowledge of conspiracy theory whilst drawing its popularity from an environment of distrust. The stuff of *The X-Files* is standard conspiracy fare. It depicts a complex and hidden world in which a shadow government operated behind the scenes and conspired against its citizens and, in its most dramatic sweep, humanity as a whole. The programme's slogan 'The Truth is Out There,' featured in the title sequence epitomizes the troubled relationship with 'the truth' that is currently experienced by the subject in late modernity. The truth is 'out there' in the sense that it is always somewhere else, hidden in the general welter of the information, concealed behind disinformation (one episode was tellingly titled, "All Lies Lead to the Truth") or hidden, restricted from the public. For Goldberg (2001, 256), this outlook typifies a historical moment in which an actively maintained veil of secrecy separates state and citizenry. He describes 'a cult of secrecy [that] has dominated the bureaucracy in Washington and distanced federal authorities from those beyond the beltway,' and that this commitment to secrecy-in-the-name-of-security has proliferated and accelerated in the post-WWII period so that its maintenance has now become more 'reflex' than 'necessity' (Goldberg 2001, 256). Moreover, this culture of secrecy has proven fertile ground for the genesis and growth of conspiracy theory. In Goldberg's (2001, 257) words,

> Concealed information denied accountability and enabled the arrogant both to ignore public opinion and to manipulate it. Behind this veil, laws were broken and democratic values subverted […] Even without the taint of malevolence, suppression of information aroused concern […] Drawing sustenance from America's resilient fear of centralized authority, perceptions of sinister design became truth.

This phenomenological correspondence between conspiracy and innuendo is key here, especially where it is coupled with a population increasingly disconnected from a central authority and experiencing perceptions of social and economic disempowerment. Knight (2000) also depicts a labyrinthine architecture of secrecy characterizing the American state as it developed during the Cold War. He describes a 'sprawling intelligence community' comprised of 'the CIA, the National Security Council, the Defence Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, Army Intelligence, Navy Intelligence, Air Force Intelligence, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, the Atomic Energy Commission and the FBI' (Knight 2000, 28). Knight's (2000, 29) reading of this proliferation of the secrecy-oriented state is similar to Goldberg's and he finds that this 'official obsession with secrecy, in effect, helped fuel the popular fixation on conspiratorial secrets at the heart of government.' Knight's analysis suggests that contemporary America is experiencing a 'culture of conspiracy' in which the widespread intelligence community is generative of a dispersed and generalized fascination with secrecy and occulted machinations. As will be noted below, it is from this position that he dismisses Hofstadter's narrow focus on conspiracy as being the purview of extremists. Knight is right to draw attention to the extent that this culture of conspiracy can be the groundswell from which a healthy critical mindedness emerges. However, it should also be acknowledged that there is an increased acceptance of a politics that was once considered to be extreme but which, concurrently with conspiracy theory, is becoming increasingly mainstream. As this article will suggest, this concurrence is beyond coincidence and is a consequence of the extent to which far right usage of conspiracy theory has become so thoroughly interwoven in the conspiracy milieu as to ensure that an articulation of current conspiracy theories is to evoke political positions on the extreme right, wittingly or not.

Conspiracy Theories and the Radical Right

The coincidence of belief in conspiracy theory and extremist politics is widely noted in the literature (e.g., Dobratz & Shanks-Meile 2000, Gardell 2002, Goodrick-Clarke 2003, Durham 2007). Both tend to share an apocalyptic structure in which communal ontologies are threatened by external forces; typically, in both instances, these forces are hidden and their threat to the extremist/conspiracy theorist's community is realized through secondary agents and secret plots. Richard Hofstadter's scene-setting and frequently maligned essay "The Paranoid Style in American Politics" paints a picture of the conspiracy theorist's self-appointed role as a protector of *a* world threatened by the machinations of hidden conspirators. Whilst there are conspiracy theories that can be seen to be written from a left-wing perspective it is the political right wing that has come to be more readily associated with the production and belief in conspiracy theories. This is not surprising. The political right are, generally speaking, socially and culturally conservative with an ongoing association with 'traditional values' so the belief of a secret adversary – be it Satan, communism, the Illuminati, the New World Order or whomever – that is plotting to radically transform society's values is a clear threat to a conservative mindset. Here, then, conspiracy is understood as Barkun's recursive 'super conspiracy' implemented to bring about an apocalyptic endtime. This paper will contend that the political extremity of white nationalism is seeking to play on this fear of an adversarial 'hidden hand' in order to provide a platform from which to normalize their politics of hate. In this, the continued value of aspects of Richard Hofstadter's work will be shown to be of continuing value in the analysis of far right discourse and the mainstreaming of their conspiratorial outlook. This will be done in the context of the use of '#whitegenocide' hashtag on Twitter.

Hofstadter's work continues to provide explanatory models for understanding the political right in the US. In 2011, Gary Kamiya wrote a piece titled, "The Infantile Style in American Politics" for *Salon.* In it, Kamiya argued that Hofstadter's essays "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt – 1955" and "Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited – 1965" provided a way of understanding the Tea Party movement within the Republican party. A year earlier the left-leaning conservative blogger Andrew Sullivan wrote a similar but shorter piece titled "Trying To Understand The Tea Party II" for his blog. Both writers drew on Hofstadter's distinction between 'pseudo-conservatives' and 'genuine conservatives' and this distinction will be useful to the current examination of the right-wing populism evident in Donald Trump's recent election and the emergence of the so-called alt-right.

Not without controversy, Hofstadter's two essays concerning the 'pseudo-conservative' political tendency in the US give an account of the nationalism and prejudice present within US populism from the late Nineteenth Century onwards. Foreshadowing current populist formations, he identified a conspiratorial outlook within these populist movements. The origin of the conspiracy was, typically, European bankers and, on occasion, Jewish bankers working with foreign powers or for themselves. Hofstadter identified jingoistic and anti-Semitic tendencies in the populist US People's Party of the 1890s. His portrayal of them is complex but he was generally well-disposed toward them, seeing them as 'mild radicals' who targeted the monied elites of their day. Although there was contestation over the extent to which status anxiety was a motivating factor for the Populists (Collins 1989), in Hofstadter's analysis the primary motivation was economic anxiety with status anxiety a secondary factor as is made clear in the correspondence cited by Collins. Nonetheless, status anxiety *is* acknowledged as being a contributory factor and Hofstadter expands upon the contribution of status anxiety to populist anti-intellectualism in the 1950s in the essay "The Pseudo-Conservative Revolt" (1955, in Bell 1963). The prejudice described by Hofstadter in this essay has value to the current discussion in its depiction of the American political situation of the 1950s. The essay starts with Hofstadter reflecting upon the situation of a generation that had been forged in the 'liberal dissent' of the 1930s that had led to the New Deal. Hofstadter suggests that by the time of writing this generation had retained their liberal inclinations but had become politically conservative; in a condition of relative affluence, they had a desire to retain the advantages that the prevailing order provided them. He contrasts them to the group he identified as the dominant radical force of the time, the pseudo-conservatives. He draws on Adorno et al's (1950) study of the authoritarian personality.

Adorno and his co-researchers initially sought to determine causal factors in an individual's development of anti-Semitic beliefs but broadened their concerns to try and understand the formative influences contributing to a generalized susceptibility to an ethnocentric, authoritarian outlook. The study is methodologically flawed (something Hofstadter acknowledges in the later essay, "Pseudo-Conservatism Revisited – 1965"), but it formulates an emerging tendency in post-War US politics that, it is argued here, characterizes the 'right wing identity politics' of the alt-right and recent formations within white nationalism. Adorno distinguishes between 'genuine conservatism' and 'pseudo conservatism' by characterizing the former as a perceived protection of 'positive' conservative values and a vision of America as a land of opportunity for all within the terms of democratic capitalism.

The latter contains elements of that aspirational narrative but they are overshadowed by a rigidly hierarchical ethnocentric framing of it. In effect, opportunity is only available to certain in-groups. From Adorno (1950, 182),

> The ethnocentric conservative is the pseudo conservative, for he betrays in his ethnocentrism a tendency antithetical to democratic values and tradition [...] his politico-economic views are based on the same underlying trends—submission to authority, unconscious handling of hostility toward authority by means of displacement and projection onto outgroups, and so on—as his ethnocentrism [...] This is not merely a "modern conservatism." It is, rather, a totally new direction: away from individualism and equality of opportunity, and toward a rigidly stratified society in which there is a minimum of economic mobility and in which the "right" groups are in power, the outgroups subordinate. Perhaps the term "reactionary" fits this ideology best. Ultimately it is fascism.

The level of contestation over Hofstadter's position on Populism reflects the level of disagreement among historians about this movement. Johnston (2007) outlines much of this discussion but asserts that Hofstadter was correct to assert the presence of reactionary voices in Populism whilst acknowledging that they sat uncomfortably alongside voices that were forerunners of the Progressive movement that was to follow. Johnston's point is simple: that U.S. populism incorporates a variety of stances in its criticism of the established order. Certainly, these stances include democratic perspectives that seek to promote the realization of the aspirations of all Americans but, at the same time, anti-semitism and a belligerent nationalism were also present,

> [T]he Populist moment of the 1890s bequeathed to its various populist successors a suspicion of elites and a taste for conspiratorial explanations that have at times nurtured antisemitism and other forms of bigotry. (Johnston 2007, 133)

More well-known and equally apposite here is Hofstadter's study of conspiracy theory "The Paranoid Style in American Politics." Effectively a survey of conspiracy theory in American culture and politics and a brief study of the John Birch Society (JBS), it shaped subsequent scholarly discussion of conspiracy theory by situating the 'paranoid' beliefs of the JBS in a long-standing – if inchoate – tradition of alternative explanations for social, political, economic, and cultural change. Like Hofstadter's commentaries on the differing modalities of

conservatism this essay has had a lasting legacy but has attracted criticism. Typical of recent criticism is Fenster's charge that Hofstadter pathologizes conspiracy thinking. Fenster (2008, 8) suggests that Hofstadter contrasts conspiracy thinking with a 'healthy' approach to politics, and 'he implied that conspiracy theory constitutes a malady or affliction.' Despite his otherwise excellent study, Goldberg (2001) goes further in this reductionist reading of Hofstadter; his reading of the paranoid style is wholly grounded in the idea of Hofstadter as a diagnostician. He writes,

> Hofstadter donned the white coat of a clinician. Conspiracy theorists were marginal men and women whose personality disorders caused them to project their problems, status grievances, and wounds into public affairs. (Goldberg 2001, xi)

Goldberg continues in this vein and uses the language of a 'clinician' to emphasizes his charge against Hofstadter: 'cure,' 'contagious,' 'infect,' 'fever.' This is all hyperbolic and this shibboleth needs laying to rest. Hofstadter himself is careful to make clear he is not using the term in its full medical sense but rather as an analogy suggestive of a tendency to identify otherwise indiscernible threats to the "normal" run of things. It is characterized by the conspiracy theorist's production of fear of hidden agency subverting a way of life. Hofstadter (1964, 77) is clear on his avoidance of the medical implications that the term might otherwise indicate:

> I am not speaking in a clinical sense, but borrowing a clinical term for other purposes. I have neither the competence nor the desire to classify any figures of the past or present as certifiable lunatics. In fact, the idea of the paranoid style as a force in politics would have little contemporary relevance or historical value if it were applied only to men with profoundly disturbed minds.

