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**Poblagovljenje evangelijske identitete**  
**(The Commodification of Evangelical Identity)**

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## Table of Contents

<b>1.0 Introduction</b>	<b>p. 1</b>
<b>1.1 Epistemological Problems</b>	<b>p. 3</b>
<b>1.2 Practical Distinctions</b>	<b>p. 9</b>
<b>1.3 Abstraction of Space</b>	<b>p. 14</b>
<b>1.4 Strategy and Tactics</b>	<b>p. 15</b>
<b>1.5 Methodology and Organization</b>	<b>p. 19</b>
<b>2.0 American Religion</b>	<b>p. 23</b>
<b>2.1 Secularization and Desecularization</b>	<b>p. 24</b>
<b>2.2 The Second Great Awakening</b>	<b>p. 47</b>
<b>3.0 The Purpose-Built Environment</b>	<b>p. 71</b>
<b>3.1 The End of the Urban-Rural Split</b>	<b>p. 71</b>
<b>3.2 Identity and Display</b>	<b>p. 77</b>
<b>3.3 Private-public Spaces</b>	<b>p. 81</b>
<b>3.4 “Authentic” Identity</b>	<b>p. 94</b>
<b>3.5 Landscape as Signs</b>	<b>p. 103</b>
<b>3.6 Roads as Public Space</b>	<b>p. 108</b>
<b>3.7 Colonization</b>	<b>p. 121</b>
<b>4.0 Commodity Culture</b>	<b>p. 124</b>
<b>4.1 Fungibility</b>	<b>p. 124</b>
<b>4.2 The Christian Aesthetic</b>	<b>p. 133</b>
<b>4.3 Idolatry and Simulatiuon</b>	<b>p. 145</b>
<b>4.4 Mass Production</b>	<b>p. 150</b>
<b>4.5 Mythic Discourse and Spectacle</b>	<b>p. 164</b>
<b>4.6 Branding as Alibi</b>	<b>p. 170</b>
<b>4.7 Christian™ Brand: Jesus as Alibi</b>	<b>p. 174</b>
<b>4.8 Hall of Mirrors</b>	<b>p. 186</b>
<b>5.0 Conclusion</b>	<b>p. 188</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>p. 200</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>p. 206</b>
<b>Summary in Slovene language</b>	<b>p. 208</b>

## 1.0 Introduction

*“Let us return again to the state of nature, and consider men as if but even now sprung out of the earth, and suddainly (like Mushromes) come to full maturity without all kind of engagement to each other.”*

--Thomas Hobbes *De Cive* 1642

Examining the commodification Evangelical identity presents several epistemological problems that make clarity and precision difficult. One problem is the descriptive power of the term “evangelical.” The term is more often used by intellectual elites to describe a type of American Christian, but those who are cast in that type reject the term. Other American Christians, who are not classified as Evangelical, insist on the use of the term. The verb “evangelize” has a strictly religious sense of spreading the word of the Gospel in Protestant discourse, but it has a more general sense of militant zeal to convert others to a cause or way of thinking. Probably the most distinctive feature of “Evangelical Christians” is evangelizing, converting the unsaved to their particular notion of Christianity, but on the other hand this emotional rhetoric of persuasion is characteristic of American politics, advertising, and marketing. The similarity is not coincidental. Both religious and secular evangelism share a common origin in the early decades of the republic when American culture went through the upheavals that made it distinct from its European ancestry. This is problematic for analysis as separating Evangelical Christians from a culture that is also evangelical is impossible. The non-institutional social form of religion (or “world view” in Luckmann’s terminology) contains elements of this revival, chiefly sacred individual and evangelism itself. That is to say that even the most ardent American atheist is probably also evangelical in his or her ingrained belief in individual agency, antinomianism, and temporal orientation.

Religion then will be looked at on two levels: the primary religious institutions and the experts that clearly articulate a sacred cosmos, and social religion which is the inarticulate world view of society as a whole. For social researchers, particularly in the United States,

these two religions often trip over one another, causing confusion and often resulting in the most banal research despite the most advanced statistical methodologies. One difficulty is separating the general evangelical folk milieu (social religion) from the group of believers intellectual elites call Evangelical Christians. This folk milieu, the mythology of the Golden Age of the early Republic, is tapped as a political (and commercial) resource by everyone who wants to influence a broader audience. It is one of the major legitimizing claims used by conservative Christian groups arguing that they represent the uncorrupted, true America. There is some case for this as those we call Evangelical Christians have predominated in rural areas, locations where the urban rush of modernity only fully penetrated in the last several decades. The current tension often called “the culture wars” is an echo of the urban/rural split, or between industrial society and agricultural. It is an echo as both dichotomies no longer exist having collapsed in postmodernity.

Specific elements of this evangelical milieu have been essential for the development of commercial capitalism. The belief in individual agency, that an individual has free will and can transcend his or her circumstances through the exercise of that will originates in Arminian soteriology, but is also an essential ideological necessity for capitalist reproduction. Antinomianism stems ultimately from the Reformation elimination of the clergy and church as the mediator between the believer and God, but the American version validates the individual’s intuitive opinion on all matters of truth. Last is the temporal orientation of apocalyptic time that pitches people toward the promise of the future and degrades the significance of the past. This last position is profoundly anti-conservative, particularly the conservatism espoused by Edmund Burke in his violently anti-Liberal book *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The irony of American conservatism is that they are actually liberals, against the reverence to the past espoused by Burke as well as the mutuality of obligation entailed in his manifesto. While modernity disenchant the world, tapping this

evangelical milieu *re-enchants* it, an essential condition for consumer capitalism. Consumer culture has Christian roots, roots which marketing and advertising in turn influences Christian practices.

The Arminian doctrine of salvation through personal choice, or “confessing Jesus,” is what theologian Tom Beaudoin describes as “the most common Christian heresy in America” (Beaudoin 2003, 39). This act is often executed in an ecstatic conversion experience, an intense emotional state of immediate, magical transformation from damned to saved. The promises of advertising offer similar transformations through the practice of consumption, a synthesis of anticipation and deferral. According to theologian Vincent Jude Miller, this misdirection of religious desire derails Christian eschatology neutralizing it as a political force. “Apocalyptic longing,” far from being a manifestation of despair, has the power to disrupt and challenge the injustice of present society by offering the immediate possibility of a just one” (V. J. Miller 2003).

Institutional religion, argues Luckmann can serve as an antithesis to society and state by claiming that the latter have diverged from the sacred way and thus serve as a catalyst for structural social change (Luckmann 1967, 67). Other social religions cannot serve this function as they lack the coherence and institutional base that could provide a counterpoint to secular powers. The privatizing of religion, particularly in America, removes religion from any public or political function rendering it an individual matter of belief to be pursued independently.

## **1.1 Epistemological Problems**

In an 1998 article, Rodney Stark boasts about the defeat of the secularization hypothesis in sociology, a hypothesis he asserts is as old as modernity. The hypothesis is that as the world

is progressively disenchanting by science (Weber's terms), society will become less religious and eventually religion will disappear altogether. Stark is entirely right in his conclusion, at least as far as the United States is concerned, particularly in its 1960s positivistic formulation of individual piety.<sup>1</sup> Stark is also entirely wrong, ignoring as he does what a *religious society* entails as something other than a Hobbesian agglomeration of individuals in possession of needs and desires, expressing rational preferences to maximize their gain. Stark and other *rational choice* scholars of religion in the United States who apply quantitative neoliberal economic models to "religious" behavior are, in a sense, playing with loaded dice. It may well be that religious behavior can be meaningfully examined using liberal capitalist economics, but that is because in the United States in particular, religion long ago qualitatively changed to resemble capitalist forms as well as helping to shape the peculiar capitalist forms in the United States. This will be fully examined in section 2.2 of this dissertation.

The relationship between American religion and capitalism is so complex and reciprocal such that postmodern American capitalism would not have its current form without specific religious developments, and postmodern American religion would not be what it is without the driving dynamic of capitalism. When Laurence Iannaccone (Iannaccone 1995, 82) says that people in their ordinary language can discuss their faith and church in terms of "satisfying their spiritual needs," it is neither accidental nor "natural" that these terms are used. Socialization of children into a quantified, commodified reality through increasingly standardized, even automated education embeds the commodity structure through sheer repetition and coercion. Further, the discourse of marketing and consumption is so pervasive that avoiding it in contemporary American society is just not possible. Kalle Lasn estimates that the average American receives 3,000 advertising messages per day (Lasn 2000). But the

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<sup>1</sup> Stark's chief target is Peter Berger. See "Bleak Outlook is Seen for Religion," *New York Times*, 25 April 1968: p. 3.

embeddedness of this discourse of need is not only due to a constant and relentless barrage of marketing messages; it precedes this hypermediated age in religious discourse, perhaps by millennia. Christian desire is desire for God, a longing reunification with the Divine that dates from the writings of St. Augustine.

That it is even possible to construct a plausible study of religious behavior using rational choice theory, and to use a phrase like “religious marketplace” unironically is a demonstration of how the discourse of the commodity has infiltrated and usurped the power of other, previously autonomous discourses. It has an odd quality of being a transparently reifying theory that “...older, traditional forms of human activity are instrumentally reorganized and “taylorized,” analytically fragmented and reconstructed according to various rational models of efficiency, and essentially restructured along the lines of a differentiation between means and ends” (Jameson 1979, 130). Rational choice scholars have no difficulty with the reduction of human motivation to the single ethic of utility, often appearing to conflate utilitarian behavior with rationality as such (Iannaccone 1995, 82). While not dismissing other explanations that explain the same sociological data regarding religion, Iannaccone invokes the scientific principle of parsimony to justify the superiority of rational choice over alternatives. “We can pull all the pieces together with a single, relatively simple model...thereby linking the analysis of religious participation to a large body of research on household production and capital accumulation” (Iannaccone 1995, 79).

The religious reality, or “landscape,” that rational choice approaches to the sociology of religion claim such descriptive power over is so thoroughly overwritten by commodification that preachers and parishioners alike speak the language of the commodity when discussing their churches and their religious practices. Commodity production results in the reification of relationships between people, converting them into objects. Writing in 1921, Georg Lukacs wrote, “Reification requires that a society should learn to satisfy all its

needs in terms of commodity exchange” (Lukacs [1921] 1971, 91). The expansion of commodity capitalism has colonized so much of the life world since then, that it is no surprise that people speak of religion in terms of commodity exchange. There is no need to establish a case that American religion speaks the language of the “marketplace.” It’s commonplace in the writings of religious leaders to speak of congregants as “consumers” and churches as “brands.” Strategies for increasing the size of the congregation use terms like “market share” and “growing” your church. That rational choice has been so successful in explaining some aspects of American religion is due to the universal nature of the commodity structure. It also shows how very weak religious institutions as primary social institutions have become when they have to borrow from secondary, secular models for their continuity, preservation and growth.

This homology between religion and market, and the isomorphic institutions, practices, spaces, and discourses isn’t crude determinism either in the vulgar Marxist sense of base-superstructure or in Rational Choice theory’s proponent’s assertion that this is a purely natural development based on the essential nature of humans as self-interested, rational actors. Rather this homology is the present instance of historical processes, most salient is not so much the processes themselves but the breakneck speed at which they are operating. As far back as the medieval period there is mutuality between religion and economy, one influencing the other, yet the role of institutional religion was strong enough to exert some considerable control over economic practices (usury laws for instance) and check the pace of change. In the American situation, Evangelism in the early decades of the republic jumped into the revolutionary void and rather than checking the pace of change, accelerated it by providing the means of persuasion which would become advertising, the organizational methods of marketing, and, most importantly a sacred cosmos for consumer capitalism.



The atomized individual, the “rational actor” in American economic discourse, is a historical artifact, a result of reification rather than the cause of society. Taking this as given ignores the transitory nature of present, capitalist society, and that “facts” themselves are made things subject to change and revision. Lukacs describes the crudeness and nullity of such theories thus: “Its determinants take on the appearance of timeless, eternal categories valid for all social formations” (Lukacs [1921] 1971, 9). As an example, Rational Choice claims to be able to explain distant events and processes like the Reformation, the Crusades, the Christianization of the Roman Empire (Stark 1998) (Iannaccone 1998), and other distant events where sources, much less reliable ones are scant, leading one to be somewhat puzzled as to how the complex statistical methods of rational choice economics can be applied to situations where there is effectively no data.

Asserting that the status quo of any given time-bound situation is “natural” is a hegemonic move. The idiocy of Hobbes “mushroom men,” that the individual is in any way prior to society is dismissed most succinctly by Theodor Adorno: “Not only is the self entwined in society; it owes society its existence in the most literal sense” (Adorno 2005, 154). This criticism of the assumptions of Liberalism has been ongoing since Hegel, and more recent “postmodern,” “post-colonial,” feminist, and other critical theories have amply pointed out the danger of essentializing most anything as a universal. The potency of commodification is such that these critical theories – even Marxism – have been subsumed by market rationality and employed as effective means for furthering the aims of capital. American Myth and Ritual scholar Pat Warner describes the complicity of academics in the commercial employment of critical cultural theory in “...an era when the vocabulary of marketing has infiltrated the academy and often leaves us feeling like sales associates for the corporate university” (Warner 2001, 764).

Theories like rational choice are context-embedded, and context-generated. In many ways it does a good job, perhaps even a better job, at explaining contemporary religious behavior than other approaches to sociology of religion do, but only because the rationality of the market has so penetrated the practices of contemporary Americans that there is no real alternative to behaving like anything other than a consumer. The data also may be better explained by rational choice models because the vast majority of data is a result of opinion polling, asking individuals to state their preference from a list of alternatives, an activity that mimics aspects of consumption like choosing from a menu of pre-established alternatives, as well as multiple choice tests in school and quantitative practices in everyday life. But despite the ample survey data and sophisticated statistical methods employed (or perhaps because of them) the results are often trivial statements of the obvious lacking in depth by still focusing on institutional religion, and that as an isolated functional domain.

These methodological flaws have been well known since the 1960s. Luckmann derides the triviality of most sociological research on religion in *The Hidden Religion*, published in 1967. While some more interesting and informative studies borrowing from anthropological techniques have been done, the persistence of the big opinion poll survey despite the knowledge of the flaws is indicative of how weak the critical position really is. If anything, the data show that the co-linked processes of social atomization and cultural homogenization among those who have the means to choose, is accelerating despite the legal legitimization of deviance, multicultural educational strategies, and other projects designed to recognize, even celebrate difference. At the same time absolute measures of equality, such as income, and social mobility continue to deteriorate, the reversal of which is the attested goal of many critical theories.

Lukacs describes the atomized individual as “second nature,” a necessary illusion for capitalist societies. Reification masks the social relations of production (and consumption) –

it does not do away with them. The potency of the illusion comes from, “the immediate, practical as well as intellectual confrontation of the individual with society, the immediate production and reproduction of life – in which for the individual the commodity structure of all ‘things’ and their obedience to ‘natural laws’ is found to exist in an already finished form, as something immutably given...” (Lukacs [1921] 1971, 92). Escaping the capitalist totality, according to Lukacs, requires the collective realization that this reality is a socially produced one, and thus the proletariat become both the subject and object of history. This is the Marxist Apocalypse, when the truth is revealed and reality itself can be remade. In Lukacs’ time that which Theodor Adorno called “the culture industry” had yet to develop its spectacular power to obscure reality further. The proliferation of images was in its infancy. Guy Debord writes of this second-order reification as the spectacle which “is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images” (Debord 2002).

Visual images have steadily been replacing written text in advertising, journalism, business discourse as well as education, with a consequent greater sense of immediacy even though the mediating artifice is far more complex, thus appearing more transparent while at the same time obscuring its inherent mendacity. The geographic separation of production and consumption in global, advanced, or late capitalism intensifies the commodity structure by putting the relations of production out of reach so the fetish of the commodity has no material challenge. “Post-industrial society” is the illusion produced, even though it is self evident that Americans consume the products of industry. The proletariat of this society, however, lives in China.

## **1.2 Practical distinctions**

Evangelical Christians in America have moved from a culturally marginal position, largely outside the view of the media and political culture, to a position of centrality in the period of 1970 to the present. The result of this is that in the process Evangelical Christians lost the distinction posted by St. Paul's injunction:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

(Romans 12:2 King James Version)

Even though the designation "Evangelical Christian" is inherently problematic, from the 1890s at least, the discourse of rejection of the sinful, urban world had developed, and Evangelical Christians largely abstained from politics, or whatever passed for "public" life. Now they are treated as a major constituency of the Republican Party and are largely credited (perhaps erroneously) with swinging national elections. In no sense are they marginal any longer, and are treated by marketers as a consumption category in their own right with a vast array of branded commodities at their disposal.

What makes Evangelicals distinctive is this separation in practice. The most distinct feature that marks out Evangelical Christians from Mainline Protestants and Catholics is *witnessing*. Witnessing is Evangelical jargon for proselytizing, i.e. persuading people to convert following the Arminian doctrine of choosing Salvation of one's own free will. This is the sole mission of evangelical churches and cultural institutions like tract societies and Bible colleges. But witnessing is also a vital religious *practice*. Beyond its proselytizing function to convert and enlarge the community of believers, it is also a personal declaration of Christian identity. It has a similar emotional load to that of "coming out" for homosexuals. "Witnessing is a deeply meaningful speech act, not simply a pragmatic conversion tool. The act of witnessing creates and defines the self, both on its own terms and in relationship to the community" (Hendershot 2004, 124). Witnessing requires revealing to others, often total

strangers, an intimate personal narrative, often recounting details of sinful, miserable lives before they accepted Jesus as their *personal* savior. It is an act that requires a good deal of courage and faith risking the possibility of rejection and invalidation. Churches often offer training sessions and support for this duty, this public confession of faith that is even more ritualized than prayer.

The similarity between witnessing and advertising is more than superficial. They have common origins in the revival tents of the Second Great Awakening. This formative period will be discussed at length in section 2.2, but for now it is sufficient to state that the techniques used to spread the word of Christ can be used to spread the word of Pepsi. But witnessing is a personal activity requiring direct social contact and personal, often persistent, appeals. Witnessing can be disruptive, obnoxious, and invasive of bourgeois notions of privacy. While deeply personal for the practitioner, it is an activity of confrontation, one that is little tolerated in “respectable” society. Thus *practicing* Evangelicals tend to be from poorer, often rural socioeconomic groups, who while claiming to avoid “worldliness,” worldliness tends to avoid them. Although revivals also occurred in cities, this militant evangelism was quickly tamed and institutionalized, but in the poverty-stricken agricultural countryside it persisted, particularly in the American southeast and mid-west. Until very recently, pre-capitalist modes of production persisted in subsistence agriculture and handicrafts. Only in the last few decades has commodity structure fully penetrated these backwaters, a process that coincides with the emergence of conservative Christians as a national political force.

The confrontation between urban modernity and rural Evangelical Christians who still maintained the practices of popular Christianity from the early republican period had many consequences, most interesting in a doctrine of separation. This separation had institutional form in tract societies (Christian publishing houses), bookstores, Bible institutes, and

theological seminaries, the stated purpose of which was proselytizing. On the level of personal practice, there was a code of behaviors that was vital in marking who was inside or outside the community. This was a strict code that prohibited drinking, dancing, smoking, watching movies, playing cards, and swearing, which were markers of the condemned outside world (Frykholm 2004, 23). The distinction was stark, and in absolute terms of “saved” and “damned.” Arminian doctrine made salvation a matter of choice, but it was also provisional. A saved person could become damned again through new sins, so the separation functioned to remove worldly temptation and maintain the integrity of the soul.