Nonetheless, despite this clarity caricatures like Goldberg's persist. Peter Knight's (2000, 31) discussion of Hofstadter also confines him to the clinical metaphor, insisting that Hofstadter produces a 'diagnosis of a thoroughgoing paranoid delusion,' and goes on to suggest that Hofstadter 'insisted' that the paranoid style is 'a minority phenomenon' (Knight 2000, 36), but again, this needs to be addressed because it undermines the opportunity to draw on Hofstadter's analysis in order to better understand times to which it is suited, including our own.

Hofstadter does describe the 'spokesman' [sic] of the paranoid style as being marginal but here his ascription of a marginal status does not downplay the seriousness of his discourse. This marginality is better understood as being reflective of Daniel Bell's (1963) suggestion that the U.S. radical right represented a 'dispossessed' constituency. As has been discussed above, Hofstadter contributed essays on the 'pseudo-conservatives' to Bell's collection; he also refers to Bell's own essay in 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics.' Here, he is quite clear that the right wing tendency in which he identifies a proclivity for the use of the paranoid style is subject to social rather than psychological stresses, 'But the modern right wing, as Daniel Bell has put it, feels dispossessed: America has been largely taken away from them and their kind, though they are determined to try to repossess it' (Hofstadter 1964, 81). Thus, marginality in this instance reflects a social status. It is worth quoting at length from Hofstadter in order to restore this social dimension to understandings of his work in current academic work on conspiracy theory. What is key in the following is that Hofstadter does not condemn 'the paranoid style' to the marginalia of history but, quite correctly, acknowledges its capacity to command influence in periods of generalized anxiety regarding social status or economic security. He writes that while a tendency to subscribe to a conspiracy view of history may be seen to be,

> [M]ore or less constantly affecting a modest minority of the population. But certain religious traditions, certain social structures and national inheritances, certain historical catastrophes or frustrations may be conducive to the release of such psychic energies, and to situations in which they can more readily be built into mass movements or political parties. In American experience ethnic and religious conflict have plainly been a major focus for militant and suspicious minds of this sort, but class conflicts also can mobilize such energies. (Hofstadter 1964, 86)

It is clear here that Hofstadter, in his conclusion, is warning of the risk of the spread of 'paranoid rhetoric' from the perennial social margins into the mainstream. In this he is not far off the analyses of the more recent commentators who have, generally, sought to dismiss Hofstadter. Aupers (2012) takes this tack and, without offering any evidence, introduces a suggested Freudian dimension to Hofstadter's undeserved reputation as a diagnostician of aberrant political views. Aupers' dismissal of Hofstatder's work typifies the recent tendency to attempt an ostensibly more considered approach to conspiracy; similar approaches can be found in Knight (2000), Fenster (2008), Robertson (2015). As such, it is worth exploring a

little further. Aupers' argument is that Hofstadter's diagnostic approach is predicated on an assumption that conspiracy theory represents a dangerous challenge to the consensus politics preferred by Hofstadter. Aupers (2012, 23) contends that Hofstadter, along with Daniel Pipes (1997) and Fredric Jameson (1991) reflect 'the ideology of modern Enlightenment,' and produce a simplistic and inaccurate division between the rational modern subject and the irrational pre-modern alternative, echoing Weber's disenchantment thesis. Following Peter Knight (2000), he sees this as approaching the status of a moral panic about the decline in public reason and suggests that, instead, conspiracy theory reflects a more generalised suspicion of authority and loci of power, '"Paranoia" is no longer simply a diagnostic label applied by psychologists and psychiatrists but has become a veritable sociological phenomenon' (Aupers 2012, 23).

This has become something of a commonplace assumption in academic treatments of conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theory is increasingly treated as a commonplace disposition that typifies a diminished public capacity to apply reason and a falling away in trust between citizens and the state. However, within this, there are variations on this theme. Clarke (2002) considers the 'attributional error' implicit in conspiracy to have potential value with conspiracy theorists' activities creating pressure on state agencies to operate in a more open manner. Indeed, the academy may do well to listen to his suggestion that, 'The conspiracy theorist challenges us to improve our social explanations. If a nonconspiratorial social explanation is better articulated as a result of the challenge of a conspiracy theory then that is all to the good' (Clarke 2002, 148). However, he is wrong to diminish the risk that conspiracy theories present. Clarke (2002, 148) suggests that 'few are actually harmful,' but it needs to be acknowledged that a conspiratorial theory of history was a contributor to the spread of anti-Semitism in Europe during the early part of the Twentieth Century. Cohn (1966) and Bronner (2000) provide a reminder of the influence of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* had during the Nazi era. Moreover, in line with other works (Barkun 2003, Wilson 2017) Bronner underscores the continued utility to the far right that *The Protocols* provides.

Following Michael Rogin's (1967) earlier work, Fenster (2008) divides academic commentaries on conspiracy thinking into two camps, symbolists and realists. The division is organized around the idea that academic writing about conspiracy theories generally serves two purposes: symbolists reflect centrist countersubversion and realist interest in conspiracy theory lies in delineating the ideological use of conspiracy theory by elite groups. Like Rogin,

Fenster describes Hofstadter as a symbolist and, rightfully, praises his approach for situating conspiracy theories in their historical social, economic, and political contexts but, tiresomely, does so in the 'Hofstadter as clinician' vein. Fenster (2008, 51) criticises realists for their, 'too-quick dismissal of conspiracy theory as a popular political practice,' and that their concentration on the instrumental uses of conspiracy theory obscures the initial circumstances that led to the politicisation of the advocates of conspiracy theory in the first place. This is certainly true but, equally, Fenster is overly hasty to err on the side of caution and extend the benefit of the doubt to conspiracy theorists in the name of open-mindedness. Fenster (2008, 90) writes that

> [C]onspiracy theories may be wrong or overly simplistic, but they may sometimes be on to something. Specifically, they may well address real structural inequities, albeit ideologically, and they may well constitute a response, albeit in a simplistic and decidedly unpragmatic form, to an unjust political order, a barren or dysfunctional civil society, and/or an exploitative economic system.

This is undeniable but by constructing and then writing dismissively of the so-called realist approach he diminishes the capacity to recognize that in the overly simplistic forms that conspiracy thinking can take there is a danger that the simplification produces potentially dangerous divisions within society. Whilst Fenster is right to highlight the capacity for conspiracy thinking to bring to light the grievances of a community it does not follow that this necessarily legitimizes conspiracy thinking as a reasonable response. As will be demonstrated, the danger in linking populism and conspiracy theory that Hofstadter outlines does pose an opportunity for potentially violent extremists to exploit and to radicalize popular dissent. Fenster is not alone in seeking to limit the perception of threat associated with conspiracy thinking. Similarly, Knight (2000) plays down the adversarial conspiracist outlook that Hofstadter delineated in pseudo-conservatives and the John Birch Society. Instead, Knight (2000, 75) insists that what was once the domain of the radical is now a mainstream reticence to extend trust or belief,

> Paranoia is no longer necessarily the mark of right-wing demonological extremism […] it has become a default attitude for the post-1960s generation, more an expression of inexhaustible suspicion and uncertainty than a dogmatic form of scaremongering.

Knight suggests that the populist, white right-wing forms of conspiracy thinking had become dissipated and indistinguishable from those shared by other social groups. He does this in a discussion of *The Turner Diaries* (1978), a race war fantasy novel written by the founder of the National Alliance, William Luther Pierce, under the pen name Andrew Macdonald. The novel depicts a guerrilla war waged by white nationalists in a future in which whites are routinely persecuted in a Jewish-run United States. Knight's analysis suggests that this is a response to the diminished position of the white working class within an economic and political context that has made equivalent the lives of all working people by destabilizing working class jobs and creating an equality of precariousness. Knight (2000, 42) writes,

> the increasing competition for diminishing social resources amongst so-called minority groups leads to mutual suspicions between the disinherited […] even the white Anglo male establishment now seeks to redefine itself as an embattled minority interest group in the face of a larger conspiracy group.

Furedi (2005) also embraces this model of an increased mainstreaming of conspiracy theory as marking a particular mode of subjectivity. He frames this as a crisis in agency, writing, 'No one is as they seem. This normalization of suspicion and mistrust does not possess any critical dimension. Agency panic represents the fear that the vulnerable subject bears towards an incomprehensible changing world' (Furedi 2005, 86). What is distinct in Furedi's (2005, 86) analysis is that whilst he embraces the generalised position he is still quite clear that conspiracy theory represents an analytical failure, describing it as a 'simplistic worldview,' that, 'displaces a critical engagement with public life with a destructive search for the hidden agenda.'

Barkun's (2003) detailed survey of American conspiracy culture in the new millennium recognized this generalized mistrust of traditional institutions and channels of communication. Nonetheless, whilst recognizing that a conspiracy view of history is present on both the left and right wing he is clear that how this outlook is made manifest is quite distinct in each instance. So, for example, in a discussion of the shared aspects of New World Order conspiracies he notes that those on the left are fearful of a restriction of rights and freedoms whilst those on the right are more likely to frame their conspiracy theories in terms of a direct persecution of themselves and their political allies. Barkun (2003, 72) writes, 'the right […] became obsessively concerned with the risk of their own incarceration.'

The theme of persecution by a socialist 'New World Order' is a well-established one on the right. Pat Robertson's (1991) use of this theme is well-documented and formed the basis of his book *The New World Order*. The book spent weeks in *The New York Times* non-fiction bestsellers list during November and December 1991. This popularity led Michael Barkun (1996) to describe it as one of two dominant factors behind the mainstreaming of populist nationalist conspiracy theories during the 1990s. The other factor he cited was the active presence on the Internet of the Militia movement; in the case of the Militias, he observed the commingling of conspiracism with Robertson's millenarian apocalypticism leading to a fervent urgency within their outlook. Thus, the conspiracism that was spread by members and sympathizers of the Militia movement was marked by an eschatological right wing outlook and it was this that characterized the mainstreaming of conspiracy theory as an actual phenomenon as opposed to the more general skepticism characterized by fictional forms such as *The X-Files*. Barkun (1996, 61) observed that 'Beliefs once consigned to the outermost fringes of American political and religious life now seem less isolated and stigmatizing than they once did.' This observation is developed by Nigel James (2001) in a chapter examining the Militia/Patriot movement's use of the Internet. In this, he also draws on Zygmunt Bauman's (1998, 1999, 2001) work on the erosion of prior sureties of identity by the dissolution of closed cultural systems brought about via relatively easy access to rapid intercontinental travel and global communications networks, particularly the Internet. Like Oliver and Wood (2014), James notes the tendency within the conspiracy milieu for conspiracy theorists and their followers to exhibit a pronounced Manichaeism in their worldviews. Following Bauman, he suggests that this becomes coupled with a retreat into a belligerent nationalism as a defense against the unbearable freedom to endlessly recreate the self that characterizes postmodern identities. It is, nonetheless, an ambivalent nationalism that accentuates loyalty to 'the nation' but this is qualified by the mistrustful antagonism toward the state found within conspiracism. James (2001, 83) provides a useful reminder that the recursive interlinking of websites and Internet-based methods of communication produce a virtual proximity in beliefs that are otherwise marginalised: 'the occultist/UFO/Egyptologist/ quasi-religious vortex of belief systems [is] never more than a few clicks away from a neo-Nazi or Christian Identity website.'

The Internet, #whitegenocide and the Radical Fringe

The Internet has provided an ideal medium for the dissemination of all manner of stigmatized knowledge and provided fringe groups and beliefs a potential audience that far exceeds the network of self-published magazines, fairs and speaking opportunities that Colin Campbell (1972) described as 'the circuit' by which the cultic milieu recruited during the 1970s. Whilst the content of the message being circulated may be analogous, the reach of fringe voices via global communication media exceeds the audiences in town halls and mail order publications by several magnitudes. Barkun (1996, 2003) raises this point and returns to it in his consideration of the prevalence of conspiracy themes in Donald Trump's campaigns for Republican Presidential candidate and U.S. President (Barkun 2017). In this short essay, Barkun reinforces his earlier point regarding the capacity for the Internet to amplify the voices of the bearers of stigmatized knowledge. He points to the capacity the web gives for republishing the same material on any number of platforms (or spamming as it is more usually called), also for the Internet to provide those with a little technical savvy to present their ideas in a polished manner that belies their fringe origins, and also the opportunity for 'securing pseudo-credibility' (Barkun 2017, 438) by being linked to be a more credible, mainstream source. In particular, though, he pays heed to the capacity for Web the 2.0 platforms such as Twitter and Facebook to accelerate the process of what he calls 'the mainstreaming of the fringe' (Barkun 2017, 441). Barkun identifies the Trump's use of Breitbart executive chair, Steve Bannon, as strategist to his campaign and presidency as a clear sign of a more generalised acceptance of far right fringe beliefs in the political mainstream; he describes Bannon and his connection with the alt-right as providing, 'a bridge to the fringe' (Barkun 2017, 440). He might equally have mentioned Trump's conversations with Alex Jones.

The Trump campaign was galvanized by support from the 'alt-right'. The alt-right is a relatively recent political formation within U.S. right wing circles. Whilst sharing some of the social conservativism of the religious right, the alt-right is marked by a comparative youthfulness and a radicalism in its racial politics. It is also marked by a nebulousness that prevents an easy ideological mapping and it is notable that its amorphousness can be at least attributed to its origins in the anonymous Internet message boards, 4chan and 8chan. There is a willed boundary pushing that tests freedom of speech in a progressive liberal environment; 'political correctness' is one of the alt-right's bugbears and the ludic nihilism of troll culture in 4/8chan has been given some political grounding by the alt-right. In this, #Gamergate is a clear precedent of the alt-right in its coupling of online trolling and reactionary attitudes to

gender roles. Similarly, the exhortations to 'transgress' made by Milo Yiannopoulos is clearly a targeted attack on the liberal values that have influenced sections of the US mass media and national politics for the last decade. Although the rapid ascendency of the alt-right has precluded the opportunity for an extended academic literature certain thematic similarities have begun to emerge. Barkun (2017, 439) is unequivocal in his description of the alt-right and notes that despite being 'a somewhat ill-defined label comprising white separatists, both anti-Semitic and non-anti-Semitic.' Rosenfeld echoes this but goes further in her characterization of the radical nature of the alt-right incursion into the mainstream. She views this fringe as proto-fascistic and a danger to the future of the U.S., and writes, 'Bannon regards his revolution - a "global Tea Party movement"—as a quintessentially spiritual movement that will return the West to its ancestral ("Judeo-Christian") culture' (Rosenfeld 2017, 13). In doing so she purposefully invokes Mussolini and her essay proliferates with justified references to the Fascistic leanings and influences apparent in the alt-right movement. Civil rights activists, the Southern Poverty Law Center detailed a number of the celebratory statements made by notable figures on the alt-right in the wake of Trump's victory (Piggott 2016). Many of these were expressed in ethno-nationalist terms confirming the alt-right's grounding in diverse white nationalist groups.

As has been detailed elsewhere one of the unifying cornerstones of white nationalist ethno-nationalist is a millenarian conspiracism (Wilson 2012, 2017). Wilson (2017) provides evidence of the purposeful use of the Twitter tag #whitegenocide by users of the white nationalist web forum, stormfront.org. During the multiple ISIL terrorist attacks on Paris on the night of November 13, 2015 forum members posted messages encouraging readers to use the hashtag in tweets relating to the attacks. The messages provide a clear account of white nationalist use of Twitter as a means of amplifying their politics of hate by association with trending political events. The phenomenon of hashtag activism has attracted some academic attention and most of it has been laudatory in the strategic use of hashtags to counter normative narratives of race, ethnicity, and racialized (in)justice, predominantly on Twitter (Yang 2016; Bonilla and Rosa 2015; Cumberpatch and Trujillo-Pagán 2016). Yang (2016, 15) notes the capacity for the shared use of the #BlackLivesMatter to allow a creative communality of shared experiences to join together disparate experiences of injustice through a shared narrative form and, 'create a collective story of struggles for racial justice.' Bonilla and Rosa (2015) also note the collective endeavor that links hashtag activists but also draw attention to the extended reception these creative acts are afforded. Even though the replies

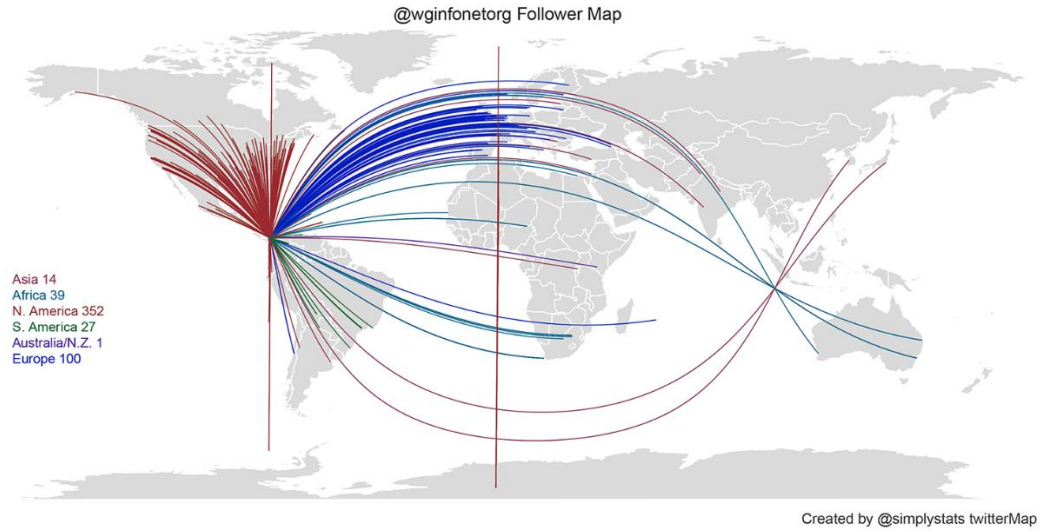
and retweets may have been challenging or critical, they note the capacity for the #Ferguson to mobilize attention to ongoing and widespread injustice in America:

> Within this context, social media participation becomes a key site from which to contest mainstream media silences […] social media users were able to show that "#Ferguson is everywhere"—not only in the sense of a broad public sphere but also in the sense of the underlying social and political relationships that haunt the nation as a whole. (Bonilla & Rosa 2015, 12)

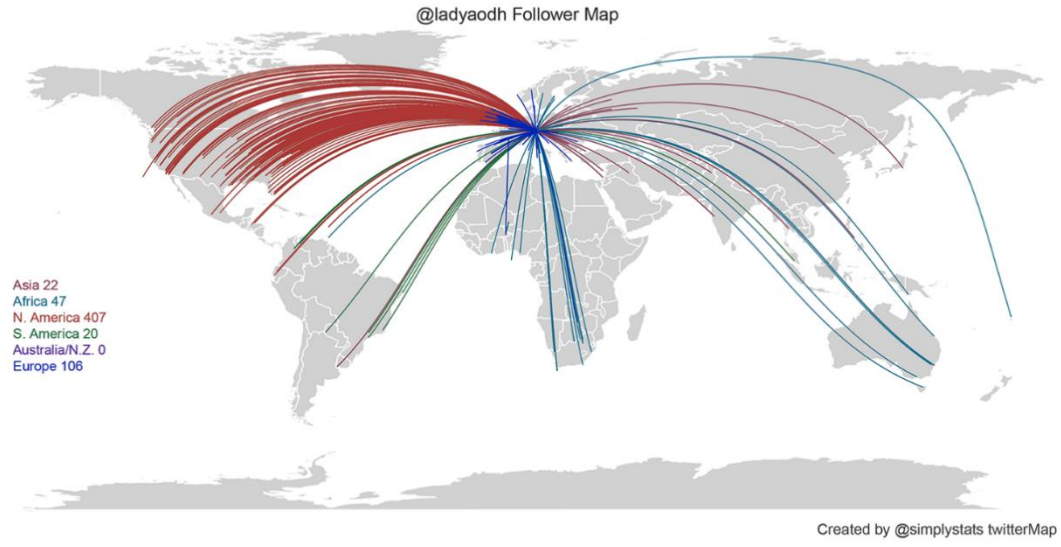
Quite rightly, Bonilla and Rose, as with Yang and others, point to the potential for hashtag activism to disrupt normatively regulated flows of information and to counter the institutional power structures represented by the mainstream media. However, as Barkun (1996, 2003, 2017) has shown, the open structures that allow the progressive use of the Internet and social media also provides an opportunity for reactionary voices to attempt the same. Thus, the communal effects of #BLM and the disinterring of concealed racial 'haunting' by #Ferguson are employed by the alt-right through #whitegenocide and other white power hashtags.