This opposition to the corruption of the city is clearly articulated in Flannery O’Connor’s 1955 novel, *The Violent Bear It Away*. In the novel, the infant Tarwater is kidnapped from his schoolteacher uncle by his great uncle (a self-professed prophet) and raised on a backwoods farm isolated from the urban society represented by the schoolteacher. During an argument between the teenage Tarwater and the great uncle, the Old Man shouts: “I saved you to be free, your own self! And not a piece of information inside his head! If you were living with him, you’d be information right now, you’d be inside his head, and what’s furthermore,” he said, “you’d be going to school” (O’Connor 1955, 16). Free to be one’s own self, not information, not quantified and abstracted, alienated and reified, is the gist of the Old Man’s justification for the kidnapping. The schoolteacher describes the old man as an example of a type that is almost extinct. The Old Man fights off the few attempts to recover the boy with a shotgun or cunning, attempts that are made difficult by the farm’s isolation.

O’Connor’s fiction gives a suggestion of a vanishing world, and a particular organic sense of self that isn’t alienated or fragmented retaining its wholeness, but not in any sentimental sense of natural. Nature in O’Connor’s stories is brutal, violent, and grotesque, insistently physical. O’Connor, a devout Catholic living in a rural Georgia, wrote of the dark results of modernity encroaching upon this world of poverty stricken farmers and other rural

characters on the margin between ‘information’ and brute nature. It is difficult to imagine being able to write any such stories set in present-day America. A paradoxical sight in rural Georgia today is the juxtaposition of poverty, in the shape of decrepit mobile homes, set next to high technology in the shape of large satellite TV dishes. The roads are paved. School busses go everywhere. Of the wooden shacks where dirt farmers once lived, usually only the chimneys remain. The cornfields are gone along with the moonshiners like the Old Man.

The arrival of The World to the world of Evangelical Christians has resulted in what at first appears to be a branded clone of commodity culture. Christian “branded” cultural commodities cloning popular cultural forms like heavy metal music, theme parks, shopping malls, video games, action figures, films, and television programs are well documented (e.g. Hendershot 2004; Lyon 2000; Miller 2003; Twitchell 2004; Wharton 2006). Some of these commodities, like the *Left Behind* novels of Tim LaHayne and Jerry B. Jenkins, have been spectacular commercial successes. Writing of the *Left Behind* series, Glenn Shuck states the novels “attest to an impassioned attempt to maintain the integrity of evangelical identity while also adapting, however reluctantly, to the inevitable change so characteristic of modernity” (Schuck 2005, 2). It’s interesting to note that LaHayne and Jenkins do not site their apocalyptic novels in an embattled small town, but rather in a banal suburb of Chicago. This may be because the authors wish to reach a broader audience as Shuck suggests, but small town America lost the battle some time ago and have either become absorbed as satellites to some larger conurbation or withered into abject destitution. The cloning, argues Schuck, is an attempt to maintain an adequate level of tension between Evangelicals and popular culture (Schuck 2005, 4). Lacking physical separation, the symbolic separation of branding is the strategy adopted. The proliferation of the Christian brand has been so successful that these commodities, books, music, clothing, are commonly found in national “big box” retailers such as Wal-Mart. This success shows the transition from a close knit,

organic life-world to a *lifestyle*. This has been to the detriment of the previously existing Evangelical culture, one of isolation and marginality, which is disappearing with its commodification.

### 1.3 Abstraction of Space

The loss of isolation isn't just cultural, but has a geographical component in a loss of a sense of place. It's common practice to speak of "landscape" or "marketplace" in an entirely abstract sense that denotes nothing physical. In social science this is perplexing, particularly as the physical environment where people live has changed so radically in the last forty years. A religious landscape without land, or a religious marketplace without a place ignores the physical reality of human life most particularly its effect on social relations and culture. "Marketplace" only really exists as a clichéd metaphor, its physical referent and the peculiar immediacy of life in the market obliterated. The rationalized shopping center or mall can offer the illusion of the marketplace, but with none of its freedoms. Mikhail Bakhtin, writing about the carnivalesque in medieval market places, describes the free relationships and speech of the market:

Officially the palaces, churches, institutions, and private homes were dominated by hierarchy and etiquette, but in the marketplace a special kind of speech was heard, almost a language of its own, quite unlike the language of Church, palace, courts, and institutions (M. Bakhtin 1968, 154).

The marketplace wasn't just for exchange, but had a festive freedom, curses, oaths, travesties and entertainments – all forbidden elsewhere – ran loose in the immediate physical space of the marketplace. The marketplace was a zone of contact, where everyone met everyone in



physical immediacy, a situation that bears absolutely no resemblance to the “marketplace” cliché which suggests a catalog or menu of things rather than social relationships and action.

Boiling down the marketplace to utilitarian exchange and rational self interest then applying this profane logic to the sacred, reduces religion to a fungible commodity that satisfies needs. There is considerable evidence to support this commodity logic, in the sense that popular religion has become more consumer friendly, or “self directed” in the terminology of Wade Clark Roof (Roof 1998). In addition to the branded cultural commodities, churches have become enormous incorporating numerous niche ministries under their roofs mimicking the shopping mall concept. Boundaries between religious activities and secular activities become increasingly blurred in postmodern pastiche. Religion, facing competition from secondary social institutions providing similar commodities has borrowed enthusiastically from cultural forms that originated or became wildly popular in the “decadent” 1960s counter culture. In the fastest growing churches in the United States, it is difficult to find very much that would have been considered “religious” forty or fifty years ago.

As Wilbur Zelinsky (2001) notes, the construction of churches in the United States has very little sense of place. Unlike in Europe or the Middle East, there are few sacred sites, and the location of a church is wholly determined by practical matters. The site itself has only utilitarian value. Churches can be near, but not at, city centers, standing alone in rural areas with no surrounding village, in shopfronts in inner cities or in decaying suburban shopping centers, or can even exist in tents. Following the Reformed tradition, the building is irrelevant, does not constitute the church so much as the congregation is the church. Churches built since the Second World War seldom follow the 19<sup>th</sup> Century form of a wooden box with a steeple at one end, and the most recent trend in megachurch construction can even tend to

“minitowns.” Even the names of the churches seldom contain any reference to physical location.

Urban development follows the Interstate Highway System, an integrated network of multilane, limited-access roads that connect cities built in the 1950s and 60s. These high-speed roads make it possible for people to live far from their workplace in downtowns or, more recently, in some other dispersed area. The highways are the single most important determining feature of the landscape and people’s relationship to it. The sheer quantity of signs, both set up by the state and for advertising purposes, dwarfs any signscape in Europe. The role of these signs will be discussed at length in section 3.5, but this particular mode of visual broadcast of message to a moving population is an endemic feature of commodity culture, yet one whose paeans have roots in Christian Evangelism. Indeed signs with religious appeals not attributed to a specific church or organization are commonplace on commercial signage. The roads and the signs together constitute a desolate machine landscape where practically nothing is built to human scale. Single use zoning restrictions ensure the fragmentation of space into single-family residential, retail, light industrial, and so on making it impossible for a local community to develop. Public spaces do not exist any longer in these cities in the sense where everyone meets everyone except on the roads themselves.

#### **1.4 Strategy and Tactics**

If there is a postmodern sense of “reflexive identity” based on choice rather than determined by circumstances, then it must have a space to manifest itself, where difference can be signified. At once the authenticity of any voluntary identity is challenged by the spaces available, constructed according to commodity structure. Jameson describes the

universe of late capitalism as “wholly built and constructed,” such that “place in the United States no longer exists” (Jameson 1990, 127). This makes the positing of an individual “being,” as physically part of the landscape and as a member of an actual (as opposed to imaginary) community very difficult to sustain. Institutional segmentation in modern life according to functional rationality, where the individual is disengaged and abstracted according to function, pushes identity into the private sphere where the individual approaches the sacred cosmos as a consumer constructing ad hoc, unstable identity vis a vis the culture as a whole from the pieces at hand (Luckmann 1967, 97-106). This is particularly the case of religious identity where the sacred cosmos is borne by the individual through an inchoate assortment of shifting beliefs, similar to what Wade Clark Roof describes as “Shielism” (Roof 1998).

Frequently there are divergences between actual social relations and attested identity, in this sense that culture has become so abstracted and ubiquitous national, or international tastes (in Bourdieu’s sense) can overcome any local, organic culture, even in remote areas. It also shows the extreme weakness of primary religious institutions in socializing people into a coherent world view. These divergences can be a matter of choice as the faculty/staff dichotomy consumer researcher Douglas Holt observed in the university town of Center, Pennsylvania (Holt 1997), or a result of development/re-development that results in the influx of newcomers to an area. Living in a given locale and being not being part of it in any organic sense is not only possible, but for mobile and transient population of the United States it may be extraordinarily difficult to do otherwise. Evangelical Christians have experienced place dislocation both in moving to urban areas and having urban areas move over them.

Commodified identity and lifestyle, i.e. identity through consumption, and the discussion surrounding it misses a basic point. It excludes all who do not have the means to

purchase such identities. Any notion of identity is going to be charged with issues of authenticity, as well as power/dominance relationships. While white teens can buy rap music, and dress in gansta fashion at the mall, only the signifiers of that marginal group's identity are permitted. Identity through consumption is a trivial sort of identity, restricted to those who have the means to pursue "the aestheticization of daily life" (Featherstone 1991). Freedom of choice is misleading both because choosing between commodities is only freedom in a formal sense and it is misleading in that one has to be in a position to choose in order to exercise even this formal freedom. The mall is not the marketplace. In these public-private spaces identity is reified to the commodity sign, essentially turning what was face to face discussion, arguing, insulting, joking, and so on, into visual signifiers, i.e. takes on the spectacular function of mediating through images. Witnessing, the practice, the engagement with strangers, becomes Witness Wear<sup>2</sup>.

The abandonment of the tactic of separation whereby Evangelical Christians sought to preserve their cultural distinction in favor of the culture wars was an attempt at strategic engagement, less to preserve their own subculture than to convert mass popular culture to reflect their own. Unlike immigrant, African-American, or other groups who were the object of cultural dominance, Evangelical Christians claim to be the authentic American culture and so their marginal status has been rather galling. Unlike Native Americans whose culture was commodified by others, Evangelical Christians commodified their own with alacrity. Their efforts to convert mass-popular culture have been spectacular failures, and in the course of this willing conversion, their separate cultural institutions are either in the process of disappearing or becoming indistinguishable from their secular counterparts. While they have had considerable success in getting recognized as a national political constituency, the social

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<sup>2</sup> "Witness Wear" is Christian-themed clothing bearing visible signifiers of Evangelical Christianity. The name is a play on marketing apparel classifications, e.g. sportswear, footwear, and so on, i.e. clothing specific to witnessing.

policies they have advocated have not been implemented. Abortion is still legal. School prayer is still not permitted and neither is any variant of “creationism” taught in public school biology classes. Their strident opposition to the enfranchisement of homosexuals arguably engendered more sympathy for the gay rights cause than it did hostility. Even within Evangelical ranks, these issues are no longer so definitive, no longer such obvious markers of Evangelical identity in the most recent years. Except for the T-shirts, bumper stickers and Christian branded tat, there is little left to mark their distinctiveness.

### **1.5 Methodology and Organization**

The methodological approach taken here is from the Marxist tradition, particularly as applied to postmodernity by Frederic Jameson and David Harvey. According to Lukacs, “The premise of dialectical materialism is, we recall: ‘It is not men’s consciousness that determines their existence, but on the contrary, their social existence that determines their consciousness.’” (Lukacs [1921] 1971, 24). Lukacs’ formulation stresses the focus on social relations as the generative force of the historical process, that is to say the conditioning effect of the material world on what people think, do, believe, and behave. Jameson’s contention that in postmodernity capitalism has entirely colonized the cultural sphere is particularly useful in looking at what has happened to Evangelical Identity as is his insistence on historicity. Harvey shares this approach with Jameson but, as a geographer, pays strict attention to the physical world, changes in the understanding of time and space as well as the effect of the late capitalist accumulation regime on urban environments, i.e. the transformation of cities from centers of production to centers of consumption.

The chapters that follow will show how contemporary Evangelical identity is the result of historical processes as well as being fully integrated into the postmodern totality.

Chapter Two investigates “American Religion.” Calling it American Religion stresses the qualitative difference between Religion as it is practiced in the United States and how it is practiced in Europe. The distinctive features emerge from Protestant Christian revivals in the early republican period, but these distinctions now also apply to Judaism, Catholicism, as well as new religious movements. The first section utilizes what survey data is available to show how rapidly and radically religion in the United States has changed since the 1970s, whereas the second sections looks at the origins of American religious distinctiveness, which are also the distinctive origins of consumer capitalism.

Chapter Three deals with space and how identity manifests itself in purpose-built environments. As early as the 1840s French poet and critic Charles Baudelaire noted and describes the distinctly different manifestations of identity in modern cities to that in earlier epochs. This new thing was *style*, visual display in the form of clothing or mannerism, in cities where displaying and looking was replacing conversation as the primary form of human interaction. Style also shows the emergence of a bourgeois private sphere which could be selectively displayed through fashion. This same observation was expanded upon by Walter Benjamin in the 1920s and 1930s. Yet the spaces where Baudelaire’s flaneur strolled, displayed, and observed were qualitatively different than the purpose-built postmodern spaces where today’s “urban monads” encounter each other, hence the particular manifestation of identity in these spaces is conditioned by the purpose for which they were built and are policed to ensure that purpose – and no other – is met in these spaces.

On this level of analysis, that of the totality of social relations, it is not necessary to delve too deeply into subjective identity while at the same time not dismissing its significance. What the individual thinks or believes is less important than what the individual does for the purposes of this analysis, i.e. practice. In Pierre Bourdieu’s formulation (Bourdieu 1984), [(habitus) (capital)] + field = practice, practice emerges as the product of

socially conditioned subjectivity (dispositions, schema etc.) and capital (economic, cultural, and social) and, most importantly for this analysis a field. It has been widely observed, e.g. Featherstone 1991, that Bourdieu's schema for distinction as manifesting social class is difficult to apply in the postmodern United States where class fragmentation makes social class less relevant as a unit of analysis. This hasn't stopped American sociologists from using Bourdieu's method productively in understanding lifestyle and consumption patterns. Practice is evidence of identity, and distinct practices should indicate distinction in identity. Practice is seriously limited by field, the space of action with some distinctive practices of group identity difficult or impossible to perform in some spaces, particularly private-public spaces. The practices of the white middle-class are the only permissible in purpose-built environments. As these spaces expand and become the norm, practices, and the identities for which they are evidence are squeezed, constrained and transformed.

Reflexive identity is characteristic of postmodern thought on identity. One chief proponent, Ulrich Beck argues that the dissolution of the boundaries of gender, race, class, nations and so on allows the individual to choose their own identities from those which are available (Beck 1992). There are immediate problems with this identity shopping that I will address in this chapter and the following one. First the boundaries have not gone away, but rather have become informal and thus much stronger. Second, identity through consumption is seriously compromised by commodity fetishism and the practice of shopping. Shopping becomes one of the most important social practices in postmodernity if not the most important.

The fourth chapter goes into depth on Jameson's theme of the complete colonization of culture by capital. Cultural commodification has a tremendous impact on religious practices, most particularly by leveling meaning structures. Here Baudrillard's work on hyperreality is most salient as the collapse of the sacred into the profane through the triumph

of exchange value renders all objects fungible. In recent decades Evangelical Christians have adapted to cultural commodification with great enthusiasm producing bestselling novels, popular music, and fashion lines – in short converting Evangelical Christianity into a brand for popular commodities. In the process their distinctive practices that marked Evangelical Christian group identity have either vanished or have been transmuted into popular culture forms that while differentiated through branding are identical in function and substance. The result is a hopeless semiotic muddle that shows the decline of institutional religion into incoherence, but at the same time revealing the hidden religion.



## 2.0 American Religion

I use “American Religion” rather than American *religions* to specify a general set of beliefs and practices that exist independent of any religious institutions. The specific theological concepts will be discussed in section 2.2, but the pervasiveness of these beliefs and practices in postmodern American culture needs some explication. The vanishing of Evangelical Christianity into the commodity world of popular culture shows both the power of commodification to absorb everything as well as the plasticity of postmodern religion. Santana and Erickson (2008) suggest an identity between postmodern religion and popular culture each being “unthinkable without the other” (Santana and Erickson 2008, 6). Remarking that insistence on Biblical literacy and inerrancy removes the Bible from interpretation, other texts are then interpreted religiously.

The Bible exists as an idea – an origin of truth and a promise of absolute – but not as an *actual* practiced source of creative popular thought. Instead, ideas and beliefs come from alternate texts such as *Bibleman Live*, *The Passion of Christ*, and *The DaVinci Code*, which in turn emulate or become sacred; the religion of America is overwhelmingly textual, but not biblical (Santana and Erickson 2008, 21).

American culture is religious, but it is a religion that is no longer a primary institution but is rather on par with secondary institutions, e.g. Hollywood, that supply ultimate significance. Santana and Erickson show how other texts, popular novels, films, and television programs are “rescripted” as sacred texts through the practice of interpretation. The urge to interpret texts is a legacy of the Reformation, but the ironic result is a television program like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for a Christian devotee is far better understood than the Bible.

The Arminian theology of personal choice and direct relation to the Divine, this democratic religion, functions to legitimate individuals defining ultimate reality for themselves. Sacred and profane are hierarchical relationships of meaning, determining truth relationships. This “Humpty Dumpty” approach to the sacred makes heresy impossible, but it extends far beyond religious orthodoxy to any matter of belief and truth. Everyone has the right to their own opinion no matter how baseless it is.

The next section examines statistical surveys that show patterns of rapid change in religious institutions and shifting affiliation. These patterns illustrate a rapid convergence of American religion to the postmodern culture of late capitalism in the United States resulting in institutional isomorphy.

## **2.1 Secularization and Desecularization**

Judging whether the United States has become more or less secular or more or less religious since the 1960s is an epistemological quagmire. Just what do we mean by “religious?” Survey data as well as more qualitative empirical studies can back a refutation of the secularization hypothesis as Stark and Iannaccone and others who employ rational choice and other economic models to religious behavior. The difficulty comes when we pry open “religious behavior” to see exactly what that means. Survey data on weekly church attendance, the acid test of religiousness, going back to the 1930s (Iannaccone 1998) (Roof 1998) shows a monotonous constancy of around 40%<sup>3</sup>, a number Iannaccone (1998) extends as far back as the mid-1800s, although there are no public survey data before the 1930s. But ask a preacher, and they will tell you that going to church and being religious are not

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<sup>3</sup>The reliability of this number is questionable as respondents tend to lie according to social desirability biases. An estimate of 29% is probably more accurate (Presser and Stinson 1999) Hadaway and Marler 1998 find the number for Protestants to be closer to 20%

identical. Just going to church does not make a person religious any more than holding a book makes a person literate. The focus on attendance also obscures other reasons why people go to church that are not at all religious in any sensible formulation of the term. The institutional bias obscures social religion that is not institutionalized, but is far more significant.

People are still going to church, or at least saying they are, as much as in the 1960s, but the churches are much different than then and what is inside is, in many cases, unrecognizable to a conservative, rural Evangelical Christian of the 1960s. If the idea that religion has become secular, that religion has lost its distinction from secular culture, then it would appear that secularization has forged ahead. Large surveys also support this conclusion. And the surveys show, to use the language of rational choice economics, a vast market shift: while the total number of religious adherents has remained constant, their denominational loyalty has changed dramatically (or has disappeared) as have their institutional religious practices.

Adherence to doctrine used to be the measure of religion. Churches used catechisms as a sort of simplified theology for the congregation. The 1646 Westminster Catechism, a popular Reformed catechism, answers the question “What is God?” God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth.”<sup>4</sup> A catechism serves as a test, a measure of belief. To be a member of a congregation, a believer had to accept the catechism. If not, they weren’t really Christian. Catechism reflect the high point in religions institutions is articulating the sacred cosmos and socializing believers into this official version expounded by religious specialists. Catechisms, at least in the Catholic Church, still have to be learned, and supplicants are tested on their knowledge before they are accepted into the Church. In Reformed churches rejection of the catechism,

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<sup>4</sup> The short Westminster Chatechism, question 4. <http://www.reformed.org/documents/WSC.html>

while rarely resulting in heresy, could result in expulsion from the congregation. The catechism is the bare bones of belief, the description of ultimate reality. Outside the Catholic Church in the United States, catechisms have vanished, are downplayed, or are taken seriously only by conservative religious communities such as Anabaptists.

“Scientific” study of religion must generalize, and defining religion is notoriously difficult, but social scientists need at least operational definitions before they can separate religious behavior from, say, pet care behavior<sup>5</sup>. Emile Durkheim defined religion in his 1912 book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, as a “...classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes—two opposite genera—that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words profane and sacred translate fairly well.” It is a system of representations of the nature of sacred things and their relation to other sacred things and profane things. Catechisms serve as an explicit statement of this division. This Durkheimian definition is religion as ontology, a world view. For Durkheim, man was *homo duplex*, individual but dependent on society for individuation. Individuals only had existence within a social world view, such as that of religion.

Thomas Luckmann provides a definition of religion as a prerequisite for human society to exist at all. An individual is born into a symbolic universe that through socialization into that universe allows the self to form. Individuals cannot create meanings ex nihilo, but require a symbolic universe – language at its most basic – to construct a biography in the general social narrative, and it is this symbolic universe that is transcendent, and when hierarchies of meaning develop in this world view, then the world view become religious (Luckmann 1967). Varying levels of articulation of this sacred cosmos are found in different societies, with the development of separate institutions and religious experts being something of a peculiarity of Western civilization. Concerning modern religion, Luckmann considers

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<sup>5</sup> Iannaccone provides the following definition “as any shared set of beliefs, activities, and institutions premised upon faith in supernatural forces” (L. R. Iannaccone 1998)

the possibility of regression to a social form that preceded institutional specialization, but later rejects the notion. Rather Luckmann speculates that a new religion is emerging, "...characterized neither by diffusion of the sacred cosmos through the social structure nor by institutional specialization of religion (Luckmann 1967, 105). The sacred cosmos resides in the private sphere where the individual may select "themes of ultimate significance" drawn from secondary institutions determined by the priorities of private life.

"The modern sacred cosmos legitimates the retreat of the individual into the "private sphere" is sanctifies his subjective "autonomy."...By bestowing a sacred quality upon the increasing subjectivity of human existence it supports not only the secularization but also what we call the dehumanization of the social structure (Luckmann 1967, 116)"

Fragmentation of the social structure into functionally rational segments, pushes the self into the private world to make ultimate sense of reality as best he or she can on their own from the commodities available.

About the same time Durkheim was writing, the American philosopher William James produced the following definition of religion in his *The Varieties of Religious Experience*: James also prioritizes personal experience and emotion in religious belief, his most read and influential book is entitled *The Varieties of Religious Experience*. In this book he defines religion as, "the feelings, and experience of individual men in their *solitude*, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine [emphasis added] (James 1982, 31)" James' definition here, and his focus in *Varieties*, is on individual cognition and experience discussing religion as a particular way of individual understanding. It is not ontological, but rather epistemological, but most importantly *private*. Religion as specific to a society drops away replaced by religion that is universal to human individuals as a mode of perception. James definition through its stress on individual

subjectivity is, in practice, more “American” than is Durkheim’s and it is one that has explicitly attracted more attention since the 1960s (see C. Taylor 2002).

The “market shift” mentioned above has been dramatic and shifting itself is increasing according to the surveys. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life's Religious Landscape Survey 2008 found that 28% of Americans have left the faith of their childhood and joined another religion. If change of affiliation between one Protestant denomination to another is taken into consideration, the number is 44% (Pew Forum 2008a). The Catholic Church lost the largest number of adherents in this survey dropping from 31.4% of the population to 23.9%, while the unaffiliated gained from 7.3 to 16.1%<sup>6</sup>. Within Protestantism, the largest gainers have been Evangelical churches with mainline churches the primary losers. The Episcopal church declined in membership from 3,647,000 to about 2 million in 2004 (Twitchell 2004: 61). While mainline Protestant denominations were a majority of Protestants in 1972, by 2001 mainline denominations had slipped to around 40% with Evangelicals now the majority of Protestants.<sup>7</sup>(Hout, Greeley, and Wilde 2001)

There is a strong correlation of switching to age group with the youngest cohorts most likely to have switched affiliation. The Religious Landscape Survey 2008 found that 42% of 18-30 year-olds had switched, pretty much the same as for other demographic groups, but remarkable as they had far less time to switch than older cohorts. Further the young are significantly less likely to be Protestant than are older Americans (Pew Forum 2008a:36). Only 68% of the 18-29 cohort is Protestant compared to 76% of the 30-39, and 80% of the 40-49 cohort. The youngest are much more likely to be “unaffiliated” than is the next group, 25% vs 19%.

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<sup>6</sup>“Unaffiliated” here includes Atheist, Agnostic, and “nothing in particular.”

<sup>7</sup>Hout, Greeley, and Wilde, as well as Roof argue that the decline of mainline denominations has more to do with birth rates and apostasy rather than overt switching to Evangelical congregations.

Sociologist Wade Clark Roof compares the post-1960s shift to the Second Great Awakening in scope and scale (Roof 1998 especially Chapter 3). Yet it doesn't appear that the change is complete as the remarkable volatility of the youngest cohort would indicate. Religion is not changing in isolation. The thesis advanced by Frederic Jameson, David Harvey and Zygmunt Bauman and others that modernity went into hyper-acceleration sometime around 1970 (Bauman 2000) (Jameson 1990) (Harvey 1990) would indicate generational consequences for those born after that date. In what Bauman calls *Liquid Modernity* "...the mortal body is now perhaps the longest-living entity around (in fact, the sole entity whose life-expectation tends to increase over the years)" (Bauman 2000).

Some more indication of categorical shift is indicated by general increases in "unaffiliated" and decline in "Christian." The 2006 Baylor Religion Survey has similar findings to the Pew survey<sup>8</sup> but finds that more than 60% of the unaffiliated have some beliefs in God (Baylor Survey 2006). A CUNY survey polling in 1990 and again in 2001 found a nine percent drop in people identifying themselves with one religion or another. A similar drop was found in those who classify themselves as Christian, from 86% in 1990 to 77% in 2001 (CUNY 2001). The CUNY authors see this as evidence of rising secularism in America and see a possible convergence with similar secularizing trends in other Western, democratic societies.

All major recent studies point to a high degree of fluidity in the American religious "landscape." Yet the church attendance numbers remain stubbornly fixed at 40%. High levels of switching point to major developments within this "landscape," but the surveys do not tell us much about what is going on. This is due to the quantitative nature of these surveys. The Pew Survey, for example, completed telephone interviews with a sample size of 35,556 adults. The surveys do not say much about qualitative differences over time

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<sup>8</sup>The Baylor survey finds a lower percentage of unaffiliated than the Pew Survey 10.8% instead of 16.1. The CUNY 2001 survey finds 14.3%.

assuming by necessity that religious belief and practice has remained much the same for the past forty or so years.

Belief and practice barely resemble the 1960s Sunday morning of sitting in pews silently listening to sermons and performing specified actions on cue from the presiding clergyman. Even within the American Catholic Church, traditional forms of worship have declined significantly (Roof 1999). The following qualitative changes have been widely noted and studied over this period. A divergence between religious affiliation and identification, increased flexibility in attitudes toward ultimate truths, changing perceptions of God's subjectivity, the convergence of religious culture and popular culture, the decline of denominations, and the explosive growth of megachurches at the expense of smaller congregations.

One enormous problem for big surveys is finding appropriate categories that accurately reflect belief. The Baylor survey finds "...a clear disconnect between how the media and academics identify American believers and how they identify themselves" (Baylor Survey 2006:15). One particular puzzle revealed in the Baylor data is only one third of those in Evangelical congregations identify themselves as "Evangelical," while more members of Mainline Protestant denominations use the term. The most popular self-identifying term on the Baylor list was "Bible-Believing" with 47.2%. Yet even this descriptor is problematic as attitudes towards the veracity of the Bible vary enormously. A 2007 report released by Gallup Inc. showed in polls over the preceding three years, found that 31% agreed with the statement that the Bible is "The actual word of God, to be taken literally," 47% agreed with "the Bible is the inspired word of God," and 19% with "a book of ancient fables, legends, and history as recorded by man" (Gallup 2007).

Making the picture murkier is the apparent divergence between affiliation, in terms of church membership, and identity. Lewis and de Bernardo find that Evangelical church



members who also self-identify as evangelicals being far more likely than those who are just church members or who only self-identify as Evangelicals to take conservative political stances (Lewis and de Bernardo 2008). They further speculate that media offerings by religious elites that effect of contemporary religious identity is similar to that of subculture membership, affectively choosing the visible attitudes of group membership. This would support Luckmann's contention that individuals are increasingly looking to secondary institutions in forming their private religious identity.

The traditional categorization of American religion into denominations appears to be increasingly irrelevant. In a small survey of middle class whites from ages 18-38, Hoge and O'Connor found that declared denominational identity had no relationship to church involvement, and conclude that denominational loyalty must be seen as a variable independent from church participation (Hoge and O'Connor 2004:84). Social factors, such as child care, support groups, and available parking, rather than specific creed appear to be increasing their influence on church membership (Roof 1999, Twitchell 2004, Hoge and O'Connor 2004).

Churches in the United States have been social centers since frontier times when there were neither towns nor villages in the rapidly expanding zone of settlement to the west (Mathews 1969). It is very common for people to meet their future wives or husbands at church still today. For many, the "religious" content of religion is simply irrelevant to their "religious" behavior. In the next section I will discuss the Second Great Awakening in some depth, but this first religious upheaval, 1800-1840, was matched by tremendous social, political, and economic transformation that went on in the formative years of the United States. The period from the 1960s to the present has had similar overtones of accelerated change in all areas of society.

If going to church does not denote “religiousness,” it is reflected in popular attitudes about church attendance. Roof and McKinney cite a 1978 Gallup study as evidence for increasing religious privatism in Twentieth Century America (Roof and McKinney 1985). 81% of respondents in the study agreed with the statement, “an individual should arrive at his or her own religious beliefs independent of any church or synagogue,” and 78% agreeing that “a person can be a good Christian or Jew without attending a church or synagogue.” While a remarkable indication of antinomianism, this indicator is contradicted by a 2006 study that found that this tolerance does not extend to atheists. Nearly 40% of respondents agreed to the survey question regarding atheists, “This group does not at all agree with my vision of American society,” surpassing Muslims, homosexuals, recent immigrants, and all other groups identified in the survey (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006). But this may be a “false other,” in the sense that self-reporting of atheism is correlated with higher education and income according the Pew Survey which does not make atheists particularly vulnerable to persecution, nor are there any apparent cultural markers that would constitute a group identity for atheists as, for example, Jews.

Yet the Minnesota study on Atheists stands out as an exception. Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann explain this finding as evidence of religious convergence:

More tolerance of religious diversity, however, does not necessarily mean that the salience of religious identity itself is declining. To the contrary, if acceptance of religious diversity in the United States is indeed based upon increasing convergence around a core set of religious beliefs and practices, then this may reinforce intolerance of those who reject religion. (Edgell, Gerteis, and Hartmann 2006)

Convergence explains the declining influence of denominations and the consistency of church attendance figures, but convergence can also be construed as loss of actual difference between denominations and between religions. Religious practices, churches and

synagogues, become more isomorphic to each other, but also to popular culture according to the surveys.

Continuing to use the market metaphor, the biggest losers in market share have been denominations that have a distant, transcendent version of God, i.e. mainline Protestants, Catholics and Jews<sup>9</sup>. Meanwhile, the winners have a far more immanent sense of the divine, where God is an active force or agency in everyday life. This is reflected in the rise of so-called “New Age” spirituality as well as more dynamic and expressive Evangelical Christian variants such as Pentecostalism. Wade Clark Roof offers the following explanation:

It is an outcome of “domesticated” transcendence of God, of a closed system of natural laws of cause and effect in which God really has no place other than “beyond” the universe. But in the contemporary spiritual marketplace, pressures mount in the direction of reconstructing the sacred: reconnecting the transcendent and the immanent, reclaiming God in everyday life and experience...(Roof 1999:100)

Roof's conception of current religious developments “reconstructing the sacred” is a response to the radical social transformations experienced in the United States in the past forty years, chiefly the break-up of cultural monopolies and consequent fragmentation reflected in tolerance surveys.

Another thing that the “losers” have in common is complex liturgical practice tied to pre-capitalist (or, indeed prehistoric) rituals and conceptions of the sacred. The incongruence between this traditionally mediated sacred universe and the everyday lives of people in a situation of accelerating social change makes these losers less and less relevant in the world outside the church and its socially isolated functions. According to the Pew Survey, the only reason why the Catholic Church has maintained market share is because of Latino immigration. The Pew Forum estimates that Latinos made up one-third of Catholics in the

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<sup>9</sup> That is Jews who self-identify as “religious,” not ethnicity.

United States in 2009 attending largely Spanish-language services (Probst 2009). The big winners, and increasingly so, have been churches that offer dramatically different forms of worship. While sermons, singing, and prayer are still central parts of church services, the nature of these three basic practices has radically altered. Churches themselves have dramatically changed, now much larger, denominationally amorphous, and offering services beyond those traditionally deemed strictly religious.

Sermons have changed quantitatively, but more importantly qualitatively. According to the National Congregations Study, average sermon length today is about 20 minutes (NCS 2006-7). Although this length held constant over the nine years of the survey, it is a decrease from 1970 levels. General trends in the content are difficult to estimate as there are approximately 335,000 congregations in the United States according to the Hartford Institute, but church sermons are more likely to be about life issues, “Chicken soup for the soul,”<sup>10</sup> than theological explication. This is far more common in newer, rapidly growing congregations than in smaller, older congregations.

Church music has also changed radically. NCS 2006-7 shows a drop in singing by choirs in worship services from 72% in 1998 to 58% in the 2006-7 wave. The same study shows an increase in the use of drums from 25% to 37% over the same period. The Hartford Institute “American Congregations 2005” FACT survey shows a jump of nearly 15% in the use of electric guitar as part of worship from 2000 to 2005 (FACT 2005). The FACT report's author, David A. Roozen finds use of electric guitar significant “...because of its close association with the emergence of what is more broadly called “contemporary worship.” (FACT 2005:13) The disappearance of choirs and rapidly rising prevalence of soft-rock band formats for live church music shows that the music is considerably less

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<sup>10</sup> Chicken soup is a popular panacea for all ills. *Chicken Soup for the Soul* is a series of self-help books by Jack Canfield featuring titles such as *Chicken Soup for the Soul: Inside Basketball*. According to Roof they all fit a narrative formula “...that recount inspirational stories of personal tribulation and triumph – designed to fit special markets or “niche areas”” (Roof 1998, 100).

“religious” at least in the sense of continuing a sacred tradition of where the past has any power over the present except in the sense of remote, Biblical “time.”

Interesting, but vague, are the FACT findings on “Ambiance of Collectively Evoking and Responding to the Presence of God.” Evangelical Protestants (called “Other Protestants” in the FACT survey) are significantly more likely to use the terms, “joyful,” “exciting,” “inspiring,” and “thought provoking” than are the other faith families, mainline Protestants (“Oldline” in the FACT survey) and Catholic and Orthodox. Evangelical Protestant congregations were the least likely to use the terms “liturgically formal,” and “reverent.” As noted above, the Evangelical Protestant faith family is the most rapidly growing and now constitutes the majority of Protestants in the United States. Contemporary worship style merges with the informality of other social institutions, better fitting a consumer lifestyle.

None of the surveys examined explicitly addressed liturgy, so it is difficult to assess how widespread are the “chicken soup” sermons, but the data that is available indicates that most likely or if this is equivalent to “contemporary worship,” but the churches that use this style are those that have been growing the most rapidly. You no longer put on your Sunday best to go to church, but go in casual weekend clothes. Pews have given way to soft, cinema-style seats, altars and religious symbols are absent, but giant video screens dominate the sanctuary.

Cross Point Church in Duluth, Georgia is typical of the growing megachurch phenomenon. My sister is a member and I have attended services with her and her family. The church is located in the exurban<sup>11</sup> zone of Gwinnet County Georgia, about an hour’s drive from downtown Atlanta. According to the US Census Bureau, the county population has increased from 588,448 in 2000 to an estimated 789,499 in 2009.<sup>12</sup> The Atlanta Regional

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<sup>11</sup> Exurban denotes a suburban area beyond the older suburbs. Distinctively labor commutes to work either to the metropolitan center or to other exurban areas. Office parks are common developments in exurbs, some corporations choosing these locations for major operations.

<sup>12</sup> US Census county tables <http://www.census.gov/popest/counties/tables/CO-EST2008-01-13.csv>.

Commission the county accounts for 26% total population growth for the metropolitan region that includes nine counties plus the City of Atlanta. The same report estimates the 1970 population of Gwinnet County at 72,349<sup>13</sup>. In 1970 the county was still rural with small farm agriculture predominant. The county was still distinctly Southern rural at the time of the obscenity trial and shooting of *Hustler* magazine publisher Larry Flint in the Lawrenceville town square in 1978, perhaps the most notorious incident in the county's recent history.

At that time Lawrenceville, the county seat, was a typical small Georgia town complete with a memorial statue for the Confederate war dead. Long since the town center and other small towns in the county have been engulfed in suburban/exurban development radiating out along the limited access freeways coming from Atlanta. Not only do these old town centers struggle to be viable in competition with the malls and shopping centers that are built up to the city limits, those first-wave developments have succumbed to decay, with retail space now taken up by those signifiers of poverty, check cashing outlets, thrift stores, dollar shops, and dollar cinemas showing old releases. Many properties are vacant. Development and the affluent middle class have moved farther out along the freeways that are the arteries of this automotive cultural geography. The county has only limited public transport beyond express busses to downtown Atlanta operating just five routes within the county. Due to the dispersal pattern of development, creating viable bus routes is difficult as there are no centers to connect. The rural history of the county is almost invisible, the most salient evidence of this past are the cemeteries from vanished churches that once served the agricultural communities in the county.

The Hartford Institute defines a megachurch as a Protestant congregation with a sustained weekly attendance of 2,000 or more.<sup>14</sup> There are more than 1,200 megachurches in

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<sup>13</sup> Atlanta Regional Commission Demographic Profiles document PDF.

<sup>14</sup> Data from "The definition of a Megachurch from Hartford Institute for Religion Research." 8 Feb 2009 <<http://hirr.hartsem.edu/megachurch/definition.html>>.

the United States with the number of such churches nearly doubling between 2000 and 2005 (von der Ruhr and Daniels 2008). The majority of these churches are Evangelical and conservative in theology, with California, Texas, Florida, and Georgia having the highest concentrations. Most megachurches are located in rapidly growing suburban or exurban areas that are part of the sprawl of most American conurbations.<sup>15</sup> About 10% of megachurches are located downtown with nearly 50% located in newer suburbs (Thumma and Bird 2008).

Megachurches inhabit this newly sprung exurban<sup>16</sup> landscape of vast housing developments, strip malls, gigantic car parks, office parks and fast food franchises. Often they appear in clusters, very near or next to each other (Twitchell 2004). Sometimes they are called “shopping mall churches” because of their location and the variety of not obviously religious services they provide. This label, while apparently dismissive of megachurches' significance, is used by some megachurch pastors. Lee McFarland, pastor of Radiant Church in Surprise, Arizona, told the New York Times in a 2005 interview that the church was deliberately designed to resemble a mall (Mahler 2005).