The following section explores current use of the hashtag and shows how text mining Twitter can enhance understanding of the situated use of #whitegenocide hashtag to further strengthen the bridge between the fringe and the political mainstream described above. Twitter's popularity clearly offers users a platform from which to address an extensive audience with 328 million monthly active users of whom 70m are American, this represents just under a quarter (24%) of all online American adults (Statista 2017). Although Twitter limits its archival database, text mining is able to make use of resources made available through Twitter search APIs (Application Programming Interface). In this instance, the free R statistical environment (R Core Team 2017) was used for the analysis. Additional R packages were used for Twitter API interaction (Gentry 2015), text mining (Feinerer & Hornik 2017), topic modeling (Grün & Hornik 2011), and visualization (Wickham 2009, Fellows 2014). 10,000 tweets using the #whitegenocide were filtered using text parsing to remove common words that added little to the character of the tweets (conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns and so forth). A frequency matrix which was used to further filter words used less than 100 times. From here a wordcloud was generated to provide an at-a-glance reference of the 50 words most frequently used in tweets flagged with #whitegenocide.

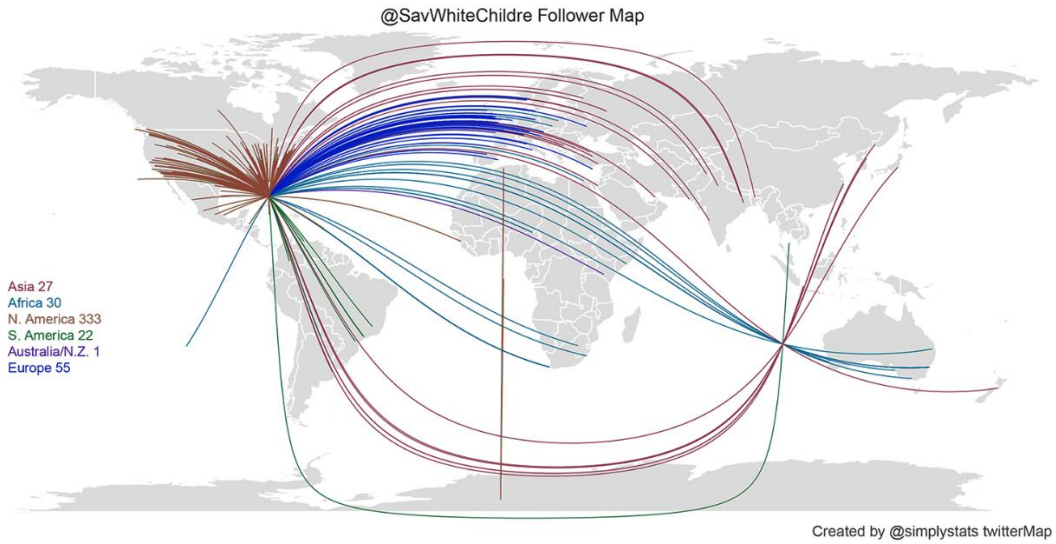
At the heart of the wordcloud are the two opposing terms in the white nationalist imaginary: white(s/ness/people/race) and diversity. The two poles in the white identitarians' Manichean divide between purity and plurality. What is also striking is the presence of a number of prominent alt-right Twitter users: @wginfonetorg (White Genocide Info), @ladyaodh (Ann Kelly, 'European rights activist'), @punishedrabbit1 (Jess Lynn, the number '1' is omitted from the wordcloud as numbers are not included in the term matrix), @savwhitechildre (SaveWhiteChildren). The latter is a clear reference to the '14 words' of mystic white supremacist David Lane, 'We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children' (cited in Michael 2009, 43). The presence of these usernames among the most frequently used terms indicates the capacity for individual users to shape hashtag usage on Twitter. The audience reach of these users is also instructive. The following maps indicate the geographic distribution of the followers of the three most overtly white supremacist of these users.



Map of followers for user White Genocide Info. Location of user estimated from linked website registrar information.



Map of followers for user Kelly Ann. Location of user estimated from linked website registrar information.

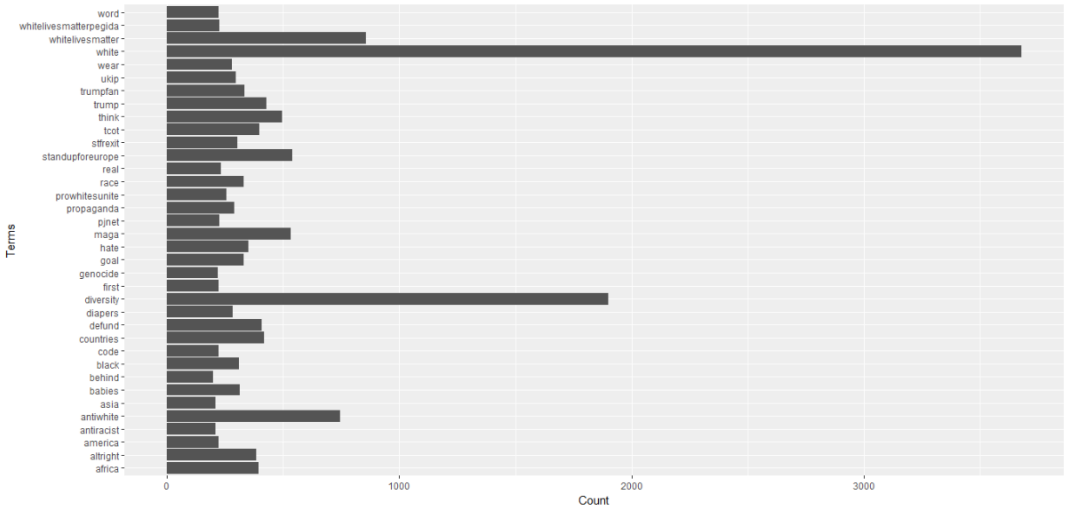


Map of followers for user Save White Children. Location of user estimated from linked website registrar information.

Although their locations are varied the three most notable #whitegenocide posters all provide a link to a homepage offering white supremacist propaganda. The distribution of their audience is broadly comparable with roughly 70% of their followers based in the U.S. and in the cases of White Genocide Info and Kelly Ann a European following of roughly 18%. Save White Children has a slightly smaller European following (11.8%) and a more pronounced South American following. It must also be recognized that only a small percentage of their following provide a geographic location and so the maps above are limited in their scope. For instance, only 2.2% of Kelly Ann's c.26.5 thousand followers provide a location that was identifiable by the R source code, *TwitterMap* (Leek 2011). Nonetheless, the broad point is that if there is an equal distribution of users providing geographic locations, in all three instances their potential audiences are global.

The word cloud procedure was repeated with the usernames of the individual removed from the term matrix. This brings a sharper focus on the variety of terms most frequently associated with the #whitegenocide as can be seen below:

Three of the five third tier terms (after the Manichean binary, ‘white’ and ‘diversity’) are hashtags: #WhiteLivesMatter, #StandUpForEurope, and #MAGA. The first two are alt-right activist hashtags whilst the latter is President Trump’s campaign slogan ‘Make America Great Again.’ #MAGA is a close tie for the fifth most frequently paired term with #whitegenocide. The following chart demonstrates the frequency distribution of terms used in more than 200 #whitegenocide posts from the sample.



Other frequently occurring hashtags include #tcot (Top Conservatives on Twitter) and #pjnet (Patriotic Journalists Network). The strategy here is clear. #whitegenocide is being

repeatedly used in proximity to more mainstream hashtags as a mechanical means to effect the bridging from the fringe to the mainstream outlined above. Trump is a clear conduit and it is no great surprise that he features in the 50 terms most frequently associated with #whitegenocide. His prevarications on matters of race and his relationship with the alt-right have ensured that the bridge to the mainstream continues to be available to the fringes of the right wing. A frequency analysis of terms most frequently associated with #maga in the dataset of tweets featuring #whitegenocide shows the following to be the most frequently associated terms:

tcot	**whitepower**	**natsoc**	**ccot**	**trump**	**altright**	**hate**	**pjnet**
.58	.57	.56	.43	.41	.40	.37	.33

There is a clear divide in these between overtly radical rights stances and the more traditional conservative right but the location of #maga and Trump vacillate between the two and are revealed as the bridges between the mainstream and the fringe described in Barkun. For clarity, these can be organized in the following table:

Traditional Right	**Bridging Terms**	**Radical Right**
#tcot (Top Conservatives on Twitter)	#maga (“Make America Great Again”)	#whitepower
#ccot (Conservative Christians on Twitter)	Trump	(#)natsoc (National Socialism)
#pjnet (Patriot Journalists Network)		#altright hate

Echoing the division between ‘genuine conservatives’ and ‘pseudo-conservatives’ made by Hofstadter, Barkun’s fringe increasingly find ways into the mainstream of American politics and shift the discourse of conservatism in a more radical direction. As was indicated above,

in the conclusion of 'The Paranoid Style,' Hofstadter (1964, 86) warned of the susceptibility of the capacity for conspiracist rhetoric to be, 'built into mass movements or political parties.' Wittingly or not, Trump's rhetoric has galvanized the radical right as they set their sights on mainstream acceptance.