Cross Pointe and Gwinnet's other megachurches have no cemeteries attached to them like those of the county's rural past. Cemeteries imply permanence and locality, not possible in the transitory, ephemerality of the county. Unlike the small clapboard Baptist churches that were once the religious and social centers of the county, Cross Pointe serves the mobile, professional middle class. The church is barely visible from the road. You must drive uphill into the enormous parking lot to view the façade. There is no portal, just a long glass wall of doors like one would find at a suburban high school. Inside there is a reception area, an

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<sup>15</sup> The largest megachurch in the United States is Lakewood Church in Houston averages 47,000 people per weekend in 2007, followed by Willow Creek, in the Chicago suburbs, with 23,500. Second Baptist Church in Houston with 23,198, Saddleback of Lake Forest, Calif. with 22,000.

<sup>16</sup> Exurbs differ from suburbs partly by being farther away from the city center, but also through independence from the city center. Exurban dwellers are more likely to commute to other exurbs for work than to the city center.

information booth, and a small bookshop. Corridors lead back to the sports complex and school rooms where children go for their separate services. The sanctuary seats about 2,000 in arced rows interrupted by a large platform for a professional television camera. There are no symbols or obvious religious decorations, nor is there an altar. The dias resembles a theatrical stage, and to the right of the stage, eight meters or so up the wall is something that looks like an aquarium with steps in it. The aquarium is the baptistery. Services begin with adult, total immersion baptism in the aquarium under spotlights and also represented on the three large video screens on the walls of the sanctuary. The old rural Baptist churches the county once had practiced total immersion baptism as well, but this was done in local rivers and lakes.

The service I attended in July 2009 began with a Christian rock band that played for about fifteen minutes. The congregation sang along helped by video subtitles on the screens. None of the songs were traditional hymns. The pastor, James Merritt<sup>17</sup>, sat on a high stool surrounded by nets, giant fish hooks and other fishing props. The props were for the “fisher of men” injunction by Jesus in John 21 to proselytize for the church, but the particular evangelizing mission in Merritt’s sermon was a weekend church picnic where the congregation was urged to invite their “unchurched” friends. Merritt told folksy stories of evangelizing people on airplanes, but never really addressed the text. Actually, he reversed it using fishing jargon to explain how to evangelize the “unchurched,” something I found rather disturbing as the clumsy fishing metaphor for evangelism, bringing the dead to life, works out

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<sup>17</sup> Biographical details from the Cross Point website read: As a popular Bible teacher and respected voice of the Christian faith, James has been interviewed by media outlets including 60 Minutes, The New York Times, ABC World News Tonight, Time Magazine, and Hannity and Colmes. Each week, Merritt's messages are broadcast in all 50 states and 122 countries around the world through Touching Lives, a television and media ministry. Dr. Merritt earned his bachelor degree from Stetson University and his Master of Divinity degree and Doctor of Philosophy degree from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky. He has published several books including Friends, Foes and Fools and How to Be a Winner and Influence Anybody with Broadman and Holman publishers. His heart for pastors has also resulted in PastorsEdge.com, a ministry resource and PastorsEdge Mentoring Conferences.



rather badly for the fish. The service ended with more playing by the band. The experience was rather bland, like a corporate motivational meeting.

Megachurches overwhelmingly use “contemporary worship style,” with only 2% in a 2008 survey saying that this term did not describe their worship at all (Thumma and Bird 2008). Contemporary worship mostly centers on the use of popular music forms, particularly guitar and drums. It originates from the Charismatic movement in the late 1960s.

Congregational resistance to leaving traditional music and practice behind resulted in the “worship wars” congregational splits and factional fighting. With the astounding rise of the megachurch, the traditionalists appear to have been vanquished.

Surveys show a strong trend toward concentration of worshipers in the largest churches. The NCS study states a median congregation size of 75 with the median person attending a congregation of 400. Mean congregation size in the same survey for 2006-7 was 1167. FACT 2005 reports that 47% of congregations have less than 100 weekly attendees, and 65% of congregations have one or no full-time professional staff. James Twitchell estimates that fifty churches a week, mostly in rural or inner city areas close every week (Twitchell 2004:81) Anderson et. al. estimate the mortality rate for American congregations at 1% per annum (Anderson, et al. 2008, 325).<sup>18</sup>

Exurban areas like Gwinnet County Georgia have their social foci in the shopping mall, which not only serve as commercial centers in their own right, many satellite retail developments surround their periphery. All are located with easy access to freeways. They are often owned by large property corporations. The Simon Property Group, inc. portfolio includes 404 malls and other retail developments in the United States. One Simon Mall, the

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<sup>18</sup> According to the authors, this rate is among the lowest mortality rates ever observed for any type of organization. This unusually low mortality rate probably indicates an organizational population whose weakest members live on in a weakened state rather than an organizational population that is unusually robust all the way down to its most vulnerable members.

Mall of Georgia in Gwinnet County, has 225 shops, 27 restaurants, and a 20 screen cinema with parking for more than 8,000 cars.

Megachurch minister Pastor McFarland compares new churches to shopping malls in terms of attracting parishioners, but the physical similarity is strong. Some aspects of mall simulation by megachurches are quite literal, such as food courts that include national franchises like Starbucks and large bookshops as well as cinema screens, fitness centers, sports facilities, childcare, gigantic carparks and central directories. The niche marketing which drives the retail appeal of large malls is extended to ministries through small groups. It is the variety of mini-ministries catering to particular niches in the congregation as well as associated services and retail operations that make them mall-like. Main sanctuary services are of two types, “seeker” and “believer” with the seeker services designed to evangelize the “unchurched.” Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church, one of the largest and most influential megachurches in the United States and author of the 20 million-selling *The Purpose Driven Life*, describes seeker services as follows:

A seeker service is an evangelistic service specifically designed for two purposes:

First, so that people without any religious background will understand everything that takes place, and Second, so that members are proud to bring their non-believing friends to it. (Warren 2006)

Willow Creek, another hugely influential megachurch offers seven weekly services, five of them seeker services. Warren is influential enough to have been invited to give the invocation at Barak Obama’s 2009 inauguration ceremony. This also shows the current fluidity of Evangelical politics per se.

The megachurch model is “multi-congregational,” containing within different ministries catering to different niches. Answering the criticism that this is consumer-oriented Christianity, Warren states, “the truth is that every style of worship service caters to someone:

A traditional service cater to those who grew up in that tradition, a formal service caters to formal people, and emotional services cater to emotional people.” (Warren 2006) In addition to seeker and believer services, small group activities are abundant. Willow Creek church has over 1,500 small groups in its small group ministry.

Small groups are not an invention of megachurches, but developed out of the 1960s self-actualization movements, group therapy, and self-help groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous. These secondary institutions of ultimate significance provide many, if not most, of the themes composing contemporary worship. Also the small group approach has been extensively used in contemporary corporate management practices. Megachurches use small groups from both sources. An example is megachurch small groups for alcoholics that copy the twelve-step approach of AA but replace the “higher power” with Jesus. This syncretic layering of Jesus over popular small group formats results in a bewildering variety of different types of small groups: divorce recovery, empty nesters, high school sexuality, skateboarding, church management, as well as more religiously explicit Bible study groups. Thumma and Bird's 2008 survey find that the number of megachurches using small group as “central to their strategy for Christian nurture and spiritual formation” rose from 50% in 2000 to 84% in 2008 (Thumma and Bird 2008). Megachurches have something for everyone as do shopping malls.

Treating congregants as consumers, and the church as a brand is explicit in the promotional literature on the megachurch format. A simple Google search performed on 21 Feb. 2009 with the terms “growing your church” returned more than 10,000 hits. Using the transitive verb “grow” in this case is an example of a buzzword from business consultancy jargon, in the sense of “grow your business” meaning to increase it. There is very little difference between church marketing discourse and general marketing discourse.

Often the term “brand” is applied to megachurches both by academics such as James Twitchell and by consultants and pastors of megachurches including the numerous how-to books. Branding is a strategy employed in the development of multi-site churches, megachurches that have sprouted satellite campuses, often in states distant from their original site. “The core idea for the multi-site movement is rather simple – one church in multiple locations...While each church shows an intentional sense of brand identity, and resembles the mother ship in some profound ways, few multi-site churches come across like an exact clone of the parent church.” (Bird, Surratt, and Ligon 2006). This is the newest development, the franchise expansion of megachurches.

While the majority of megachurches are affiliated with a Protestant denomination, the affiliation is not emphasized or part of the church name, and many of the largest megachurches, such as Willow Creek, are non-denominational. As noted above, traditional denominational affiliation among adherents has been weakening since 1970, leading some scholars to speculate that megachurches have become mini-denominations (Thumma and Bird 2008).

Sociologist Mark Chaves conducted an exhaustive study of congregation size with data from congregations going back to the 1900 in some cases. According to Chaves, while large churches have been present at least since the 1930s, for every denomination for which he has data, people are increasingly concentrated in very large churches with the trend beginning rather abruptly in the 1970s and showing no signs of tapering off (Chaves 2005).<sup>19</sup> Chaves, while examining many different explanations to the explosive and accelerating proliferation of megachurches finds the most potent explanation in “Baumol's Cost Disease,” “The basic idea is simple. If there is increasing productivity – increases in efficiency –

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<sup>19</sup> Chaves stresses that none of the individual characteristics of megachurches including size, small groups, lack of Christian symbolism and so on are not at all new.

somewhere in the economy, and if wages increase in these sectors, then wages also will increase in other sectors of the economy, or else talent will move to the sectors in which wages are increasing.” (Chaves 2005:342) Basically, the argument goes that bigger churches are more cost-effective and cheaper to run on a per-unit basis. This follows the organizational form of increasing size of corporations, mergers, buy-outs and consolidation that has been especially prominent in recent decades. Megachurches creating franchises doesn’t follow the denominational evangelizing and spreading pioneered by the Methodist in 18<sup>th</sup> Century England, but more like the operations of Starbucks or McDonalds. Unlike denominations, it is not creed that differentiates, but rather brand identity. Von der Ruhr and Daniels (2008) write that while churches in the past were chosen first by their doctrine and denomination, currently, as manifest in the megachurch phenomenon, function and form are determinant. “Megachurches’ emphasis on practical religion invite a voluntary faith that is allowed to deepen (or not) based on the individual’s perception of the value of the experience” (von der Ruhr and Daniels 2008, 6). Using an investment model, they further posit that the many activities megachurches provide appeal to diverse personal interests and hobbies that “serve to subsidize a potential member’s investment in religion and the church” (ibid 7).<sup>20</sup>

At least in suburban and exurban areas, there is a strong case that economic factors have heavily influenced churches and religious behavior. Copying a successful form like the shopping mall makes sense in a “religious marketplace” as it would in other commercial venues. That religion in America is run like business is hardly contentious. Alexis de Tocqueville made this observation in his *Democracy in America* published in 1835. As noted above, pastors of the largest churches have no difficulty in using market speak for describing their churches and the services they offer. Making it easier to go to church, by providing

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<sup>20</sup> On a visit to Cross Pointe Church in 2008 I was invited to go turkey hunting with a church group and given a colorful brochure with pictures of camouflage-clad parishioners posing with shotguns and bagged turkeys.

parking and child care; making worship services more pleasant, by soft rock music and folksy “chicken soup,” sermons; and making extending the church to subsidizing hobbies and other activities lends support to Mike Featherstone’s conclusion that religion has become a question about the effects of religion once it has become a private, “leisure-time pursuit purchased in the market like any other consumer cultural lifestyle” (Featherstone 1991, 113). Once religion becomes isomorphic to secular culture, and when religions behavior is indistinguishable to consumer behavior in general as the proponents of a rational choice economic model to the study of religion assert, then it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish religions behavior precisely because it is no longer religious.

Yet there is a social form of religion in the United States even if religion as a specialized institution with respected experts has disappeared. A more general sacred cosmos, a world view if you will, remains, even if inchoate and unarticulated in any formal sense. Luckmann insists this is not regression as discussed above. The private nature of contemporary religion militates against social forms of religion that permeate society in all areas rather than being confined to the individual and his or her ad hoc constructions of ultimate reality. However some specific religious representations remain in this “new” social religion, chief of these is the sacred individual. This isn’t necessarily liberation of the inner man. “Because the individual’s performances are controlled by the primary public institutions, he soon recognizes the limits of his “autonomy” and learns to confine the quest for self-realization to the “private sphere”” (Luckmann 1967, 110). But there is a public component to this sacred individual, in the American case at least. First is the power of the individual and individual will to choose and escape his or her circumstances and past, to reinvent, achieve, and change through sheer determination. Secondly, this sacred individual must not be structurally limited by collective control from achieving all he can, a belief that deifies the free market. This isn’t to say that capitalism is a religion, but its most fervid

neoliberal proponents base their argument on individual freedom. Public qua public then becomes the adversary.

In the explosive expansion of capitalism into its global form since 1970, the same period has marked serious changes in religion in the United States. Religion has become more Jamesian, individual, and reflexive. Using Roof's terminology, since the 1960s, American religious practices have shifted from being "other-directed" where the other was God or humanity, to "self-directed" where religious resources were there to serve you rather than you being required to serve them (Roof 1998). Jesus is personalized as a friend, companion, or a helpful presence. These changes reinforce the sacred qualities of the "autonomous" individual, whose consumption of commodities of "ultimate significance" has rocketed in that time.

This section began with an examination of the secularization hypothesis and the refutation of it by rational choice scholars of religion such as Stark and Iannaccone. If self-reported church attendance and national polling data indicate that there is no decline in apparent religiosity, then it appears that they are correct and the United States has not become more secular and less religious since the 1960s. Thomas Luckmann offers an alternative interpretation of secularization for the American situation:

The distribution of church religion in America, nevertheless, does not represent a reversal of the trend towards "secularization" ...It is rather the result of a radical inner change in American church religion. This change consists in the adoption of the *secular* version of the Protestant ethos by the churches which, of course, did not result from concerted policy but is rather a product of a unique constellation of factors in American social and religious history' [emphasis in original] (Luckmann 1967)

Although Luckmann wrote in the 1960s, *before*, the changes described in this section took place, the observation is astute. He further notes that the American church's social and psychological functions would be considered secular according to earlier norms and European churches. It's hard to see how turkey hunting can be anything but secular, unless one has a very broad definition of religion indeed. Accordingly, following Luckmann's view of secularization, it would appear that by adopting secular cultural forms with such enthusiasm, that religion is even more secular than it was when Luckmann wrote *The Invisible Religion*.

This leaves an odd situation with a secular religion in the 1960s and an even more secular religion in the 2000s. Both need explication, the former to show continuity with the past and illustrate the relationship between early American revivalism and industrial capitalism, and the second to show how Evangelical identity, indeed all "reflexive" voluntaristic identities, have become commodified, and flattened in postmodernity.



## 2.2 The Second Great Awakening

Wade Clark Roof is right to compare the current ferment in American popular religion to that of the Second Great Awakening, the formative years of the early republic. It is in this period from 1790 to 1840 that the United States ceased to be a cultural colony of Europe and began developing its own domestic culture. In the previous section secularization was discussed where I proposed that while Americans remain as religious as they have been for decades, institutional religion has become secular and isomorphic to popular consumer culture. The purpose of this section is to describe the point of fundamental divergence of American culture from European civilization in general and how the themes from the early days of the Republic resonate in the postmodern period. Popular religion in the United States long ago became secular practice.

Much to the delight of many, the apparent resurgence of religion the United States during the 1970s and 80s caught sociologists by surprise (Roof 1998) (C. Taylor, 2002) (M. C. Taylor 2007) . This surprise was a double error, both in the answer to the question and the question itself. Luckmann argues that secularization in modern, industrial societies proceeds either through decline to the periphery of marginal social groups if the religious institutions continue to mediate a traditional universe of meaning, or the churches accommodate themselves to modern industrial society by taking on the function of legitimating that society (Luckmann 1967, 37). In the first case, Europe, institutional religion did not undergo a radical transformation and continued to mediate the sacred cosmos according to traditional, pre-industrial social values and declined. In the second case, that of the United States,

religion adapted itself to the social values of industrial capitalism and maintained its institutional position.

The relationship between commerce and religion in the United States is reciprocal, each begetting the other. Luckmann writes, “Whereas religious ideas originally played an important part in the shaping of the American Dream, today the secular ideas of the American Dream pervade church religion” (Luckmann 1967, 36). Writing in the 1960s Luckmann identified a process of doctrinal leveling between Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism, which, while not at all a theological rapprochement, resulted in nearly identical institutional structures through “...a bureaucratization along rational, businesslike lines – and accommodation to the “secular” way of life” (Luckmann 1967, 35). In this manner, religious institutions such as churches become isomorphic, identical in form, to secular institutions from business and government. This secularization, according to Luckmann is due to unique historical and social circumstances. The peculiarity most salient is voluntarism, the essence of the American Dream, and the most potent sacred quality of the “autonomous individual.”

Early American religion reflected industrial capitalism through its emphasis on production. Contemporary American religion reflects late capitalism’s emphasis on consumption. A good explication of the better known Protestant work ethic is articulated in this excerpt from John Wesley’s sermon, “The Use of Money,” where it is a Christian’s duty to:

Gain all you can by honest industry. Use all possible diligence in your calling. Lose no time. If you understand yourself, and your relation to God and man, you know you have none to spare. If you understand your particular calling, as you ought, you will have no time that hangs upon your hands. Every business will afford some

employment sufficient for every day and every hour. That wherein you are placed, if you follow it in earnest, will leave you no leisure for silly, unprofitable diversions.<sup>21</sup>

Wesley's marriage of God and Mammon serves as a statement of the familiar Protestant work ethic, but also describes money as a gift from God. Methodism, the spearhead of the Second Great Awakening, was Wesley's creation to bring religion to the poor, and organized labor's struggle with capital over working hours was often denounced from the pulpit. Evangelical Christianity in the United States was never systematically opposed to capitalism as a system, but only in the "populist" form of "dishonesty" of individuals (usually not specified, often some secret cabal) and institutions like banks. The system is not structurally corrupt; it is the actions of individuals who corrupt it. Hobbled by its insistence on individual agency, populist movements have never managed to mount a serious political challenge to the economic order (Shuck 2005).

This version of the Protestant work ethic in Wesley's sermon with its condemnation of leisure and "silly, unprofitable diversions," is an apology for capitalist production. While not at all vanished, there is also an apology for capitalist (commodity) consumption, what sociologist Colin Campbell calls "the other Protestant work ethic." Jackson Lears describes this ethic as originating in the mystical strain of Christianity present since Augustine, an emotional inner cultivation of the yearning toward God. Protestantism had already removed the mediator between God and man: the Arminianism practiced in the Second Great Awakening through ecstatic conversion experiences released this repressed longing for immediate connection to the Divine. Hence this other ethic is working to cultivate inner spiritual bounty, the ecstatic experience. The legitimation of emotion as an immediate form of knowledge rather than an aspect of human nature that had to be disciplined, rapidly moved out of what was strictly religion to the commodity. "Mystic dreams of spontaneously flowing

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<sup>21</sup> [http://servanthood.org/resources/wesley\\_money.html](http://servanthood.org/resources/wesley_money.html)

spiritual abundance were translated into the secular language of the marketplace” (Lears 1995, 48). The longing for unity with God, the basic Christian desire in Augustine, cannot be realized in earthly life. The ecstasy of the conversion experience wears off, and everyday reality resumes.

Lears suggests this other ethic is in an uneasy dialectic with the first, one overwriting the other. Leisure is no longer unprofitable – indeed it is necessary to cultivate the inner world – but leisure to pursue ecstasy is in turned disciplined, organized, and rationalized. In postmodern consumer capitalism, self improvement becomes the purpose of leisure. David Brooks observes that for the Bourgeois Bohemians, the new ruling class, pleasure must have a purpose. Excess is ruled out, fun is responsible and purposive. Pleasure has become “useful” (Brooks 2000, 198-200). It’s hard to understand how pleasure taken so seriously remains pleasure at all. According Slavoj Žizek, writing about the narcissistic postmodern subject, pleasure has become an obligation, something to feel guilty about not because it is sinful, but because one may fail in the pursuit of it. Even that most hedonistic group of the 1970s, gay men, have succumbed to this iron rule. “In the course of a brief stroll along Christopher Street or in Chelsea, one encounters hundreds of gays putting extraordinary energy into body-building, obsessed with the dreadful prospect of getting old, dedicated to pleasure, yet obviously living in a permanent anxiety and under the shadow of their ultimate failure” (Žižek 1999, 367).<sup>22</sup> Wesley’s doctrine of salvation had the built in anxiety from contingent salvation, one could backslide into sin and damnation without constant self-vigilance.

From the time of the publication of Alexis de Tocqueville’s “Democracy in America” in 1840, voluntarism has been widely recognized as one of the signature elements of the

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<sup>22</sup> Žizek’s example also shows the cultural commodification of physical labor. Gyms and fitness centers sell something to the consumer, which used to be sold by the worker: work. If money is a form of stored labor, then paying to labor is having your own labor sold back to you. Treadmills are a commodified form of walking, yet one doesn’t require a treadmill to walk. In yet another inversion, being fat, which was once a marker of status and wealth, is now a marker of poverty and moral decay. The working class is too poor to work.

American character. Robert Bellah, in his very influential 1967 article *Civil Religion in America* proposed it as an integral part of the “unrecognized” civil religion in America (Bellah 1967, 1). While Bellah and other writers are entirely correct in pointing out that collective voluntarism in the sense of voluntary associations for civic improvement originates from the Calvinist Puritan tradition set up in early New England settlements, they do not stress the theological origin of voluntarism enough, missing an essential point. This is the Arminian doctrine of personal salvation by choice that achieved hegemony during the formative decades of the early republic, the great religious revival known as The Second Great Awakening. Theological voluntarism changed conceptions of individual subjectivity which combined with political and economic Liberalism evolved into the optimistic, ahistorical, enthusiastic individual subject of the American Dream with an antinomian ethic. American peculiarity emerged in the early decades of the republic, a time of enormous turmoil and upheaval, the cultural revolution that followed the War of Independence.<sup>23</sup> The American Revolution was the first and most successful of the great Liberal revolutions and it a mistake to assume that the revolution was merely political and had no profound social consequences. While the political aims of the revolution were narrow, the renunciation of the King and the establishment of the Republic was more than regime change. It also destabilized the legitimacy of the entire social order, which was based on hierarchy with the king at the top. Further destabilization of these social structures came from the rapid expansion to the west geographically and the introduction of industrial capitalism as a mode of production.

As in the 1970s, rapid social dislocation and the disappearance of the predictable, traditional social structures led to the surge of religious revival that swept the United States

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<sup>23</sup> Even though the United States popular mythology is that it is a new country, the constitution of 1789 has only been amended 16 times since making for one of the most stable political systems in modern history, far more stable than all European countries with the exception of Switzerland.

between 1790 and 1830. This is commonly called as the Second Great Awakening, following as it did by fifty or so years on the far less Earth shattering First Great Awakening. The conditions of rapid transformation of economic and social structures and consequent religious fervor is similar in context to that of countries that today are experiencing this sort of change and have also undergone rapid and radical changes in their religious make up.

According to Charles Taylor, Evangelical Protestantism often increases in contexts where societies have recently experienced a breakdown in traditional community and social disruption (Taylor 2002:38). Evangelical Protestantism has not only increased its “market share” in the United States in the past forty years, but has made even more radical gains in South America, Africa, and in South Korea growing at the expense of traditional religious affiliations such as the Catholic Church or Buddhism.

Since 1970 South Korea has moved from a predominantly rural, undeveloped, Buddhist backwater to one of the leading industrial economies in the world, highly urbanized, and with the highest level of broadband internet connections of any country per household. It has also become increasingly Evangelical Christians with strong millenarian beliefs. According to Damian Thompson, visitors returning to Seoul after two decades find the city so changed that they have to use the surrounding mountains to get their bearings (D. Thompson 1996, 227). Brazil is now 15% Protestant up from near zero in 1970, with almost all the growth going to Evangelical Protestantism mostly in the explosively growing urban areas.

The early decades of the United States were times of similar, if not greater, turmoil and transformation and experienced a revolution in religion to match that of politics. Protestantism in America was entirely remade in this period, leaving behind forever Puritan Calvinism in favor of stripped down to essentials religion focusing on salvation by faith and simple theological slogans (Birdsall, 1970:361). This was the beginning of the decline of religious experts in articulating the sacred cosmos as defined in the catechisms. The

dissonance between Calvinist articulation of the sacred cosmos and rapidly changing everyday life in a disrupted social order where traditional political hierarchies had been overthrown was seized upon by my Arminian heretics to remake Christianity in the United States. The conflict between what had been primarily a Reformed, or Calvinist, version of Protestantism and a doctrine known as Arminism rotated around soteriology (or doctrine of salvation). Arminism's voluntarism, that a person could choose salvation, was the doctrine that won and replaced Calvinism in the United States. This is the key to the American Dream so the theological origins are worth exploring.

The central component of voluntarism in all senses is agency. What capacity does the subject, either individually or collectively, to take action according to his or her free will? This should be a familiar question. It has been a fundamental question of Western civilization since the time of St. Augustine. The long running nature versus nurture dispute that still has passionate partisans in the natural and social sciences is just the latest manifestation of this perplexing question. Theologically it has two domains, ontology, and soteriology.

Ontological voluntarism was first voiced by medieval theologian, William of Ockham (c. 1288 – 1348), and was the keystone of the nominalist philosophy. Ockham argued against the deductive rationalism of Thomas Aquinas based on Aristotelian categories. Thomism posited that God's will was based on his reason, that God chose the good through reason. Ockham reversed this asserting that God acted and that action was good because it was God's will. Theologian Mark C. Taylor states, "For Ockham, God is above all else omnipotent will – he is absolutely free and as such is bound by nothing, not even Divine reason (M. C. Taylor 2007, 57)." According to Taylor, this reversal had profound effects. Since all that exists is the will of God, knowledge can only be a *postiori*, the product of

experience. Voluntaristic ontology prepares the way for empirical epistemology as well as modernity and postmodernity (Taylor *ibid*).

This redefines divine ontology. God is the primordial agent absolutely free and absolutely powerful, the cause of all things through his will alone. This will is arbitrary, not governed by anything. If this is the reality of God and the reality of all things, then the elaborate Thomist universe of the scholastics, most beautifully articulated in Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, becomes unstuck. The rational, mechanical medieval universe, and its soteriology of merit, comes under increasing pressure until it explodes in the Protestant Reformation. Both Luther and Calvin extended the omnipotent will of God to predestination, which utterly rejects individual agency in salvation.

Calvin's version of predestination is more pertinent to this discussion than Luther's as the English Puritans who settled New England were largely Calvinist. In proper nominalist fashion, all creation is the will of God who, according to the 1647 Westminster Catechism, is eternal, infinite, and unchanging. As Eternal, God has predestined the saved. The Calvinist doctrine of Total Depravity totally rejected human agency in determining individual salvation. Because of his sinful nature, there was nothing an individual could do to affect his salvation. God chose the individual; the individual was incapable of choosing God. If a person was among the elect, they would naturally act virtuously as they were infused with the Holy Spirit.

It is mistaken to call the Reformed Church (as opposed to Lutheran and Anabaptists) Calvinist, strictly speaking. The Reformed movement was a localized affair, with city states and principalities often working out their own Catechisms. Calvin was the most influential and read, but there were many intellects at work and more congregations working things out for themselves, a tradition carried on by the Puritan settlers in New England who almost immediately split on doctrine in Massachusetts with dissident factions setting up the colonies



of Connecticut and Rhode Island. The catechisms were vital: they stated the ontological basis of belief, what the believer believed as the ultimate reality. These documents are still being revised today by Reformed churches around the world to change language on race and homosexuality. Protestantism is, to corrupt a phrase from Leon Trotsky, a Permanent Reformation.

A rival soteriology sprung up almost immediately, although it later came to be known as Arminianism from a Dutch Reformed theologian Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). Arminians, in particular English theologian and minister John Wesley (1703-1791) attacked predestination as blasphemous, stating that it made “God as worse than the devil, as both more false, more cruel, and more unjust” (Wesley 1740). In addition to being able to choose salvation, freely accepting the message, a person could also achieve Christian perfection (a life without sin) or apostasy, backslide and lose salvation through his or her actions.

Sociologists of religion either discount or underestimate the impact of Wesley’s Arminianism. This is a reversal of Ockham’s voluntarism. Although it is still justification by grace, not merit, the individual can choose to accept this grace – or not. It’s up to the individual, not God, to decide salvation or damnation. As this doctrine provides the explosive force in the vast revival movement in the United States, the Second Great Awakening, it is no less revolutionary than the Reformation itself. The human subject had the radical freedom to re-make oneself, to become a new person by choice. It’s the end of human helplessness, and the beginning of human omnipotence. It also marks the beginning of the end for the catechism and all the catechism entails. All have equal opportunity for salvation under God, a democratic religion for a new democracy.

The controversy between Calvinism and Arminianism in the United States and the eventual total victory of the Arminian side has long been forgotten except among historians of the early republic. The result, what I will call the deification of the individual, has been

sublimated, become part of the American social unconscious. It has long become entirely secular, and assumed. It's the basis for the plucky rags-to-riches heroes of Horatio Alger stories as well as *The Great Gatsby*.

In response to the Liberal political ferment stirred up by the Revolution (a role in which patriotic clergy played no small role preaching that the Revolution and King George were collective punishment for sin (Mathews 1969, 27)) and the stress between these new Liberal, democratic values and the existing power structure, the Second Great Awakening “was a socio-emotional response to dissension and strain within New England (Rossel 1970, 907-908) The revival initially began in the lay folk of the Connecticut valley. It was a popular movement, one that frightened clergy into thinking a millenarian movement influenced by “French ideas” might also spark a social revolution as it had in France. Preachers from the Methodist movement got involved and gave the revival some safe coherence.

Puritan voluntarism stemming from Covenant theology was multiplied by Methodist, er...methods. Methodism was more an organizational technique than theology. Methodism as set up by John and Charles Wesley was not a separate religion, but a popularized version of the Church of England designed for the lower classes. Methodism utilized lay societies with lay preachers recruited from the lower classes. By the time of the Second Great Awakening, lay societies provided the motive force for expansion. Membership in these voluntary societies increased sevenfold in the first decade after independence (Mathews 1969, 36). Like later revolutionary cell organizations, Methodist organizers would travel around setting up local societies where they went independent of clergy. This was the model for American populist grassroots activism, the essence of voluntarism in the sense Bellah and others use it.

This popular movement fit well with the Liberalism of Tom Paine and Thomas Jefferson, the radical freedom of the individual to choose salvation spiritually complimented democratic liberties. But the Jeffersonian right to pursue happiness, was not a Puritan value. The goal of a Christian was Godliness. The best known leader of Puritan settlers was John Winthrop, first governor of the Massachusetts Bay colony. His 1630 sermon to the settlers, A Model of Christian Charity, is widely considered to be one the foundation texts of the United States. The opening line is as follows:

GOD ALMIGHTY in His most holy and wise providence, hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in submission (Winthrop, 1630).

This is very far from Jefferson's words opening the Declaration of Independence, in 1776 that "...all men are created equal." For Winthrop, as for other Calvinists, the role of the church was to maintain social order and community. It was to be a theocratic colony. The main intention of the sermon is not to justify the hierarchy but to state the ethos of mutual obligation, support, and charity that would constitute the new settlement as a Godly Christian community. While hard work had always been a Calvinist ethic, the acquisition of property was not valued in itself. This is clearly set out in the sermon as a choice between fulfilling the Covenant or seeking to fulfill "our carnal intentions seeking great things for ourselves and our posterity" (Winthrop 1630). Wealth was the sign of Divine Providence, not the result of faith, and brought with it obligation. Under the new dispensation, sometimes called "the Gospel of wealth," property and prosperity become the result of faith rather than a sign of Providence, a cause-effect relationship. Acquisition loses its taint of sinfulness and becomes a virtue.

The new, voluntaristic doctrine stressed free will in a way that amounted to "an ideology of personal salvation..." (Mathews 1969, 31). Far from the arid individual

hopelessness of Calvinism, New Light preachers such as Charles Grandison Finney promised immediate and complete remission of sins through an ecstatic conversion experience (Fitzgerald, 1986 p. 403). Salvation and damnation was a choice, "...requiring no special knowledge and no accumulation of good works but merely the acceptance of Christ as a personal savior" (Fitzgerald, 1986 p. 391). God in this formulation is an immediate presence through the Holy Spirit, and active, immanent God, not the distant, transcendent God of Calvin.

The methods of Methodism were shocking to Calvinist clergy and other critics like Jefferson. They were intentionally designed to provoke hysteria. Historian E.P. Thompson describes the emotional violence of a revivalist sermon: "The tense opening, the vivid descriptions of sudden death and catastrophe, the unspecified rhetoric on the enormity of sin, the dramatic offer of redemption" (E. P. Thompson 1963, 418). During the peak years of the 1820s, travelling preachers would set up enormous tents in villages, especially in the "burned over district" of western New York for camp meetings that sometimes lasted a month or more. People would travel for days to reach these meetings. Thompson's description would appear to make this something to avoid rather than seek at hardship, but the hysteria of the camp meetings, despite the loud denunciations of sin generated a carnival atmosphere. The camp meetings could be "virtuously voluptuous," leading one critical minister to remark in 1835 that, "more souls were begot than saved" at such revivals (cited in Lears p. 57). The lives of farmers and urban workers were hard lives of ceaseless toil, and while the promise of salvation gave hope for rest in the hereafter, the camp meeting and urban revival offered a blow off, cathartic drama, and a damned good time.

"Word circulated among the frontier settlers about the time and location of a camp meeting, and entire families loaded into wagons and gathered at the appointed place for preaching and revival – as well as for some surreptitious drinking and carousing.

The camp meeting functioned as a huge social occasion...it also schooled them in enthusiastic, evangelical religion (Balmer 1993, 231).

Calvinist worship had no spectacular elements; there was no drama or excitement. No one felt the influence of the Holy Ghost and experienced the ecstasy of conversion. Calvinist theology was intellectual and arid, where “revelation had become a theory, a religion that knew too much about God and tried to explain rather than deepen the mysteries of life“(Birdsall 1970, 356).

Historian Donald G. Mathews argues that the most salient feature of the Second Great Awakening, as opposed to the First, was “...in the undeniable quantitative fact that Methodist and Baptist sects were not restructuring [Christianity] so much as extending it – they were recruiting new Christians by the tens of thousands” (Mathews 1969, 26). A fairly recent estimate of church membership at the time of the Revolution is about 15% of the colonists belonged to any church (A. Taylor 1986). By the time of Tocqueville’s visit in 1831, the number of churches, parishioners, and clergy had vastly increased , but it was a different sort of Christianity, one that involved the individual in its very essence. The America of 1830 was radically transformed from that of 1790, no longer a cultural colony of Europe, but a nation with its own distinct culture, a culture with voluntarism as its basis.

During the Second Great Awakening, American religion began the homogenization process – secularization – where it began to lose its distinction as a social institution, and it is voluntarism, the radical and natural freedom of the individual which becomes its most salient feature. Direct intervention by the Divine “democratizes” religion by turning religion from knowledge of a catechism to emotional experience. There is a rise of denominationalism, different churches, but tolerated as rivals rather than condemned as heretics. New “start-up” sects like the Mormons and the Seventh Day Adventists have their origin in this period as the power of the catechism wanes. The American Dream takes shape as the deified individual is

embodied in the self-made man who has escaped history and remakes the world according to his will.

The individual by being able to choose through an exercise of will, salvation or damnation, acquires a power that had been previously reserved for God. This new belief in human agency should not be underestimated in its effect. It was *radical freedom* to re-make oneself, to become a new person by choice. Far from being hopelessly depraved and helpless, the individual can choose salvation and even achieve a personal state of sinless perfection<sup>24</sup>. This religious sense of individual power and potential was also mirrored in political and economic individualism. It fits quite neatly with the ideas of natural human freedom described by John Locke, the major influence on Thomas Jefferson. The self-made man emerges as an American archetype.

Voluntarism encourages proselytizing, and persuasion becomes the distinctive feature of Protestant sermons, encouraging sinners to choose salvation. The highly developed, histrionic oratory of the famous evangelists and the popular movements that supported them with furious publishing of tracts succeeded in at least doubling the number of Christians in the United States.<sup>25</sup> The America of 1830 was transformed from that of 1790, no longer a cultural colony of Europe, but a nation with its own distinct culture, a culture with voluntarism as its basis.

The first great commentator to realize that something very different was going on in America compared to Europe was Alexis de Tocqueville. His *Democracy in America*, published in two volumes in 1835 and 1840, was and is immensely popular on both sides of the Atlantic. His observations are widely viewed to have withstood the test of time and remain current almost two centuries later. Tocqueville's visits, in the early 1830s, were just

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<sup>24</sup> Doctrine of John Wesley 1703 – 1791, founder of the Methodist movement.

<sup>25</sup> Fierce competition over converts resulted in accusations of poaching, or stealing converts between denominations often resulting in vicious public verbal attacks (Carwardine, 1972 pp. 337-338).

after the furor of the Second Great Awakening had abated and the initial spontaneity and enthusiasm was becoming institutionalized, along with other social and political institutions of the new republic. The revolutionary period had concluded and a new cultural hegemony emerged, one that Tocqueville describes with great insight and detail.

Tocqueville discovered the American paradox of diversity and conformity, particularly in religion. The following excerpt is from a letter written to a French friend in 1831 where a puzzled Tocqueville compared the religious tranquility of the United States he found at that time to the turmoil and conflict over the role of the Church in the France of his day.

Protestants of all communions, Anglicans, Lutherans, Calvinists, Presbyterians, Anabaptists, Quakers, and a hundred other Christian sects, there's the basis of the population. A practicing but indifferent population, which lives from day to day, accustoms itself to surroundings that are hardly satisfying but tranquil, and whose appearances are satisfied. Those people live and die dans des à peu près, without ever bothering to get to the bottom of things.<sup>26</sup>

Later in the letter he described faith, and “unfaith,” in the America he visited to be “inert” despite its ubiquity of practice, devoid of the heated political passion that was dominant in Europe at the time. He put this down to the lack of an aristocracy in the United States which did not tie religious leaders to social elite positions. Unlike in the French Revolution where the bourgeois Third Estate overthrew the powers of the First (aristocracy) and Second (clergy), the bourgeoisie had no formal clerical opposition, institutional religion had no defined place in the social structure and in most cases the clergy were members of the bourgeoisie.

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26 Excerpted from Tocqueville and Beaumont in America by George Wilson Pierson, “Tocqueville Essay.” <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/religion/piers152.html>. Original essay dates from 1831.