Concluding Comments

The compounding and expansion of state secrecy during the Cold War and the War on Terror produced an era of mistrust and generalized suspicion described by Fenster, Knight, and Aupers. Not unreasonably, they signal conditional approval for the skepticism toward loci of power/knowledge within the modern state and globalized corporate entities that conspiracy theory represents; although their approval is tempered by the more outré claims of fringe conspiracy theories. Nonetheless, the dismissal of Hofstadter's work as an operation in clinical diagnosis has correspondingly resulted in an unpreparedness for the exploitation of this 'culture of conspiracy' by the radical fringe. It should be noted here that conspiracies do exist and that conspiracy theories are not the preserve of the political right. Covert actions are, arguably, a necessary part of statecraft but their distinction from conspiracies is determined only by the legitimacy of the power that is exerted in their enaction. At the same time, fanciful accounts of the secret exertion of power to achieve grand, malevolent ends abound. What is of note in our moment is the spread of conspiracy theories into the mainstream. In their turn to conspiracy theory, the radical right have conformed to the 'diagnosis' made by Hofstadter.

To return to Hofstadter's article on the paranoid style, it is notable that he dedicates a subsection to the paranoid spokesman's habit of 'Emulating the Enemy.' Among the Ku Klux Klan, anti-Communists, anti-Catholics, and anti-Masons' reproduction of the tactics or organisational structures of their perceived enemies, Hofstadter also describes how 'the John Birch Society emulates Communist cells and quasi-secret operation through 'front' groups, and preaches a ruthless prosecution of the ideological war along lines very similar to those it finds in the Communist enemy' (Hofstadter 1964, 85). The parallels with the alt-right's reproduction of #BlackLivesMatter in its reversed form as #WhiteLivesMatter is clearly a maneuver in this tradition and might be understood to represent a desire to emulate and claim a parallel creative community to the one described by Yang (2016). Although this simple

mimicry is more redolent of the fragile desperation with which the alt-right seeks a consistent, communal 'white' identity than it is of a developed political strategy. Nonetheless, political progressives would be well advised to dismiss the continued hashtag activism of the alt-right at their peril. Whilst this article was being completed President Trump gave a public speech to a crowd in Warsaw, Poland ahead of the G20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany. He told the crowd,

> The fundamental question of our time is whether the West has the will to survive? […] Do we have the confidence in our values to defend them at any cost? Do we have enough respect for our citizens to protect our borders? Do we have the desire and the courage to preserve our civilization in the face of those who would subvert and destroy it? (Thrush & Davis 2017, §6)

Trump's association with the alt-right leaves little room to doubt that his 'West' is a white West. His rhetoric is at once that of the paranoid spokesman trafficking 'in the birth and death of whole worlds, whole political orders, whole systems of human values. He is always manning the barricades of civilization' (Hofstadter 1964, 82). Certainly, Huntington's (1993, 1996) clash of civilizations casts a long shadow over this rhetoric but in light of the enmeshed hashtags, the proximity of the alt-right to the White House, Steven Bannon's strategic role, it is not unreasonable to suppose that there will be an audience for Trump's words that hears not Huntington's influence but that of William Pierce, David Lane's 14 words, or #whitegenocide.

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Appendix H. (Wilson 2019) 'The Prism of Lyra: UFO Consciousness and Portals to Cosmic Awareness' in J.Poller (ed.) Altered Consciousness in the Twentieth Century. London: Routledge.

8. UFO Consciousness and Portals to Cosmic Awareness

Andrew Wilson

This chapter provides an overview of modes of consciousness experienced by people who believe that they have been contacted by extra-terrestrial entities. Although these experiences are widely varied there are two primary modes of experience: forced contact (abduction) and dialogic contact (channelled messages or physical manifestations). These can range from a single isolated event to decades of sustained interaction. Although it is not exclusively the case, forced contact tends to take the form of singular events whilst dialogic contact tends to be ongoing. Although there are accounts of dialogic contact in which the contactee claims to have been physically visited by alien entities[1] the prevailing norm is for this kind of contact to be a message conveyed by a fully realised alien mind – either that of an individual entity or a gestalt consciousness. Each will be discussed with the seminal abductee account provided by Betty and Barney Hill providing a focus for discussion of the abduction scenario whilst the current work of entity channel Lyssa Royal Holt will provide an extended case study of the extent to which states of altered consciousness have relevance to channelling.[2] The focus of this chapter is the theme of self-transcendence in the experience of UFO channels. In Lyssa Royal Holt's written and spoken material the self-transcendence attained through alien contact promises humanity the 'collective salvation' that Wessinger attributes to millennialism.[3]

[1] Raël (Claude Vorilhon) and George Adamski are notable examples of contactees who engaged in conversation with extra-terrestrial visitors to Earth.
[2] Lyssa Royal Holt has added 'Holt' to her surname during the 2010s but the majority of her published writing to date has been written under the name Lyssa Royal. Her current surname, 'Holt,' is used throughout the text to refer to her but Royal is used in the notes and bibliography for accuracy.
[3] Catherine Wessinger, 'Millennialism in Cross-Cultural Perspective', in *The Oxford Handbook of Millennialism*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4-5.

It should be made clear that discussion of the experiences of contactees does not imply a simple acceptance of the claims that are being made. Whilst, at times, the case studies may be related from an emic perspective, my stance is an etic one but in order to enhance the readability of this chapter the decision has been made not to qualify every statement of belief or experience with the phrase 'claims to have' or similar. The contested nature of the objectivity of these experiences is referred to from time to time but what is far more important is to ensure that the mental worlds, constructs and terms of reference of the contactees are treated with an eye for accuracy and fairness. They will be analysed from a perspective that seeks to situate their experiences in a framework that links them to the wider social and cultural context of their particular historical moment.

The narrative of humans claiming contact with nonhuman intelligence is long and, arguably, begins with the complex and contested history of shamanism and the traditions it has been applied to since.[4] Nonetheless, I believe a distinction can be made between earlier forms of contact and those that have occurred in modern, secularised societies, especially those accounts that have come in the wake of the post-World War II 'space race' and the objective fact of physical human exploration beyond Earth's atmosphere.[5] Certainly, George Adamski and Kenneth Arnold[6] predate the space race but the idea of space travel was more or less culturally embedded by then through science fiction, comic books and film serials, such as the Flash Gordon series. Whilst Arnold was a 'reliable witness' of unidentified flying objects, Adamski presents a more useful and pertinent point of reference in the context of this chapter as he encapsulates the coming together of what Geppert characterises as 'astroculture' and spiritual consciousness.[7] Altered states have been the foundation of modern UFO contact for most – but not all – experiencers.

George Adamski's claim to have experienced a direct, physical encounter with an alien provides a seminal instance of physical visitation. Following a series of UFO sightings, he claimed to have communicated with a 'Nordic' Venusian called Orthon in the Colorado

[4] Ronald Hutton, *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination* (London: Hambledon and London, 2001).
[5] Andrew Fergus Wilson, 'Postcards from the Cosmos: Cosmic Spaces in Alternative Religion and Conspiracy Theories', *The Journal of Astrosociology* 2 (2017).
[6] Arnold is credited with the first sighting of UFOs in 1947.
[7] Alexander C.T. Geppert, 'Extraterrestrial encounters: UFOs, science and the quest for transcendence, 1947–1972', *History and Technology* 28, no.3 (2012): 335-362.

Desert in November 1952.[8] Orthon's message was a warning of impending doom should humanity continue experimentation with nuclear weapons; the contact is typically benign and contactees come away from their encounter with a warning for humanity to mend its ways or face catastrophic consequences. These prophetic messages from higher intelligences predate the UFO phenomenon and take many forms in religious and esoteric traditions. Adamski was not only aware of this but situated his visitation by Orthon in a tradition of spiritual contact by ascended masters associated with the Theosophical Society. Christopher Partridge has provided a detailed study of the incorporation of ascended masters into post-World War II Theosophy and the influence of Theosophy on Adamski's understanding of his experience.[9] Partridge draws attention to the incorporation of technological themes into the spiritual millennium that are accentuated in Adamski's adaption of Theosophy.[10]

Adamski's prophetic message warned of the risk of nuclear annihilation if humankind failed to develop spiritual wisdom at the same rate as its technological development. These warnings are, effectively, millennialist and promise utopian joy should humanity achieve the required spiritual evolution. This is commonplace in the messages relayed by many subsequent contactees and channels, such as Lyssa Royal Holt, and while some have threatened apocalypse the majority are concerned with a millennialist awareness of humanity's destiny to become a species at home in the cosmos. In the case of Holt, this is an eschatological transformation of consciousness in which individuals progressively surrender their unique consciousness to a single, amalgamated consciousness. This is reminiscent of the model of the evolution of consciousness described in Theosophy. In Holt, the influence is unacknowledged, so embedded is the concept in New Age-influenced spiritual formations, but in Adamski's account the influence is evident.

Multiple other contactees followed in Adamski's wake with tales of contact – and travel – with the 'space brothers'. Among these were George King, a taxi driver living in Maida Vale, London. He received contact from 'Mars Sector Six' in the form of a voice he heard whilst washing his dishes at the kitchen sink during 1954. Although King did not receive the same kind of physical visitation that Adamski did his message was broadly comparable and owed

[8] Don Lago, 'Messages from Space', *Michigan Quarterly Review* 54, no.1 (2015). Available from http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0054.108.
[9] Christopher Partridge, 'Understanding UFO religions and abduction spiritualities,' in *UFO Religions*, ed. Christopher Partridge (London: Routledge, 2003)
[10] Ibid., 15.

much of its structure and message to the same Theosophical roots.[11] Whilst Adamski's daughter and other followers formed the George Adamski Foundation to maintain Adamski's message following his death, King founded a religious organisation based on the messages from the cosmic masters who he claimed communicated with him.[12] Named after his primary contact, the Aetherius Society has survived King's death and continues to spread King's work and to meet for the purpose of focussing positive energies to counter current challenges. Under King's tutelage, the Aetherius Society developed into a structured and consistent religious movement; King was undoubtedly the charismatic leader around which it was organised and within its teachings he alone possessed a mind that was sufficiently evolved to receive the message of the cosmic masters. His basic message, described by Simon Smith as an urgent need for humanity to reach 'a higher state of evolution as soon as possible',[13] is repeated – replete with Theosophical underpinnings – by many current channels but where they vary is the diminishment of the necessity for a charismatic leader. Instead, many now suggest that the required psychic development necessary to become attuned to the correct vibrational frequencies through which to receive contact from alien consciousnesses is attainable by any human who follows a spiritual path. Certainly, this development can be traced to the individualistic spiritual seekership associated with New Age religious sensibilities but that does not mean that aspects of the content of King's messages do not resonate in current beliefs, although this chapter seeks to draw attention to the social and cultural context of contactee discourse.

King appeared on British national television a number of times and both discussed his experiences and appeared to receive channelled messages live on air. The first of these appearances, on *Lifeline* in 1959, consisted of King channelling a report from 'Mars Sector Six' and a discussion between King, a Cambridge astronomer, a Jungian psychologist and the host, psychiatrist Dr David Stafford-Clark. In his summing up of the programme, Stafford-Clark offered the home audience the following guidance: '[It] would be easy, foolish in fact, to deride Mr King […] but what the Aetherius Society is really doing is expressing in a symbolic form the fears and anxieties that divide the world […] The fear that our scientific

[11] Simon G. Smith, 'Opening a channel to the stars: The origins and development of the Aetherius Society', in *UFO Religions*.
[12] John Gordon Melton, 'Spiritualist, Psychic, and New Age Family', in *Encyclopedia of American Religions,* vol. 2, ed. John Gordon Melton, 3rd edn (New York: Triumph Books, 1991).
[13] Smith, 'Opening a channel to the stars', 93.

advances have outrun our wisdom and our humanity in some respects, and that we are afraid it might outrun our very existence.'[14]

The argument being made here is not far removed from Stafford-King's closing remarks. The ongoing dislocation between scientific knowledge, its technologies and the instrumentalisation of our lifeworlds and our ability to represent and culturally reflect the subsequent complex and rapidly changing nature of our social, technological, and cultural realities is the basis of differing versions of the crisis of postmodernity. In Lyotard, Baudrillard, Jameson, and Virilio our systems of representation are no longer capable of reflecting our realities to us – they become either concerned with their own self-referentiality or are simply outstripped by new media of communication.[15] Thus, the primary mechanism through which modern societies had become accustomed to engaging with the cultural realm fails to provide a meaningful cultural response to this cultural context. When science, technology, culture, the economy, and society appear alien then the attraction of the alien motif as a means through which to make sense of one's position in the new cosmos becomes compelling. It is argued here that the cosmic consciousness appealed to and held up as an ideal is a socio-spiritual signifier of entry into a technologically transformed relationship with ourselves and the now-breached heavens.

Although much of what follows is concerned with an attempt to uplift human consciousness into an evolved form more fully oriented toward a global, technological future, it should be noted that there are those for whom such dramatic change comes at a cost. If there is a symbolic hope for a techno-utopia in the channelled messages, abductees reflect a fearfulness borne out of alienation and confusion. In 1964, whilst under hypnosis, Betty and Barney Hill 'recovered' memories of being abducted by aliens three years earlier. During their time on the alien craft the Hills claim to have been made the subjects of medical experimentation. This was physically invasive and traumatic. Betty Hill recounted having a range of tissue and fluid samples taken via the insertion of a large, needle-like instrument into her naval. Her husband, Barney, reported being anally probed and having his semen extracted. Initially they

[14] Cited in David Clarke, *How UFOs Conquered the World: The History of a Modern Myth* (London: Aurum, 2015), 177.
[15] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984); Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation* trans. Sheila Glazer (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991); Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics*, trans. Mark Polizzoti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986).

had no memory of their experience beyond a period of 'lost time' after having been pursued by bright lights whilst driving through the deep woods in the northern reaches of New Hampshire late at night on September 19, 1961. Having stopped their car to observe the lights first Betty and then Barney came to the conclusion that they were watching a craft of non-terrestrial origin. According to their account, it approached and they observed several uniformed humanoid figures who signalled to them. Fearful, they fled in their car but claimed to be unable to account for a period during which they drove over thirty miles save for memories of electric buzzing sounds at the start and end of that period.

In *The Interrupted Journey* (1966), the journalist John Fuller worked with the Hills and their psychotherapist Benjamin Simon to produce a narrative for those missing hours. Barney Hill had first visited Simon in December 1963 seeking help for a generalised anxiety disorder and the disturbing, repetitive nightmares his wife was suffering from. It is only as their sessions continued that the importance to them of the abduction became clear. The relevance of the Hills here is not the entry into the hypnotic state. Writing in the preface to *The Interrupted Journey*, Simon is quite clear in his belief that hypnosis does not offer access to thought processes or content that would otherwise be unavailable to hypnotherapist or client: 'Under hypnosis, experiences buried in amnesia may be recalled in a much shorter time than in the normal course of the psychotherapeutic process. Nevertheless, there is little produced under or by hypnosis that is not possible without.'[16] What is relevant is the state of mind that the Hills describe as being produced in them during their time on board the craft they described. According to the account he gave whilst under hypnosis, Barney Hill received telepathic communication from the aliens but unlike the dialogic contactees this caused him pain: 'Just stay there, he said. *(Now his voice breaks in extreme terror.)* It's pounding in my head!! *(He screams again.)* I gotta get away! I gotta get away from here!'[17] Barney Hill went on to recount whilst under hypnosis how he was rendered helpless by the alien abductors, carried on to the UFO whilst in a state comparable to the hypnosis he was undergoing as part of his therapy. Whilst on board the alien ship he had a memory of being on an operating table with something cold cupping his groin. Once released from the flying saucer he recalled being full of relief and meeting Betty in the road, also in a state of happiness, 'Betty and I feel, I feel real hilarious, like a feeling of well-being and great relief [...] I am relieved because I feel like

[16] Dr Benjamin Simon, 'Preface,' in John G. Fuller, *The Interrupted Journey: Two Lost Hours 'Aboard a Flying Saucer'* (New York: The Dial Press, 1966), ix.
[17] Fuller, *The Interrupted Journey*, 94

I've been in a harrowing situation, and there was nothing damaging or harmful about it'.[18] Their experience became archetypal of the invasive abduction typically recounted by abductees. In both forced contact and dialogic contact the state of mind of the contactees is other. For the Hills it is repressed and hidden from the waking mind whilst for King and Adamski the experience brings spiritual wisdom and is the result of a heightened awareness. As was noted in the comments of his contemporaries, King's beliefs were treated as symbolic of an emergent social reality. Jodi Dean suggests that the Hills experiences – no less real for them – simultaneously carried a symbolic dimension that referred to a general theme in abduction accounts of alienation whilst also expressing the particularity of their experiences as an ethnically mixed couple, Barney being African-American and Betty European-American. In her general account of anomic futurity, Dean points to the diminished sense of location, blurred accounts of spaceships and unknown stars, of being whisked off to an unknown place by an unknowable technology: 'Not only is alien technology invasive and incomprehensible, but virtually all technology is alien'.[19] For the Hills in particular, and subsequent narratives of human-alien hybridity, an implicit aspect of their account was the ongoing sense of dislocatedness and prejudice experienced primarily by Barney. Dean asks, 'Is it possible that his story escaped the confines of ufology because it commented on tensions around racial difference and mixed marriage in the United States during the 1960s, on the transgression of racial boundaries? Was it a way of thinking the unthinkable? Of using a stigmatized discourse to probe stigmatized practices?'[20]Again, we find the hinterlands of accepted experience providing the discursive space in which social practices without representation in recorded culture are afforded expression.

Current contact and evolutionary consciousness

Lyssa Royal Holt and her extensive written and recorded archive provides a valuable means of understanding the alien contact experience as both process and belief system. Holt is a psychology graduate who grew up in the Northeast of the United States and her psychological training may well begin to explain her pragmatic approach to channelling. She does not

[18] Ibid., 128
[19] Jodi Dean, *Aliens in America: Conspiracy Cultures from Outer Space to Cyberspace (*Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 111.
[20] Ibid., 165.

present herself as the sole recipient of the aliens' message as did George King. Instead, she believes that the capacity to communicate with aliens is inborn in all humans and provides workshops that seek to train people to access it. She offers a variety of programs with an intensive course taught in Japan being the basis of all other sessions.[21] At the time of writing, Holt was offering a three-day residential course in the US in September 2018 and a wider range of programs in Japan.[22] During these sessions students are taught by Holt and two extra-terrestrial consciousnesses that she channels, Sasha, a Pleiadian entity and Germane, a group consciousness. Although Holt's training sessions are commercial offerings[23] she has made publicly available an extensive archive of written materials in multiple translations via her website and hours of video teachings and interviews on her Youtube channel.[24] These are supplemented by three published books outlining her work and the message she claims to be channelling from extra-terrestrial entities and a pack of divinatory cards that are intended to aid their user in accessing the higher aspect of consciousness that Holt describes as our evolutionary destiny. The books are: *Prism of Lyra: An Exploration of Human Galactic Heritage* (1989), *Visitors From Within: Extraterrestrial Encounters and Species Evolution* (1992), and *Preparing for Contact: A Metamorphosis of Consciousness* (1994); all three have been edited and updated with *Preparing for Contact* having being most recently expanded and revised in 2011. The divinatory cards are published under the title of *Galactic Heritage Cards*. They're based on *Prism of Lyra* but are intended as a supplementary tool for accessing cosmological consciousness. The cards depend upon Holt's description of the fragmentary nature of consciousness for what she claims to be their divinatory capabilities. After the Fall, in Holt's account, all current consciousness across the universe became separated from 'the Whole' and thus the Whole was fragmented into collective and individual consciousness. Nonetheless, all forms of identity – group and self – contain the memory of the Whole and thus Holt describes the holographic nature of consciousness. Essentially, she is using 'holographic' in a metaphorical rather than literal sense; she is suggesting that the fragment of unified consciousness we experience as our ego contains an untapped model of the expanded cosmic awareness that she suggests is the destiny of all sentience. On the basis of