At the same time of the camp meetings, American commercial culture was spreading as well penetrating the same rural areas that the itinerant preachers were. These peddlers, traveling salesmen, went from settlement to settlement hawking their exotic goods and provided a break from the monotony of rural life as much entertainment as commerce (Lears, 1995). The peddlers and the preachers occupied the same space, and used much the same persuasive tactics. The proselytizing of potential converts, and the doctrine of instant salvation by choice, had tactical parallels to Yankee Peddlers hawking their wares, particularly nostrums. De Tocqueville remarked on Evangelists, “The evangelical mission appears to us to be here an industrial enterprise rather than an affair of zeal and conviction.”<sup>27</sup> In the letter cited above he describes Protestant ministers as “the businessmen of religion.” Sociologist of Religion Wade Clark Roof’s 1999 observation that there was a peculiar “weightlessness” of contemporary American religion has historical antecedents in Tocqueville. There is little passion to “get to the bottom of things,” no real substance theological slogans. This stripped down Christianity, an inarticulate sacred cosmos whose world view was decidedly secular.

Bellah’s argument for an American Civil Religion is insightful and convincing as its secularity reflects the secularity of American religion in general. Bellah writes, “I would argue that the civil religion at its best is a genuine apprehension of universal and transcendent religious reality as seen in or, one could almost say, as revealed through the experience of the American people” (Bellah 1967, 12). It is a religion in the Durkheimian sense of relations of sacred and profane, yet lacking a catechism<sup>28</sup>. The transcendent reality in Bellah’s statement is derived from experience, which appears to be a fudge as experience is immanent, this

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27 From a diary entry at Sing-Sing , New York 30 May 1831. Source <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/DETOC/religion/piers152.html>

<sup>28</sup> It’s possible to argue that the examinations given to immigrants applying for citizenship embody such a catechism, but the content (and very existence) of these tests remains hotly debated.



worldly rather than other worldly, but the fudge allows for ambiguity and the absence of the catechism.

If Bellah is correct, then the origins of this American Civil religion were in the Second Great Awakening and the Arminian revolution. While the Second Great Awakening began as a spontaneous popular movement among rural New England congregations in the early 1790s, it soon achieved a degree of organizational coherence when established clergy jumped on the train as it was leaving the station. Methodist clergy in particular, began to organize and channel the movement and give it coherence, officially beginning the revival in a series of public conferences in 1801. Like Jefferson's Declaration, the new evangelism was egalitarian, preaching that all were equal in the eyes of God. The revival though was *not* revolutionary. Despite the largely aesthetic opposition of clergy and luminaries such as Jefferson, revival did not pose a direct threat to existing interests, and so whatever hostility clergy may have had toward it, their position was not fundamentally threatened (Carwardine 1972, 34-35). Another element of the revival was that it proposed to change individuals, not institutions or society. It promised inner change in the individual. It did not engage in political organization for changing the individual's material conditions. Unlike Calvinist aims which were oriented toward the world, Arminians were solely concerned with the subject. The movement's vast scope and wild success in gaining adherents gave it the function of integrating the new country (Mathews 1969, 38).

The intense inner drama of conversion and Arminian worship made men less inclined to envy those better off in worldly satisfaction and be better able "to face the boredom and frustrations that were the inevitable corollary of industrialism and the closer social organization it required" (Birdsall 1970, 364). Calvinism, with its stress on mutuality and social order was ill suited to the rising industrial capitalism that was rapidly taking hold in the northern states. Puritans like Winthrop while holding that humans were irredeemable

individually, the world itself could be redeemed through the expansion of Godly communities. E.P. Thompson argues that, in England at least, Methodism through its lay organizations was instrumental in defusing early labor activism by actively going among the poor unlike the social distance maintained by Church of England clergy. Further, many of the Methodists in the lay organizations were poor themselves (E.P. Thompson 1963, 386). According to Thompson the effect of the Methodists was disastrous for the nascent English labor movement: “They weakened the poor from within, by adding to them the active ingredient of submission” (E.P. Thompson 1963, 390).

The sublimation of voluntarism into the American Dream is the substance of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *The Great Gatsby*. Gatsby doesn’t rebel against the order that made him poor by birth, but subscribes to the Arminian faith that one can rise in the social order through sheer will. This is like the famous “green light” on the dock in the novel. He can see it, he worships it, yet it is unattainable. Yet he believes in the green light, the myth of success. Adorno and Horkheimer address this in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. “As naturally as the ruled always took the morality imposed upon them more seriously than did the rulers themselves, the deceived masses are today captivated by the myth of success even more than the successful are. Immovably they insist on the very ideology which enslaves them” (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944]1997, 133-134). In the course of the war against Revolutionary France and later Napoleon, Methodists sought to defuse any revolutionary sentiment among the poor. At the beginning of the Second Great Awakening clergy feared that the movement was dangerous, even “atheistic” leading to “French ideas” (Birdsall 1970).

Rather than being opposed to the Liberal ideas which had been violently opposed to religion in Revolutionary France, American Christianity absorbs it (or is absorbed by it) creating a Liberal consensus that appears self evident. Unlike in Europe, there was no conservative political philosophy with any call on authenticity from the past. Lacking checks

from the ancient regime, other 19<sup>th</sup> Century challenges to Liberalism in Europe, both intellectually in the German Rationalism of Hegel and its extension by Marx to economics, and in the practical application in labor politics had little effect. European immigrants with such ideas led the American labor movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. However the movement was violently and bloodily suppressed, frequently with the sanction of church leaders. The sanctity and importance of the individual is taken as given on practically all levels.

The anti-intellectualism that is such a prominent part of the American democratic ethos, also has its origins in the Second Great Awakening. The move to expressive religiosity was a response to the arid theology of Calvinism “...in which revelation had become a theory, a religion that knew too much about God and tried to explain rather than deepen the mysteries of life (Birdsall 1970, 356).” Historian Sidney Mead characterizes evangelical Protestantism emphasized direct experience – not knowledge of doctrine. As a result, it is also anti-intellectual and ahistorical (Mead 1963). The self-made man emerged from his inner qualities, be it in business or religion. One needn’t attend a seminary to start a religious movement. The market was open to anyone who had the calling.

Some of these religious “start ups” have persisted to today. In the 1830s William Miller established a millenarian movement (whose descendants include the Seventh Day Adventists) around this time, and Joseph Smith published *The Book of Mormon* beginning a distinctly American version of Christianity. Miller had as many as 50,000 followers in 1844 at the time of the Great Disappointment when his followers spent the night of 22 October on hillsides waiting for the apocalypse. (Thompson p. 100)

Along with voluntarism, apocalypticism is so written into American mythology that philosopher John Gray describes the United States as an apocalyptic nation (Gray 2007). The founding of the Massachusetts colonies was motivated by Calvinist post-millennial ambitions

to found a Godly society. The “city on a hill” motif Winthrop uses in *A Model of Christian Charity* is still widely, if incorrectly, applied to the messianic destiny of the United States in saving the world. Millennialism can be understood as a collective salvation, the redemption of an entire community to a perfect, just, and equal society free of want and violence. Post-millennial apocalyptic beliefs are “post” as Jesus Christ will not return in the second coming until the perfect society is realized on Earth. Politically this manifests itself in reform measures like the abolition of slavery, prohibition of alcohol, and women’s suffrage. It is also embodied in the belief in social progress, that development is teleological and has an end in a just society.

Pre-millennialist versions of the Apocalypse are much older, and their disruptive potential has usually excluded it from organized religion as heresy. Pre-millennial apocalyptic belief (millenarianism) asserts that the millennium will only arrive through divine intervention and a violent upheaval that will remove social injustice by force. Norman Cohn, a historian of medieval millenarian movements, tracks the profession of these beliefs to outsiders, the poor, particularly in times of rapid change and dissolution of their traditional communities (Cohn 1961). Millenarianism provides the justification for social revolution, hence its practice by the poor and its exclusion for institutions like the church. Today’s Evangelical Christians often subscribe to this theology, which reflects their marginal status and exclusion from the centers of power. In the catastrophic end of human history, the “saved” will be “raptured” to heaven while the damned have to suffer through the seven years of the “tribulations” when the Earth is ruled by Antichrist. This very specific pre-millennial doctrine was developed in Northern Ireland only in the 1840s, and became popular in the United States after 1900. Known as “premillennial dispensationalism,” there is nothing that humans can do to avert the catastrophe or assist its coming, so this is millenarianism without the revolutionary edge. Separation from the world of sin is the passive strategy for the saved

in this telos, revenge against the oppressors will come in due time. This is the theology of the *Left Behind* series of novels that converts it into a thriller. Politically it manifests itself in disengagement.

Often the apocalypse is so sublimated in American exceptionalism, there is a certain underlying faith that the United States is the embodiment of the millennium and the salvation of the world through its example. The potency of this ideology of being already saved as a nation is clear in the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. In 1839 the influential journalist John L. Sullivan wrote one of the most articulate descriptions of this ideology.

We [Americans] have no interest in the scenes of antiquity, only as lessons of avoidance of nearly all their examples. The expansive future is our arena, and for our history. We are entering on its untrodden space, with the truths of God in our minds, beneficent objects in our hearts, and with a clear conscience unsullied by the past. We are the nation of human progress, and who will, what can, set limits to our onward march? Providence is with us, and no earthly power can. (Sullivan 1839)

Sullivan's enthusiasm was shared by many and the sentiments expressed, although no longer called Manifest Destiny, still echo today in American politics and religious practice.

The lack of interest in antiquity Sullivan expresses is that of the New World, a new beginning in a innocent, idyllic space that frees America from history and points to an entirely novel, and brilliant future. "Providence" points to a strain of supercessionism that was prominent in Puritan settlers. Supercessionism is a doctrine of replacement whereby a people takes the place of Israel as the chosen people of God. According to Clifford Longley, the doctrine was evoked in a prayer at the opening of the First Continental Congress in 1774, and compares the nationalization process by which one becomes an American Citizen to conversion rituals related to Judaism (Longley 2002, 66-70) From New England pulpits,

independence from Britain was compared to the Israelites being freed from the Babylonian captivity.

During the American Civil War (1861 – 1865), President Abraham Lincoln frequently evoked the special destiny of the American Republic in his speeches, including messianic language. In a message to Congress 1 December 1862, he described the United States as “...the last best hope of earth.”<sup>29</sup> Saving the Union is equated with the salvation of humanity, the millennial vision barely sublimated. Lincoln had to invest the war with a higher purpose to justify the incredible bloodshed<sup>30</sup>, and in the process redefined the Republic. If American Civil Religion has a Messiah, it is Abraham Lincoln.

Toqueville speculated as to whether industrialism would generate a new aristocracy in the United States. The defining characteristic that distinguished America from other nations was a singular drive toward trade and industry, which was reflected in public estimation of virtue and honor. “...no stigma attaches to love of money in America. The American will describe as noble and estimable ambition which our medieval ancestors would have called base cupidity (Toqueville 2007, 358). There are many men of ambition, but few with lofty goals, the object of rise in power is to “...gratify trivial and coarse appetites more easily (Toqueville 2007, 364).” Ambition is focused on immediate success rather than long-lasting glory. This attitude probably reaches its zenith of expression in President Calvin Coolidge’s 1925 remark, “The business of America is business,” quite a fall from the rhetoric of Lincoln. The messianic telos expressed by Lincoln, is replaced by the laconic teleonomy of Coolidge, i.e. activity and industry according to a self-perpetuating logic without ultimate purpose.

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<sup>29</sup> Lincoln, Abraham. *Annual Message to Congress*, 1 December 1862. Text from <http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/congress.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Total dead in the war is estimated to be around 600,000, out of a total population of 25,000,000. In comparison, American dead in the Second World War numbered around 350,000 out of a population of just over 130,000,000.

American peculiarity is closely tied to the rise of industrial capitalism, and the general denial of historical ties and traditions undoubtedly contributed to its explosive growth there following the Civil War. Yet the impetus for this growth, the wild pursuit of the American Dream by millions comes from the basic pillar of voluntarism, this religious empowering of the individual with God-like potency, where by sheer volition, a man can achieve his goal, be it even eternal life. Free market capitalism in this climate of voluntarism can proceed almost without restraint. Following the Second World War, a new phenomenon, consumerism took hold, and the commodity was at last freed from the fetters of materiality. Commodification, the fetishization of products of labor, has long progressed from material products to intangible, even mental products. What sort of physical world this has created the postmodern built-apace environment, where commodity structure rearranges space and even topography is the next sections subject. This is the landscape where the deified individual is free to pursue his or her lifestyle.

### **2.3 Private**

This section explored recent developments in institutional religion in the United States examining it under Thomas Luckmann's secularization hypothesis. As a distinct and separate public institution, religion in the United States has continued to secularize, but the hyper-accelerated pace characteristic of postmodernity. Institutional religion as such borrows much (if not most) of its representations of ultimate significance from secondary institutions in "secular" popular culture. Popular culture itself is infused with a social religion mediating a peculiar sacred cosmos based on the sanctity of the autonomous individual. The origins of secularization as well as that of this new social religion come from the early decades of the republic, specifically the great revival of the Second Great Awakening. The wholesale

adoption of the Arminian heresy of salvation by choice, synchronized institutional religion with the social upheaval and radical changes in everyday life that characterized the early decades of the United States. Freeing the individual will along with postmillennial apocalypticism provided the uniquely American elements for the new sacred cosmos as well as legitimizing laissez faire capitalism. Postmodern religion is even more private and subjective, and the individual approaches religion as a consumer constructing his or her sacred cosmos in an ad hoc manner from secondary institutions that produce ultimate meanings including religious institutions that compete directly with secular institutions using identical commodities.



### 3.0 The Purpose-Built Environment

This section examines the effect of physical changes to the configuration of space and the effect it has on identity. When looking at the actual landscape rather than the metaphorical one, American cities and settlements have been completely remade since the 1960s. The extension of urban culture and commodity structure to rural areas eliminated their economic autonomy and even viability. The effect of new shopping centers and big box retailers like Wal-Mart on small town commercial centers has been devastating, exacerbating rural poverty. The suburban explosion that began in the 1970s also gutted the city centers as those who could afford to move away from urban ills did so in droves. Cities as manufacturing centers faded as globalization increasingly moved production to other countries with cheaper production costs. Re-developed in the 1980s brought suburban forms to cities that now became centers of consumption, theme park imitations of their pasts. Purpose-built environments became the new “public” spaces; only under private ownership they have no attributes of public spaces.

### 3.1 The End of the Urban-Rural Split

“The so-called religious organizations which now lead the war against the teaching of evolution are nothing more, at bottom, than conspiracies of the inferior man against his betters.”

-- H L Mencken, "Homo Neanderthalensis" *The Baltimore Evening Sun*, June 29, 1925

The 1925 Scopes (or “monkey”) trial could be seen as the first battle of the “Culture Wars.” If so, it was a crushing defeat for Evangelical Christians. Mencken and other Northern, urban journalists successfully portrayed the rural Southern fundamentalists as violent, vicious, ignorant rubes. Dramatizations such as the 1960 film *Inherit the Wind* reinforced this image for the urban educated classes. Historian Randall Balmer credits this

disaster with the Evangelical retreat from “worldly” politics and into separatism, interpreting Biblical injunctions to “be in the world but not of it” avoiding “modernism” at first, and “liberalism” later as manifestations of worldly temptation to sin (Balmer 1993).

Despite (or because of) the ubiquity of religion in the United States, little proper research has been done on it. The US Census hasn’t collected data on religion since 1900, and with views like Mencken’s prevailing in urban, educated circles still today, only recently has it attracted academic attention. Whether or not the Scopes trial did drive Evangelical Christians into separation isn’t so much the issue as the fact that until recently separation was achieved by the urban-rural split. The various strands that Balmer identifies as “Evangelical,” fundamentalist, Pentecostal, and charismatic, predominate in rural areas that were generally agricultural and dominated by crushing poverty, particularly in the South. Urbanization and industrialization effected separation better than any conscious decision ever could. Pun intended, Evangelical Christians were “left behind,” marginalized as agriculture and small farmers lost their economic and political importance.

The State of Tennessee only removed the ban on teaching evolution in 1965, a time of upheaval in the South as federally mandated desegregation was underway. But also since that time, as the United States moved from an economy of production to one of consumption, Southern cities have grown the fastest. While there are many competing theories as to why Evangelical Christians returned to the world of politics in the late 1970s, the end of conurbations brought the city to the country and separation was no longer possible. As happened in Gwinnet County Georgia, modernization came with epochal force effacing an entire way of life before anyone really noticed it was gone. Institutions of this separate culture, Bible colleges, book shops, camps, and churches have moved along a path of convergence to urban norms according to economic necessity. No matter how much conservative Christians value the domestic role of the stay-at-home mother, falls in real

wages since 1970 and middle class aspirations have forced these women into the labor market just as with American women in general (Harvey 1990).

The public appearance of Evangelicals after decades of cultural obscurity was at least in part a result of urbanization, suburbanization more precisely. Suburbs and the newer exurbs are a dispersal phenomenon. The subdivision, a planned residential development based on a set of model detached houses, is the basis for these processes. Using land that had either been forest or farmland, developers set out roads and utilities, designate lots, build models, and often help to arrange financing for people buying houses. Subdivisions can have from hundreds to thousands of individual houses in them, all built according to the models and in a period of a few years. These are followed hard on by commercial retail developments, the strip mall, which contain supermarkets and other retailers aimed at subdivision dwellers. Most states have strict single-use zoning laws which require that commercial and residential areas are separated. Hence even if a subdivision may have several thousand inhabitants, it will have no shop where once can buy milk, bread, cigarettes and so on. Even basic items like these require a car trip to the strip mall. Exurbs are the same as suburbs but built even further away from the urban center, such as in the Central Valley in California, a two-hour drive to San Francisco. Exurbs are a sort of boom town, instantly appearing and then generating a local economy based solely on the expansion of the exurb, i.e. builders, suppliers, furniture, decorating, landscaping and so on. The housing collapse of 2008 hit exurbs the hardest as the speculative values of the houses rapidly went “under water” and building ceased drying up the cash that ran the exurb’s local economy overnight.

Roof and McKinney (1987) report that conservative Protestants have on average lower levels of income, fewer years of education, and lower status jobs than mainline Protestants as well as being more likely to live in rural areas (Roof and McKinney 1987).

The Pew Forum's *U.S. Religious Landscape Survey 2008* shows that in education and income at least these observations still hold. Geographic distribution is sketchier, but a 2006 study of the distribution of Christian bookstores found them to be concentrated in the South and Midwest (Bader and Lockhart 2006). This confirms what is already known, and corresponds to the "Red state, blue state," division of the electoral map. These areas were also the last to urbanize, the Sun Belt growth not really beginning until after 1970. Lower income people have less geographic mobility than do the middle classes, so it is a reasonable assumption that conservative Christians stayed put as the suburbs sprawled over them. Still as a demographic group, Evangelical Christians are the least likely to vote of all religious groups, showing that disengagement still holds to a degree (Woodberry and Smith 1998, 47). It is possible to argue that Evangelical Christians only took the political stage when their territory (rural areas) began to be absorbed by expanding conurbations, that is to say when they were forced to become involved with "the world."

Since World War II American cities have been growing larger both in terms of population but also in physical area. The economic geography also shifted. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's report, "The State of the Cities 2000: Megaforges Shaping the Future of the Nation's Cities" identifies decentralization, "...the continuing shift of jobs and people to the metropolitan edge..." as one of the four megaforges shaping the future of American cities. The report further states that this "...is threatening the stability of existing communities and the development of new, livable, and sustainable communities" (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development 2000). Between 1990 and 1998 suburban population rose by 11.9% compared to 4.7% for central cities. Suburban development was resulting in land being consumed at twice the rate of population growth. It is highly likely that this trend accelerated after 2000 as the US real estate boom accelerated before crashing to a halt in 2008. The so-called "white flight" of particularly working class

white families from city centers following desegregation orders of schools in the early 1970s demographically concentrated this zone beyond the traditional city.