[21] Lyssa Royal Holt, 'Channeling Training', Home of the Lyssa Royal Material and Royal Priest Research, accessed Aug. 14, 2018, http://www.lyssaroyal.net/channeling-training.html.
[22] Lyssa Royal Holt, 'Schedule 2018,' Home of the Lyssa Royal Material and Royal Priest Research, accessed Aug. 14, 2018, http://www.lyssaroyal.net/-schedule.html.
[23] A 2018 US-based course taught over three modules charged $395 per module. Lyssa Royal Holt, 'Channeling and Quantum Integration', Home of the Lyssa Royal Material and Royal Priest Research, accessed Aug. 14, 2018, http://www.lyssaroyal.net/channel-training-usa-info.html.
[24] Lyssa Royal Holt, 'SOLi School | Lyssa Royal Holt' Youtube Channel, accessed Aug. 16, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCeuLbnOjJBUfqqm2KEqkpLA.

this, Holt describes the relationship between the card reader and what is to her the destiny of consciousness as unified and integrated with the cosmos: 'What happens to your connection to the hologram when you pick a card? An analogy can explain it. The hologram is spinning. When you pick a card, it is like tapping the spinning computer with your finger. A window pops out like on a computer. In that window, you see an aspect of yourself that is represented on that card.'[25]

Certainly, the cards are a commercial endeavour and are one of many such divinatory tools available in the 'spiritual supermarket' that at once describes the eclecticism of belief and the commoditisation of religion that some associate with New Age religions.[26] To some sociologists of religion this signifies the waning of religion's affect and the primacy of the secular world; notably, Steve Bruce has discussed this in relation to New Age religious formations.[27] For Bruce, this commercialisation of religious practices devalues it and limits the opportunity for individuated consumer-believers to effect change in the world in the manner in which, say, Methodists did in nineteenth-century Britain. Nonetheless, as Guy Redden has subsequently pointed out, this overlooks the complex ways in which New Age beliefs are consumed as well as the evidence that the social, political and civic engagement of New Age spiritual seekers is generally greater than their secular counterparts.[28] Moreover, as Paul Heelas suggests the embracement by believers of a holism that runs counter to the instrumentalism of late capitalism continues the 'romantic trajectory' of 'the qualitative versus the quantitative, the expansive versus the restrictive, the expressive versus the channelled, the priceless versus the philistine, the bloom versus the cage'.[29] That is not to say that Holt is engaged in any active campaign of resistance to corporate oligarchies, but her message of shared humanity and universalism does run counter to rising currents of populism and Trumpian calls to 'build a wall' – both real and symbolic. Holt's is a developing work and whilst there are other, earlier examples with a similar message she describes her role as a channel of alien consciousnesses as part of a (shared) responsibility to bring about an

[25] Lyssa Royal Holt, *Galactic Heritage Cards: Card Meanings and Commentaries* (Flagstaff, Arizona: Light Technology Publishing, 2013), 23.
[26] Marion Bowman, 'Healing in the Spiritual Marketplace: Consumers, Courses and Credentialism', *Social Compass* 46, no.2 (1999): 181–189.
[27] Steve Bruce, 'The New Age and Secularization', in *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, ed. Steven Sutcliffe and Marion Bowman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000).
[28] Guy Redden, 'Revisiting the spiritual supermarket: does the commodification of spirituality necessarily devalue it?' *Culture and Religion* 17, no.2 (2016): 231-249.
[29] Paul Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life: New Age Romanticism and Consumptive Capitalism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 220. Of course, here, Heelas is referring to 'the channelled' as a dependency on received Earthly 'common sense'.

evolution in human consciousness. 'If we are to truly transform, it will be through the infusing of awareness onto our world, not using the awareness to escape from our responsibilities as citizens of Earth and the Galactic Family.'[30]

Holt's account of telepathic contact with alien intelligences from the Pleiades star cluster is remarkably similar to those of King. In each case the aliens who appear to, or speak through, the contactees are benign and seek to aid humanity's development as cosmic beings. The state of mind that allows perception of the aliens is a state of awareness that has integrated with the expanded cosmic consciousness that is typically described as humanity's evolutionary destiny – although it is worth considering this to be a spiritual evolution rather than a physical one. As in King's narrative this spiritual evolution fulfils a return to a cosmologically holistic state. Where Holt's differs is that the 'integrated consciousness'[31] she describes which, in King's earlier versions, stemmed from a specialised and particular history of esoteric development, is more widespread and available in her version. Indeed, this wider consciousness shift is intrinsic to the messages that she claims to channel.

Although her contact with alien consciousness is benign, Holt recognises continuity between her experiences and those of the abductees. As noted in relation to the Hills' 'ur-abduction', the abductions were experienced only in retrospect, the shift in consciousness being so violent that at the time of abduction the experiencers were reduced to a near-catatonic state. Holt dedicated her second book to the abductees in the following way: 'To all humans who have allowed the abduction phenomenon to touch their lives… Thank you for being humanity's pioneers on the evolutionary frontier.'[32] Essentially, Holt explains the abductions as being a mismatch between the abductees' undeveloped cosmic consciousness and the expanded awareness of unified consciousness held by the aliens. In a channelled conversation with the Zeta Reticulan Harone, it is suggested that the aliens' perception of the shared consciousness of higher lifeforms provides an implicit consent to abduction.

[30] Lyssa Royal and Keith Priest, *The Prism of Lyra: An Exploration of Human Galactic Heritage* (Scottsdale, Arizona: Royal Priest Research Press, 1992), ix.
[31] Lyssa Royal and Keith Priest, *Visitors From Within: Extraterrestrial Encounters and Species* Evolution, 2nd edn (Columbus, NC: Granite Publishing, 1999), 14.
[32] Ibid., iii.

> *I'd like to open this conversation with a question. What is the nature of the agreement or permission perceived by the Zeta Reticuli that allows them to abduct, detain, and experiment with humans?*
>
> Harone: The nature is simple. We view your collective soul as being a part of ours and therefore by that unification, permission is granted.[33]

Moreover, the abductions are presented as a necessary stage in humanity's entry into cosmic consciousness. Harone continues, 'Therefore, as a member of the universal races, it is our responsibility and also our gift to assist planets in their evolutionary steps'.[34] The aliens are, in effect, proselytising a literally universal teleology. Following the trauma of the abduction, humans adapt to and integrate the alien presence then, by acting on the guidance offered through the dialogic contacts, humanity becomes a fully-realised cosmic being. I have written elsewhere about the potential for reading expressions of human spirituality that focus on alien life and extra-terrestrial experiences as a response to the culture shock of becoming a space-faring species and this theme is continued in the discussion of Holt and her comparable channels.[35]

Holt's cosmology follows the Paradise-Fall-Redemption (PFR) narrative structure of Christianity and is expressed in terms of seven 'densities' of being.[36] The densities are post-Fall states of being whose coming-into-being provide the basis of the Creation myth in Holt's cosmology. In Holt's account, the Fall is a falling away from a unified consciousness shared by all matter in the universe; human selfhood and ego are symptoms of this fall, a stage of (re-)ascension toward oneness with 'the Source'. Although the Source is the state of being to which all beings are oriented, Holt refers to the fragment of reality that humanity experiences as, 'the Whole, All That Is, or God'.[37] Holt is clear that the splitting of the Whole from the Source is analogous to the moment of creation – both in secular and religious constructs. In her rendering of the creation myth it is curiosity that stimulates the splitting of reality between the Source and the Whole: 'The Whole's initial curiosity about a fragmented

[33] Ibid., 46
[34] Ibid.
[35] Wilson, 'Postcards from the Cosmos: Cosmic Spaces in Alternative Religion and Conspiracy Theories'.
[36] See Royal, *The Prism of Lyra*. She outlines this in Prism of Lyra and continues to refer to it in her written and spoken word.
[37] Royal, *The Prism of Lyra*, 1.

existence actually created the reality itself. It required a shift in perspective, focus, or frequency'.[38]

In Holt's account, whilst the potential to access this consciousness is inborn it is seldom accessed. The majority of humanity exist in the 'third density' and await initiation into fourth density consciousness. Although it is an uncomfortable metaphor, consciousness density may be understood as the bandwidth of information that a being has available to it by which it understands its relation to the Whole.[39] Holt expresses this in terms of the rapidity of vibrations within a being's energy field and the higher number of vibrations equates to a higher level of 'density'. Thus humans (and other beings) who exist in the third density are conscious of their self and its relationship to a larger reality but perceive themselves as distinct from that reality. Each density corresponds to a state of consciousness defined in relationship to its degree of separation from the Source and represents a stage of evolution in a being's consciousness. Whilst each stage is a distinct level of consciousness, Holt suggests that movement through the densities is experienced as a continuum:

> As a civilization's consciousness begins to evolve, they begin evolving from a 3rd-density perspective of […] intense singularity […] into what we call a 4th-density reality […] this is a spectrum. So the metaphor there is the anchor that anchors the consciousness in singularity in 3rd density begins to get lighter and lighter and lighter.[40]

The first density is 'Awareness as a point; Physical matter [...] It provides the matter and energy for the creation of atoms and molecules'.[41] Leibniz's monad is called to mind by the first density in the absoluteness of each monad's distinctiveness. The second density energy vibration is linear and is a consciousness shared by lower animals and other organic matter lacking self-awareness; beings in second density consciousness share a group identity that inhibits their connection to the holistic source. As stated, the majority of humans experience reality through third-density consciousness, Holt describes this as 'Volumetric awareness',

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[38] Ibid., 2
[39] Although uncomfortable the metaphor has some relevance here. In the preface to *Being with the Beings: The How and the Why of E.T. Contact*, Miguel Mendoza speaks of 'downloading' information from cosmic consciousnesses. This theme of advanced technology contributes to the improvised millennialism of much current channelling of alien consciousness.
[40] Interviewed in Miguel Mendonca, *Being with the Beings: The How and Why of ET Contact* (N.p.: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2017), 39.
[41] Royal, *The Prism of Lyra*, 4.

characterised by, 'Ego; Loss of group identity, development of individual identity; Ability to remember past and cognize the future while retaining present awareness'.[42] The third density is therefore a dimension of consciousness defined through difference: self from others, this moment from other moments in linear time and so on. In Holt's system the content of conscious thought in third-density consciousness is never a true experience of the integrative nature of shared cosmic consciousness; the ego contains the possibility of consciousness of the Whole but is constantly deflected from realising that possibility by the logic of difference that the ego requires. Like an organic intellectual, Holt builds a meaningful response to the condition of consciousness in the early twenty-first century but unlike Gramsci's figure she articulates not a focused, political will (say, hegemony or counter-hegemony) but a diffuse, intuited response to ongoing transformation of the pluralistic *Geist* (mind, spirit, culture). The polyvalency of the term in Hegel is useful in capturing the simultaneous realisation of multi-layered consciousness that Holt suggests is experienced in the fourth density of consciousness.