The HUD report tells us about the quantity of this expansion, but little about the quality. The suburban/exurban world is mass produced, both in private and in “public” spaces governed above all by the logic of the automobile. Detached housing is almost always in the form of subdivision developments with individual houses built according to a small set of established models, often entirely built by a single contractor using prefabricated components. While some degree of customization is permitted, entirely different designs are almost never permitted.<sup>31</sup> Buyers can choose from a catalog of paint colors, carpets, tile, bathroom fixtures and so on, but fitting Baudrillard’s discussion of personalization in automobiles, the house fits the logic of the model/series, and the house as essentially a technical object can only be personalized in inessential characteristics, these “personal,” inessential modifications are cosmetic, in reality fashion (Baudrillard 2005, 152). Further enforcing the generic appearance of subdivision housing are community covenants that regulate the use and appearance of the property. The ornamental lawn is mandatory as the functional clothesline is prohibited.

Commercial development is even more monotonous, particularly in areas that have good access to freeways. Construction is even more standardized, and the ubiquitous parking lot uses incredible amounts of land. True public spaces, except for parks, are largely absent. For adults, shuttling between suburban house, suburban office park, and shopping mall by automobile is how the fragmentation of space plays out. Pedestrian walks are conspicuous by their absence. There are no neighborhood shops to walk to. They are not permitted by zoning laws and often not wanted by subdivision dwellers who fear that shops might affect

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<sup>31</sup> Mortgage financing also influences the design. The preference for cheap wall-to-wall carpeting in new built suburban houses is due to banks not releasing the final quarter of the loan until the floors are finished.

their resale property values.<sup>32</sup> This resale value is an obsession for American home owners who see their house as an asset having exchange value in addition to its use value as a home. Selling and moving on is assumed as is making a profit on the transaction. Up to the 2008 crash, homeowners frequently secured lines of credit on their equity in the mortgage up to, or in cases, even exceeding the market value of the house. Except for the UK where these financial practices are common, this relation of a home owner to his or her home as exchange value is rather unusual in Europe.

Strip malls and enclosed built retail environments predominantly have corporate franchise shops and restaurants, varying little from Seattle to Miami in design and tenants. In this built environment signs, more importantly logos for national brands serve to orient the consumer in an otherwise blank, generic environment. Ownership is generally large national property management corporations who often develop properties as speculative investments in the land itself, lending an ephemeral quality to the landscape. Shoddy apartment complexes will be thrown up, only to be torn down and replaced by an office park fifteen years later. This disposable architecture was noted by Adorno and Horkheimer as early as 1944. “Even now the older houses just outside the city centers look like slums, and the new bungalows on the outskirts are at one with the flimsy structures of world fairs in their built-in demand to be discarded after a short while like empty food cans” (Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* [1944]1997, 120).

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<sup>32</sup> And attract the wrong elements, like teenagers or Mexican day laborers. Personal conversation in Gwinnet County, July 2009.

### 3.2 Identity and Display

How then does personal identity play out in this generic, ephemeral, atomized space? Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor gives an interesting description of how the individual interacts with others in these spaces.

Spaces of this kind become more and more important in modern urban society, where large numbers of people rub shoulders, unknown to each other, without dealings with each other, and yet affecting each other's lives...Here a host of *urban monads* hover on the boundary between solipsism and communication" (emphasis added) (C. Taylor 2002, 86)

Monad suggests both a unified, strongly delimited individual as well as the model of the world it constitutes. Between solipsism and communication is an odd position, which is overcome by "the common language of style" in the "space of fashion." Taylor acknowledges the limits of interaction in such spaces. "The resulting general structure is not that of a common action, but rather mutual display" (C. Taylor 2002, 85). Exactly what the monad is displaying and the intention of the display will be examined later, but examining the act of display, where it is displayed, and, more importantly, who can display, is of importance in order to discuss the identity of these urban monads and the relation of these identities to agency.

The reduction of interaction to mutual display of styles not only compromises face to face communication, it also undermines the authenticity of signifiers of social groups through their commodification. "Capitalism systematically dissolves the fabric of all cohesive social groups without exception, including those of its own ruling class, and thereby problematizes

aesthetic production and linguistic invention which have their source in group life” (Jameson 1979, 140). The culture industry, which will be thoroughly discussed in section 4, atomizes individuals by commodifying their group’s culture; actual popular culture only continues to exist in pockets isolated or marginalized from the global capitalist system, certain religious groups, parts of Third World countries, and pockets of the Third World within the developed world (see Harvey 1990). The rise of cities as centers of production in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century began the process of breaking up traditional group life, but the new social classes that still had well-marked boundaries and cultural markers, something that postmodern urban monads lack.

A person’s social status could be read by their appearance. An early “people watcher,” or rather the most famous articulator of life in an early modern city is the French writer Charles Baudelaire. In his essay, *The Painter of Modern Life*, Baudelaire observes that every age has its own aesthetic, its *style*. Further, he states: “Within that unity which we call a Nation, the various professions and classes ... all introduce variety, not only in manners and gesture, but even in the actual form of the face” (Baudilaire 1964 [1863], 13). Baudelaire was among those writers who marked off the early industrial period as *modern* and distinctly different from what came before, but Baudelaire was a powerful and popular critic of art and fashion, as well as something of an unashamed libertine. In the essay he urges the reader to pay attention to the life of the city, to be a man of a crowd and see as a child everything new and innocent. Describing this ideal “modern man” he states: “He is an ‘I’ with an insatiable appetite for the ‘non-I’” and on the following page, “His passion and profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite” (Baudilaire 1964 [1863], 10, 11).



Walter Benjamin, whose work on the mass production of cultural commodities will be discussed later, paid tribute to the flâneur, a sort of dandy, in his mammoth, unfinished *Arcades Project*.

“The street becomes a dwelling for the flâneur; he is as much at home among the facades of houses as a citizen is in his four walls. To him the shiny, enameled signs of businesses are at least as good a wall ornament as an oil painting is to the bourgeois in his salon... The crowd was the veil from behind which the familiar city as phantasmagoria beckoned to the flâneur. In it, the city was now landscape, now a room” (Benjamin, *The Flâneur* 1935-38).

Like Baudelaire who celebrated the menagerie that was the urban landscape of 19<sup>th</sup> Century fashionable Paris, Benjamin saw a liberating potential in the strolling, aimless dandy, who wandered the city as much to be seen as to see. The leisurely attitude of the flâneur is a protest against his industriousness and the division of labor that makes them specialists. For Benjamin, city life was about seeing more than hearing, and public transportation forced city people to sit looking at each other for long periods of time without speaking to one another. The crowd offered entertainment and security in anonymity, but Benjamin recognized that the fate of the flâneur was as a commodity.

Baudelaire’s conjecture that the outside of a person, their appearance, told what was inside, their identity, is still commonplace today. It’s trite to say that how you dress tells people about who you are, but there appears to be little shame in repeating this. Fashion marketing scholar Mark Tungate states that it is foolish to underestimate the importance of fashion as expressions of identity: “You don’t buy clothes, you buy an identity” (Tungate 2005, 2). This appears to be a reversal of Baudelaire’s distinction between body and soul, where the body was the manifestation of the soul into the single act of purchase where inside and outside are acquired together. Nevertheless, the matter of appearance, the play of images

and flow of people in public spaces, bears continuity with Baudelaire and Benjamin's accounts, up to a point. While there clearly was fashion in Baudelaire's time, and even the first department store in the world, the Bon Marche, there were no brands, and designers were artisans of lower social status than those who bought their designs. More importantly, the city was a center of production – not consumption. The public space in which the flâneur strolled was far different than the “public” spaces in where today's urban monads go to see and be seen.

### 3.3 Public-private Spaces

The irony of the first modern American shopping mall, Southdale Center built in Edina, Minnesota, a suburb of Minneapolis in 1956, is that its designer, Victor Gruen intended as a means of stopping suburban sprawl. It was part of an integrated urban development intended to compliment downtown Minneapolis and end the “suburban strip” nightmare he detested. Gruen, an Austrian Jewish immigrant, had designed several shopping centers in other American cities, all inspired by his experience of European city arcades. What made Southdale different was that it was all enclosed and climate controlled because of the harsh Minnesota winters. This design was wildly successful, and by the 1970s it was estimated that Americans spent more time at the mall than any place other than home or work (Jackson 1996, 1114).<sup>33</sup> Gruen’s mall was yet another modernist architectural experiment gone awry, producing exactly the opposite conditions it was intended to do. Like the major urban public housing projects built in the United States during the 1960s, the mall served to further atomize and alienate the people whom it was intended to bring together. Gruen’s malls were built for entertainment purposes as well as shopping. “In all of his designs, he relied on visual surprises to amuse visitors, create consumers, and produce profits...Using artificial lights, giant show windows, and fancy facades for his stores – grand fountains, twirling sculptures, and rose gardens for his shopping centers – Gruen attempted to seduce and produce a larger audience for his retailers” (Hardwick 2003, 4).

The modern mall is a purpose-built retail environment embodying a dynamic of domination in its design while at the same time offering illusions of being something other

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<sup>33</sup> Feeling his ideas had been subverted to crass commercial ends, Gruen retired to Austria in frustration in

than what it is. Malls embody the dominant white middle-class identity in its mode of signification to the exclusion of others; relying on surveillance and muscle (in the form of private security guards) should anyone seek to transgress and violate the code. Geographer Jon Goss provides a detailed analysis of the architectural domination expressed in the modern shopping mall as a privately owned public space. Malls are the universe of the commodity, and leasing agents exclude tenants like repair shops, laundromats, and thrift stores "...that might remind the consumer of the materiality of consumption..." (Goss 1993, 22). The magical nature of the commodity is carefully protected. Malls conceal delivery entrances, toilets, even fire exits – all of which would violate the illusion. Goss describes two strategies of illusion of place, nostalgia for the city streets using street signs, benches, statues, fountains and the like, all kept in a state of absolute newness. While the first strategy temporally displaces the shopper, the second creates the illusion of an exotic local, a generic version of Mexican paseos or Parisian boulevards (Goss 1993, 24). The goal is manipulation through disorientation. "Adopting a relatively vulgar psychogeography, designers seek to environmentally condition emotional and behavioral response from those whom they see as their *malleable* customers" (Goss 1993, 30).

As private simulations of public spaces, malls have a direct bearing on the discussion of identity. They appear to be public, but are not. They are subject to surveillance and discipline of the Foucaultian type. "It is a central principle of theme parks and shopping centers that these are privately owned public spaces in which the public are under the watchful eye of video-cameras, and rowdy, troublesome elements are excluded before they disorder might disturb others" (Featherstone 1991, 105). An example of rowdy, troublesome behavior would be anything that was overtly *political*. You cannot have a demonstration in a mall, and in many states, striking workers' picket lines must be off the property owned by the mall. Usually mall policy excludes "soliciting" which in American parlance means to try to

approach someone for the purpose of persuasion or advocacy. Demonstrators, or pranksters for *National Buy Nothing Day*, can be excluded under such policies, as well as Evangelical Christians wanting to witness. Those who refuse to leave or are too slow can then be arrested for criminal trespassing. Like theme parks, malls are designed to be static environments, explicitly away from the multitudes of the city. Malls are dream ideals, devoid of the poor, the insane, the homeless, the demonstrators, the eccentrics, and buskers you would find in a truly public place like a major city park.<sup>34</sup> In short they are escapes from the reality of the social world. Baudillaire's flâneur would also be excluded. "The contemporary flâneur cannot escape the imperative to consume: she or he cannot loiter in the mall unless implicitly invited to do so, and this generally only applies to the respectable elderly...Moreover, shoppers do not independently pick their way like the leisurely flâneur, but follow the meticulously conceived plan which has plotted paths, set lures, and planted decoys for its purpose" (Goss 1993, 35).

One result of flexible accumulation and globalization is that American cities have shifted from being centers of production to centers of consumption. The constantly repeated estimate is that 70% of all economic activity in the United States is consumer spending. For some cities, cities rich in what Pierre Bordieu calls "cultural capital," the process of suburbanization has been reversed, known as *gentrification*. Cities have responded with various urban renewal schemes, like Baltimore's Harbor Place, which creates a sanitized urban spectacle recycling the defunct harbor as a working harbor into a place of entertainment and shopping (Harvey 1990, 89-92). Cities compete with each other with their urban spectacles, recreating suburbia in the city center. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in Manhattan was once notorious for pornography, strip clubs, prostitution, and small time drug dealers, but in 1995

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<sup>34</sup> And increasingly not even there. Surveillance and segregation is strictly enforced by some urban designed spaces. Susan Bickford describes "prickly" spaces: "designed to be uncomfortable occupy, particularly by the homeless. Its components include sprinkler systems, lack of protection from sun or shade, an absence of public toilets or water, "bag-lady proof" enclosures around restaurant dumpsters, and "bum-proof" benches on which it is impossible to lie down" (Bickford 2000, 362).

the City of New York encouraged Disney, AMC, and Madame Tussaud's to open franchises on the street in return for a \$34 million municipal subsidy. This was part of a major redevelopment scheme which included the forcible removal of Manhattan's enormous homeless population. Baltimore's harbor is no longer a harbor but a harbor-theme of nautical signs, as much as Manhattan has become an ideal image of what Manhattan should be from a suburban point of view. According to Harvey, the city is effectively dead. "Where we used to think of a city as a machine for working in, we now see it as an antique, a spectacle, or even an image for living in. The city is no longer treated as an entity malleable for broad social ends, but as a collage of spaces and people, of ephemeral events and fragmentary contacts" (Harvey 1988, 33).

Gentrification is a process where run down working class neighborhoods or former industrial sites are either comprehensively redeveloped by a private company or are "colonized" by the "new-middle class" or what some call "para-intellectuals" (Featherstone 1991, 109). A consequence of gentrification is that property values rise and the lower income groups are purged from the neighborhoods, something that is often hotly contested. The first colonizers are often artists or creative types of middle class origin who create an atmosphere of "cool" raising the cultural capital of the area. New York's Soho is the best known example of this, but San Francisco's Castro, or Atlanta's Little Five Points also serve well. Attracted by the artistic lifestyle, new-middle class people, or to use David Brooks term, Bourgeois Bohemians, then move in pushing the artists, students and poor out. The urban, working class authenticity that first attracted the artists is eliminated in favor of upscale boutiques, trendy restaurants, gourmet groceries and whatnot. The neighborhood then

becomes an exclusive enclave often bordering on impoverished, high crime districts that are little Third Worlds (Davis 1985).<sup>35</sup>

Urban boundaries of exclusivity can be even more marked and deliberate. Common Interest Developments or Planned Urban Developments are often surrounded by walls, sometimes topped with barbed wire, with a guarded gate. The gates have different social meanings to different groups according to Susan Bickford. “A gate that indicates safety and security to a resident of a middle-class development can communicate “danger-keep out” to residents of the poor neighborhood it borders... Most significantly, gates construct and manifest social relations-in this case, segregation” (Bickford 2000). Both Bickford and Zygmunt Bauman cite Richard Sennet’s contention that what the better off are doing is *ghettoizing* themselves, except that they have freely chosen to live in these ghettos and pay extraordinary sums to live in them (Bauman 2000, 180). Ghettos are marked by the *sameness* of the inhabitants, some shared quality such as religion or race, but the new ghettos are marked by status and privilege. While those such as Beck and Giddens assert that boundaries have collapsed into voluntaristic freedom of identity, actual urban boundaries between actual social groups have become all the more obvious and popular.

In cities where the processes of redevelopment and gentrification are taking place, the goal is to purge urban spaces of others who might make suburbanites or tourists feel unsafe or uncomfortable, and pierce the mall illusion necessary to the singular function of these new urban spaces: consumption. Bickford argues that this significantly changes what it means to be “in public.” “We are no longer moving with and negotiating around diverse strangers in a shared material world, but rather within a certain kind of bounded space that determines who and what we perceive” (Bickford 2000, 363). The danger for those who live inside these enclosures is that the world outside can vanish, and the simulation of public space -- or even

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<sup>35</sup> The Little Five Points district in Atlanta is bordered on the southern side by an elevated railway with few crossings.

the simulation of the public – replaces what is actually there. Politically the citizen is in the process of being recoded as consumer through the erosion of the public sphere both through the elimination of zones of contact and through the active discipline of corporate advertising and media that is “...busily engaged in dissolving the identities of their subjects as citizens, in order to better facilitate their reincorporation into systems of planned and manipulated consumption” (Debeljak 1998, 113). George W. Bush’s appeal to American citizens’ patriotism after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks was oddly passive, urging people to go about their daily lives and do things like fly and go take the family to Disneyland.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps it is best here to get to the bottom of “citizen” and “public,” those potent terms of democratic theory as well as the empty rhetoric of popular democracy. These are classical terms all having their etymological and political roots in antiquity, which for some at least represents that absolute past or golden age Bakhtin describes in epics. As difficult as it is to describe contemporary subjectivity, the Roman subject is at best a trace to be elicited from the literature surviving from that time. Yet it isn’t such a leap to suggest that literary representations of people reflected popular perception of value and identity. One thing almost entirely missing from classical literature is any subjective interiority, or inner world. Literary interest in inner life does not really appear until Christianity and it is largely credited to St. Augustine (Auerbach 2003). Discussing the high genres of antiquity, M.M. Bakhtin, the represented individual is “absolutely equal to himself. He is, furthermore completely externalized. There is not the slightest gap between his authentic essence and its external manifestation.” This type of characterization also occurs in the essays of Plutarch where his own self representation, his “I” bears an exact correspondence in form to the view of himself as other, i.e. he sees himself as others see him (Bakhtin 1981, 34). This strongly suggests the priority of public presentation, one’s reputation. Historian Tom Holland states that

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<sup>36</sup> Bacevich, Andrew J. He Told Us to Go Shopping. Now the Bill Is Due. *The Washington Post*. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/10/03/AR2008100301977.html>.



citizenship, being part of the *res publica* was what it meant to be Roman. “Only by seeing himself reflected in the gaze of his fellows could a Roman truly know himself as a man” (Holland 2003, 5). Roman citizens sought out public offices that they often had to pay for out of their own pockets for the prestige that election brought increasing their reputation. Romans had to at least affect modesty: Julius Caesar wrote *The Gallic Wars* and *The Civil War* in the third person. Envy of reputation in the Roman world often led to murder and civil war, as anyone familiar with Shakespeare’s interpretation of the assassination of Caesar would be familiar with. The most sought after recognition was that of a triumph, a celebratory parade through the streets of Rome and the presentation of the laurel wreath.

Twenty four hours before an election, a candidate for Roman public office was allowed to put on the *toga candidus* (a specially whitened toga) so they could be recognized as a candidate as they moved around the Forum campaigning (Goldsworthy 2006, 116). The importance of the forum hardly merits mentioning, but that it was not a safe place does. Roman citizens moved about armed, the wealthier with armed retinues. Public officers were allotted a number of lictors, bodyguard armed with *fascies*, the number of which was according to their rank. In addition to protecting the official, the lictors also made way for him, pushing back the crowd. The forum was a zone of contact, not a zone of security. Being *in public* entailed being at risk, and rivalries often resulted in bloody brawls.

Bakhtin writes of the *zone of dialogical contact* as the place where two or more languages in the Bahktian sense of the term interrogate each other. Literary genres serve as languages, e.g. tragedy, comedy, and epic, but Bakhtin recognizes the real world situation as one of heteroglossia.

“At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects in the strict sense of the word (according to formal linguistic markers, especially phonetic), but also – and for us this is the essential point – into languages

that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, “professional” and “generic” languages, languages of generations and so forth” (Bakhtin 1981, 272).