The fourth density and humanity's evolutionary consciousness

Holt summarises fourth density consciousness as 'Superconsciousness; Reintegration of group identity without loss of ego identity; As vibration increases, perception of past, present, and future become more fluid along with the ability to interface with multidimensional and multidensity realities'.[43] She describes fourth density consciousness as the final stage in embodied consciousness and that humanity and cetaceans are currently experiencing two overlapped realities, third and fourth density consciousness. It is Holt's belief that this marks the evolution of humanity (and whales and dolphins) into a higher level awareness of the Whole. As will be discussed below, Holt believes it is her mission and that of other channels of alien consciousness to encourage this transition from third to fourth density consciousness and to pass on the structures of thought that allow this awareness of integration to the cosmic Whole. In essence, to train others to open their minds to the higher density realities. There are three further non-corporeal consciousness densities in Holt's system, the fifth, sixth and seventh; Holt suggests that whilst all seven densities are on a continuum the first four levels

[42] Ibid., 4-5.
[43] Ibid., 5.

are distinct due to altering perception of embodied being whereas the final three are much less distinct and blend into each other. The fifth density is characterised by wholeness: a singular, aggregate identity which is capable of manifesting in multiple moments, 'Experiential awareness of "I" as a group identity; Not bound by linear time'.[44] It is thus the ego transformed from that of the embodied consciousness to that of multiple awarenesses across time and space. In the penultimate sixth density, consciousness becomes the medium of experience, 'Awareness as the dimension itself'.[45] Holt characterises this as being best understood as 'Christ consciousness' in which, 'one begins taking responsibility for the Whole rather than the Self. The process of progressing the Self and progressing the Whole become one and the same.'[46] The continued influence of Theosophy is evident here.

Theosophy is also, more generally, evident in Holt's awareness of the holistic being that is encountered across the fourth to seventh densities. It is the expanded consciousness realised in the fourth density that allows access to that wider, plural sense of self, and this provides a gateway to the integrated plurality of the Whole. For Holt, gaining access to an awareness of shared consciousness, is the mechanism through which channellers are able to be contacted by, and communicate with, alien intelligences. In other words, by reducing the demands of the ego and attaining the openness to the fourth dimension's multiplicity of consciousness the evolving being gains access to the expanded evolutionary consciousness that Holt suggests is the cosmic destiny of all things. Holt casts newly aware channels of alien consciousness as functioning agents of consciousness evolution:

> One of the reasons so many of us beings are here now, is to help guide you out of that hall of mirrors […] where you're seeing your own polarization and your own fragmentation bouncing back at you. We're here to help guide you back from [the reflected fragments] and into the memory of your wholeness. When you go into the memory of your wholeness [...] when you experience that wholeness, you then experience the dissolution of the distracting energies that bind you to the 3rd density, physical, separative reality.[47]

[44] Ibid., 6.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Mendonca, *Being with the Beings,* 49.

The alien beings are manifest in and through their channels and this shared consciousness is a consequence of the dissolution of the ego that Holt encourages as a step toward higher density awareness. Although highly organised within its own terms of reference, Holt's cosmology is recognisable in the context of dialogic contact and the theme of spiritual evolution as redemption is clearly not new. For Holt, the process is evolutionary with humanity growing in its ability to ascend the sevenfold dimensional scale she describes. In the PFR narrative structure this is the prelude to redemption and readmission into the extra-terrestrial universal. In *Prism of Lyra*, Holt described it thus, 'All consciousness and energy was once fused into an integrated whole. This Whole was aware of aspects of itself, but in a different way from individualized consciousness.'[48]

Through the redemption of integrated consciousness, the Paradisiacal state of Wholeness is realised in the seventh vibrational density state. It is from this level of consciousness that the currents dictating connections joining minds transitioning from third to fourth density emanate. When a 'critical mass' of seventh dimension consciousness is reached then the Whole will rejoin the Source and return through the 'Prism of Lyra' to engage with a new reality.

Although Holt's cosmology stresses the usual markers of New Age spirituality – holism married to a message of self-improvement – it is significantly distinct in the transcendence of ego. For instance, Heelas and also Farias and Lalljee[49] point to the greater tendency toward individualism in New Age believers but in Holt individuality is an obstacle to achieving cosmic awareness. Indeed, the goal of spiritual development is to be re-absorbed into the Whole; an undifferentiated amalgamation of evolved consciousnesses akin to the Real in Lacan which is, ultimately, a return to a prelapsarian state. Nonetheless, as is common to a number of twentieth-century UFO spiritualities, the general themes of spiritual development and acquisition of an expanded universal consciousness following the guidance of hidden masters follow the structures of belief associated with Theosophy. As stated, the influence of Blavatsky's Theosophical Society on the New Age in general is well-documented. What is of use here is Theosophy's intention of integrating not only all world religions but also science in its belief system. This is a feature in Adamski's account and also one of the aims of the

[48] Royal, *The Prism of Lyra*, 1.
[49] Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996) and Miguel Farias, Gordon Claridge, and Mansur Lalljee, 'Personality and Cognitive Predictors of New Age Practices and Beliefs', *Personality and Individual Differences* 39 (2005): 979-989.

Aetherius Society. In Holt, the fate of the Zeta Reticulans, who used science to destroy their planet's ecosystem, is a cautionary tale about the misuses of science. However, science also offers redemption; she also recounts the importance of science in preserving their species and supporting their evolutionary journey to the Whole: 'The first priority was to genetically alter the brain structures to affect emotional expression. They shunned their past expression of passion and chaos; they now wanted order. Their brains were thus altered to output a consistent chemical response to external stimuli. They achieved detachment from their ego structure. Over generations of neurochemical manipulations, the Apexians became a group mind.'[50]

Benjamin Zeller suggests that one of the structural factors influencing the development of emergent religions is the increased prominence of institutional science: 'The new religions served as harbingers of a dawning conversation on the relation of science to religion […] religious groups had several methods of creatively responding to science, and the often-assumed conflict-based model of "science vs. religion" must be replaced by a more nuanced understanding of how religions operate in our modern scientific world.'[51] Again, the emergent religions are understood as a valuable indicator of developing but otherwise unexpressed cultural formations. Holt reflects this observation of Zeller's but what is central to her channelled messages is the theme of integration, of overcoming difference and promoting a universal harmony. Certainly, there is nothing unique in this and her indebtedness to not only a diluted New Age Theosophy but also the contactee tradition is evident. What is notable is that, for Holt and her followers, this message of the need for an integrated species-consciousness, the Whole, continues to serve as a universal necessity for our collective development.

Conclusion

Although the comparison to Gramsci above was no more than a suggestive allusion that is not to say that a protean politics should not be looked for in Holt's thought. There is little in Holt's work that can be considered to be conspiracy theory but it belongs to the same order of

[50] Royal, *The Prism of Lyra*, 78.
[51] Benjamin E. Zeller, *Prophets and Protons: New Religious Movements and Science in Late Twentieth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 170.

knowledge that conspiracy theory does; Michael Barkun usefully describes the category as 'stigmatized knowledge'.[52] Although it is a commonplace of the literature that conspiracy theory has a political underpinning there is less acknowledgement of the political dimension present within New Age religions. Ward and Voas unpick the hybrid conspirato-political-spiritual form taken by David Icke's paranoid cosmology,[53] whilst Christopher Partridge and Andy Letcher both delineate the commingling of spirituality and eco-politics in the British occulture of the 1980s and 1990s.[54] More typical, though, is the dismissal of New Age spirituality as too individualistic to allow it to take a wider political form. As discussed above, Steve Bruce is representative of this position but there has been much work that suggests a more nuanced complexity in the political and social role of emergent religions. Indeed, this dismissiveness overlooks the political tendency present in the foundational beliefs that informed the New Age. B.J. Gibbons makes clear that the boundaries between the political and the spiritual are porous and frequently poorly defined. He writes:

> The initial attraction of Theosophy for Besant, however, may have been that it provided a spirituality which entailed a radical social gospel. Helena Blavatsky herself had argued that Christ and the Buddha 'were ardent philanthropists and political altruists – preaching most unmistakably Socialism of the noblest and highest type'. If Besant's conversion to Theosophy led her to be less active in the socialist movement, this perhaps involved more a redirection than a diminution of her radical energies. After moving to India, Besant became increasingly active in Indian nationalist politics.[55]

To be clear, Holt is not making any kind of reference to a socialist politics and the closest she comes to doing so is to use communism as a measure of repression: 'Think of [the Orion Empire] as 1,000 times more repressive than communism'.[56] What has hopefully been shown by the preceding argument is that these notes from the cultural fringe offer insight into

[52] Michael Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*, 2nd edn (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 2013).
[53] Charlotte Ward and David Voas, 'The Emergence of Conspirituality', *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 26, no.1 (2011): 37–41.
[54] Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture*, vol. 2 (London & New York: T & T Clark International, 2005); Andy Letcher, 'The Scouring of the Shire: Fairies, Trolls and Pixies in Eco-Protest Culture', *Folklore* 112, no.2 (2001): 147-161.
[55] B.J.Gibbons, *Spirituality and the Occult: From the Renaissance to the Modern Age (*London: Routledge, 2001), 124.
[56] Royal, *Galactic Heritage Cards*, 16.

themes and structures of feeling[57] that have yet to come into the widespread vernacular of everyday culture. In articulating unresolved tensions within society they provide a semiosis of expression to felt but undefined cultural currents; her message is not new but the articulation of it in the pseudo-scientific context of holographic alien intelligences exemplifies a novel reformulation of it. In Holt's instance, she is articulating a holistic and universal reconciliation of fragmented and disparate races into an integrated whole in preparation for a journey into a new universe through 'the prism of Lyra'. Essentially, her paradisiacal future is organised around an evolved consciousness that embraces and recognises the Self in Others. It is not necessary to embrace her cosmology to recognise that this species goal may be no bad thing in these times.

[57] Cf. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP 1977).