Ironically, Roman literature was largely monoglossic, but Roman public life was not. Taking place in the zone of contact of the unsafe Forum, Roman politics could hardly ignore other languages – or “the others,” those “not like me” to be blunt about it. In fact ignoring “the others” or attempting to exclude them could well result in lost prestige, lost elections, or lost lives in the extreme case. Roman citizens did not meet as equals, but they did meet.

The exclusive, segregated spaces of today’s conurbations clearly do not meet these criteria for public spaces. Safety, or the illusion of safety, has priority over dialogue. There are no zones of contact, only zones of control. In some countries that have adopted American style shopping malls, like Turkey, control is overt, at the door in the form of metal detectors and armed guards who also serve as bouncers keeping the Istanbul homeless and lumpenproletariate out. It’s not just the riff raff and agitators who need excluding, it’s also the excess of the carnival. Consumer culture, evolving as it has in a climate of religious Protestantism and the work ethic, operates by means of transgression, violation of the norms of self-control and indulgence. Carnival was (and still is) the week prior to the penitent fasting of Lent. In pre-modern Europe, Carnival was celebrated much as it is today in places like Rio de Janeiro and New Orleans, a profligate suspension of the norms of proper public behavior and overindulgence of all sorts, food and drink in particular. Carnival was celebrated by consumption and often inversion of the social order (Lears 1995, 23). Bauman describes Carnival as the city transformed, the other side of its reality that “stayed constantly within reach but was normally concealed from view and barred from touching” (Bauman 2000, 98). If anything, being out of control was what Carnival was all about, reaching out for the forbidden.

In the introduction I cited Mikhail Bakhtin's conception of the medieval marketplace as a lawless zone of contact and free speech. Bakhtin's conception of the "carnavalesque" is rooted in a universal, liberating laughter of transgression.

As opposed to the official feast, one might say that carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of the time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortal and completed (M. Bakhtin 1968, 10).

Carnival was not a show or a parade as it has become in many places. Bakhtin stresses that the people live in it and all participate as the idea of carnival embraces all the people (ibid 7). Carnival was not something you watched, but rather something you took part in along with everyone else, it was collective activity to renew the world through laughter. It has revolutionary characteristics, the potential to overthrow the social order, even if only briefly.

In postmodern temples of consumption, such as shopping malls, how is the carnivalistic instinct thwarted? Discipline and control are required to stroll through these places, "to look and not snatch, to move casually without interrupting the flow, to gaze with controlled enthusiasm and blasé outlook, to observe without being seen, to tolerate the close proximity of bodies without feeling threatened" (Featherstone 1991, 25). Shopping malls with their displays of abundance and constant incitement to consume offer only the carnival promise of freedom distorted by commodity structure. It is very far from the anarchic freedom of actual carnival, much less its universal character which would require the actual contact with other physical bodies, a release of control and inhibition.

The segregation of space in purpose-built environments is the anti-Carnival, the assurance that one will not encounter someone who is actually Other. Postmodern emancipation of the sort described by Beck and Giddens, the loosening of public formalities

requires a new means of self-control. In the United States it is common to greet superiors or even strangers by their first name, the use of mister so-and-so is increasingly uncommon in actual speech. Dress codes at schools and workplaces have been steadily relaxed in the past forty years, and strictly formal occasions requiring formal dress is limited to the very wealthy or weddings and funerals. Even though “public” behavior has been freed of formalities, the process of *informalization*, knowing how to behave when there are no rigid rules can be even more anxiety provoking as the new, informal rules are far more complex (Wouters 1991, 710). Informality is problematic as actual social distances remain even if they are erased in language. “Estrangement,” Adorno write, “shows itself precisely in the elimination of distance between people” (Adorno 2005, 41). Simply being on a first name basis with your boss does not eliminate the fact that he or she is your boss but rather effaces the hierarchical linguistic marker of power. Informalization masks power by using the signifiers of equality.

Simultaneously the removal of the stigma of deviance from transgression subjects what had previously been transgression to control. David Brooks writes about how the new-middle class, his Bourgeois Bohemians, indulge in previously licentious behavior without transgression. They take their fun very seriously in that even sadomasochism is good if it is edifying and life enhancing (Brooks 2000, 199, 216-217). The carnivalesque aspect of consumption, the transgression and liberation described by Bakhtin in his essay on Rablais, is neutered in the mall by the controlled de-control necessary to experience them in the mall or other private-“public” spaces (Featherstone 1991, 25). In short the liberation of the postmodern self is an extension of control, discipline, and quantification into areas that had been previously free from capitalist utilitarian logic because they were outside accepted culture.

Zygmunt Bauman compares the shopping mall to Foucault’s boat, a floating piece of space, a place without a place. They offer, for those eligible a balance between freedom and

security. Moreover, they are offered a sort of counterfeit community of sameness, something that would never happen in “real life.” Inside the illusion, there are no differences that count, none that would require negotiation or confrontation, much less facing “otherness” (Bauman 2000, 100). They are spaces, but not places. No one lives there. Its population is transient, much like passengers on a bus or travelers in an airport. The illusion of the mall and its power strategy of disorientation makes it literally no place. “This utopia is kept scrupulously clean and orderly without any material contamination not hint of the gradual obsolescence that characterizes material objects” (Goss 1993, 32).

In his essay, “Coffeetalk,” Rudolph Gaudio shows that there is nothing casual or spontaneous about the “casual” conversations in built retail environments. “When two people “go out for coffee,” they arrange their schedules and pay money to conduct an ostensibly “private” casual conversation in a “public,” institutional venue that is “privately” owned” (Gaudio 2003, 674). Starbucks style coffee houses are built with the same illusory principles as the mall, using “no place” marketing strategies to appeal in particular to middle-class women. The price of the coffee excludes lower class customers, an ironic denial of the American coffeehouse tradition. Conversation requires consumption, and employees circulate removing empty cups to remind customers to consume more (Gaudio 2003, 683). The familiar American waitress’ question, “can I get you anything else?” is an invitation to leave. If you answer “no,” your check is brought to you without your asking. Lingering at the table is actively discouraged in restaurants and coffeeshops. Further the cultural coding of the dominant group in these spaces, despite what “ethnic” décor may be present, mandates social interaction according to the rules of the dominant group constituting what counts as “public” behavior (Alonso 1994, 394).

The presence of Family Christian Stores in many malls shows how commonplace Evangelical retail has become. Apparently the mall is not “worldly,” even though Family

Christian's carefully controlled cultural commodities are sold in the same place as those which might tempt children to sin. Their shops do not stand out, seamlessly fitting into the aesthetic illusion of the mall. This is interesting as "witnessing," proselytizing strangers to convert, is generally prohibited behavior in malls.<sup>37</sup> This shows that the religious Other is also on the excluded list, so commodities such as "Witness Wear," clothing with Evangelical themes use this as part of their sales pitch.

You can be an advocate for Christ, simply by what you wear. With Witness†Wear's diverse range of clothing and other accessories you can show people what you live for, without the need for words. By Wearing the Word, people can see you are not ashamed to be seen as a follower of Christ, but rather you are proud to be a child of God and belong to his family.<sup>38</sup>

Elsewhere in the pitch, Witness Wear is described as a way to overcome discomfort in talking to strangers, which is the very essence of witnessing, and a denial of the universal ethic of Christianity.

Another Witness Wear marketer explicitly makes the accommodation to "secular" fashion.

Witness Wear is a clothing and accessory retailer offering a Christian alternative to the mainstream shopping experience. Witness Wear carries a variety of Christian music, clothing, jewelry and accessories reflecting a modern Christian's lifestyle, without sacrificing style or fashion ability.<sup>39</sup>

The pitch would sound very strange to an Evangelical Christian of fifty years ago. Words like "fashion," "style," and most of all "modern" were all terms used to describe what a true Christian was not (Balmer 1993). It is strange indeed to imagine one of these Old Time

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<sup>37</sup> Evangelical Christians have great respect for private property and authority, so confrontation with mall security is unheard of. However, BattleCry, an Evangelical tract society has recommendations: shop, talk to others, hand them the literature, keep shopping. <http://www.chick.com/bc/1996/witnessinginmalls.asp>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.witnesswear.com.au/>

<sup>39</sup> <http://shopwitnesswear.com/>

Religion Evangelicals as a flâneur, the fashionable dandy, or even an urban monad as the isolated rural communities from whence Evangelicals came were intensely social, anonymity impossible.

Most significant in these pitches is the reduction of that single most salient activity for Evangelical Christians – witnessing – into display of style. Proselytizing, spreading the Word, encouraging people to “confess Jesus” is the most important religious duty for Evangelicals, is a social relationship by necessity, and its conversion into style, visual signs on material objects is an example of reification par excellence. It is one way in which witnessing is commodified.

### 3.4 “Authentic” Identity

Much heat but little light has come from the enormous fuss about identity in recent decades. Given the pervasiveness of Arminian voluntarism, the American self is a sort of Nietzschean identity that wills itself into existence. The central issue in the debate is authenticity, and the stress put on authenticity in marketing shows how important and potent an issue it is. “The quest for *authenticity* (being-founded- on-itself) is thus very precisely a quest for an *alibi* (being-elsewhere)” (Baudrillard 2005, 81). For Baudrillard this is a paradoxical quest, as seeking authenticity betrays its lack, or rather that which is sought is an image of the authentic rather than the authentic itself, which might be extraordinarily unpleasant. The authenticity gap is also present in classic Christian theology in what Mark Taylor calls the “Lutheran subject,” *I am what I am not*. The self has a dual nature, simultaneously sinner and saved, an intense inner paradox between what one is and what one aspires to be (M. C. Taylor 2007, 62-64). Taylor credits Luther with the creation of the modern, divided subject which does not live its true nature. Sinfulness and righteousness exist at the same time in the subject, unhinging its being founded on itself.

Another identity paradox is group identity, what identity an individual gets from being a member of a group or category. The first paradox can be represented  $x$  is  $x$  and  $x$  is *not*  $x$ , and the second is  $x$  is a  $y$  and  $y$  is *not*  $x$ . Franz Fanon’s description of recognizing himself as a negro when a white child reacted, “Mama! See the negro! I’m frightened!” In one of the most eloquent descriptions of recognizing one’s self as Other, Fanon writes: “I already knew that there were legends, stories, history, and above all historicity... I was responsible at the same time for my body, my race, for my ancestors. I discovered my



blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slaveships, and above all else, above all: "Sho' good eatin'." (Fanon 1968, 112). His reflexive identity,  $x = x$ , is suddenly contradicted by a strange reciprocal identity,  $x = y'$ . This was the identity politics of the anti-colonial movement, a tactic used in revolution and liberation. This is not just economic exploitation, but corruption of identity.

But identity politics per se, the insistence on authenticity, the natural essence of the group, has not had entirely beneficial results. Alonso writes her analysis of hegemony and state formation, official nationalism homogenizes the community while creating heterogeneity, displacing "ethnic" (as opposed to "national") identity to the private world (Alonso 1994). Terry Eagleton writes, "Identity politics is one of the most uselessly amorphous of all political categories, including as it does those who wish to liberate themselves from tribal patriarchs along with those who wish to exterminate them" (Eagleton 2000, 86). Žižek also points out that multicultural liberals sometimes tolerate "the most brutal violations of human rights" through a reluctance to contradict their ideology of tolerance (Žižek 1999, 218).

What Žižek calls the "new fundamentalisms," religious fundamentalism and Eastern European post-communist nationalism are manifestations of the same thing, a post-individual world. Multiculturalism is a result of globalization, a post-colonial effect where the colonized become the cultural colonizers. Both nationalism and religious fundamentalism are expressions of postmodern nostalgia, for a time of purity, the absolute past of ancient epics Bakhtin describes where there is no ambiguity and time is absolutely closed. The Taliban attempted to recreate the world as it was in the time of Mohammed in Afghanistan, and American Christian Evangelicals continuously evoke the early Christians as their source of

authenticity, while no Afghanistan is under occupation, a theme park which idolatrously manifests this fantasy, “The Holy Land Experience” has been built near Orlando, Florida.

Perhaps the best example of the identity paradox comes from theories of *reflexive modernity* in the work of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens. Beck’s hypothesis of reflexive modernization is, like that of Jameson, epochal, but sees it as a liberating triumph for humanity.

‘Reflexive modernization’ means the possibility of a creative (self-) destruction for an entire epoch: that of industrial society. The ‘subject’ of this creative destruction is not the revolution, not the crisis, but the victory of Western modernization (Beck, Giddens and Lash, *Reflexive Modernization Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* 1994, 2)”

The liberatory force is the abolition of the social boundaries of class, gender, and so on, an exhaustion of social limits enabled by a “world that has been effectively mastered (Bewes 2002, 116).” This mastery precisely contradicts Bakhtin’s description of carnival freedom where nothing is determined. Beck’s “risk society” is a result of this dissolution of deterministic boundaries, the risk is that it is now up to the individual, fragmented self to decide among the newly presented “risky opportunities” which can lead to unlimited movement (Beck, Giddens and Lash, *Reflexive Modernization Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* 1994, 8). The project of modernity has reached its conclusion realizing the fact that reality is constructed by man, and so empowered can remake it as it would, including fixing the environment.<sup>40</sup> The social construction of reality has long been a fundamental position of postmodern theory, but the notion that this can be the basis of a positivistic enterprise of social engineering based on unlimited personal choice is a Liberal extension of this thought as postmodernists would loudly argue with the mastery of

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<sup>40</sup> Beck is from Germany’s Green movement.

the world. Marxists, in particular Lukacs, also see reality as socially constructed and remaking reality is the stated goal of dialectic materialism according to Lukacs, but this is a mode of collective action (praxis) not individual choice.

Reflexive modernization is self improvement on a global scale. Individualization is the flip side of globalization. Leaving aside for now the idea that the Nietzschean ahistorical self-willed self can ever actually *be*, Scott Lash sees this as not being liberation, but rather, using Foucault's theory of discipline, actually an extension of control. "What appears to be as the freedom of agency for the theory of reflexivity is just another means of control for Foucault, as the direct operation of power on the body by its mediated operation on the soul" (Lash 1993, 20). For Bewes, reflexive modernization presents reification in an extreme form precisely by denying it. The mastery of the world, especially the subjective world, aims to progressively extend its mastery to what is not, effectively colonizing the world with its all penetrating forms (Bewes 2002). Hence the identity paradox is even stronger, with identity entirely up to the liberated individual presented with a menu of commodified identities from which he or she must choose.

Wade Clark Roof and James Twitchell both describe this shift as a collapse of cultural monopolies, creating the condition of cultural competition through product differentiation. Through a legislative and legal process, marginal, stigmatized groups are legitimized and legally included, with an articulated ideology of *multiculturalism* in some countries such as Canada and Australia. This has met with considerable resistance from, what I shall term fundamentalist critics such as influential American radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh. "Multiculturalism has nothing to do with race. This has to do with there being two or three completely different Americas now. We are trying to save this country as it was founded for anybody who wants to join us" (Limbaugh 2009). Limbaugh and other self-appointed

defenders of American culture<sup>41</sup> attack multiculturalism by often by using the contradictions of multiculturalism and *identity politics* against itself. If every cultural identity is legitimate and authentic, then an exclusive cultural identity is also authentic. Furthermore, what is viewed by fundamentalists – falsely—as traditional national culture, now has marginal, i.e. oppressed status, in the face of rising multiculturalism. The very public furor over civic Christmas celebrations is emblematic of this struggle; the movement “to put Christ back in Christmas” using litigation and popular pressure to prevent the renaming of municipal trees or celebrations as “holiday trees.”<sup>42</sup>

Beck and Giddens’ version of the end of history in reflexive identity is a modern myth of this sort as well, but absolutizing the present as an unchangeable terminus (Bewes 2002, 117). Hybrid identity has been much played up as a new, liberating feature of postmodernity (Clifford 1988) (Gilroy 1993) (Bhaba 1995) (Anzaldúa 1987). Hybrid identity is fluid, porous, unbounded, and ever renegotiable, an identity for the quotidian individual. Yet through the ideology of multiculturalism, closely tied to hybrid identity, cultural differences are normalized, and so the political claims of culture are normalized, subverting “any normatively compelling non-instrumental grounds for preserving cultural differences and rescuing endangered cultural resources” (Kompridis 2005, 322). Setting all cultures equal eliminates culture as a stance for political action, but it also ignores asymmetries of power between cultures in a multicultural state. According to E. San Juan Jr., multiculturalism *excludes* the concept of dominant and subordinate cultures (San Juan Jr. 1994, 67). It sets as

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<sup>41</sup> Gaffe-prone Sarah Palin implied in a campaign speech in North Carolina that some parts of America were more “pro-America” than others setting off a furor in the media world. Reported in *The Washington Post* 17 October 2009

[http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/10/17/to\\_avoid\\_being\\_depressed\\_palin.html?hpid=topnews](http://voices.washingtonpost.com/44/2008/10/17/to_avoid_being_depressed_palin.html?hpid=topnews)

<sup>42</sup> “On Thursday, Boston will light its city Christmas tree, after an uproar over an attempt to rename it the “holiday tree.” It’s just one of many battles across the country over what some Christians see as attempts to sap Christmas of its religious meaning. Christian conservatives have launched online petition drives and recruited a record 1,550 attorneys to pursue any attempts to substitute “Christmas” with “holiday,” or any other inclusive or nonsectarian terms. It’s all aimed at -- to use their phrase -- “putting the Christ back in Christmas.” And in some places, it’s working. ABC news, “Groups Gear Up to Fight for ‘Christmas,’ But Is There Really an Issue?” Nov. 30, 2005. <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/story?id=1358020>

equal the Pima Indians of Arizona and white, middle-class commodity culture, ignoring the vast difference in power between the two cultures and the subordinate relation of the Pima. Hybridity, far from freeing culture from essentialism, has the problem of presupposing purity ignoring the innate hybridity of every culture (Eagleton 2000, 15). Universities that include in the canon literature from minority writers to support multiculturalism, miss the political fact that it is not so much who is read that matters as who controls the university. Normalized pluralism explains away political-economic antagonisms, making culture “inner,” by focusing on art it reactivates elitist hierarchies of privilege, not bothering with the “actual circumstances of social life.” San Juan Jr. sums up this attitude as, “Thus what is needed is not mass struggle against institutional racism but individual self-improvement through a variegated reading fare (San Juan Jr. 1994, 66).

The curious thing about the superficial dissolution of cultural monopolies in the United States has been an implosion, or disappearance of the center, what would constitute convention. Sinclair Lewis’ 1925 novel, *Elmer Gantry*, describes the misadventures of a religious entrepreneur who, at different times, is a revivalist leader, a peddler of theosophical self-improvement courses, a farm implement salesman, and a respectable Methodist Minister in a large, fictional, Mid-Western city. The famous first line of the book reads, “Elmer Gantry was drunk” (Lewis 1927). Reading the novel for the first time in the early 1990s, I was struck by how familiar the religious world of Elmer Gantry was. It seemed nothing had changed at all in 70 years. The book comically mocks the hypocrisy and charlatanism of Elmer Gantry and his ilk, but what I did not know at the time that it was common practice to accuse Evangelical preachers and “New Age” practitioners as charlatans, hypocrites and con artists at the time. Lewis was a social critic along the lines of Thorstein Veblen and H.L. Mencken who coined the term “Booboisie” for the gullible American middle class. Lewis dedicates *Elmer Gantry* to Mencken.

In the 1920s, contemporary cultural figures like Deepak Chopra, Jedi enthusiasts, Jerry Fallwell, Pat Robertson and others would have been condescendingly denounced as crackpots, idiots, or inheritors of circus impresario and inventor of the modern museum, P.T. Barnum who, according to popular legend said, “There is a sucker born every minute.” While the growth of new religious movements in the last forty years is well documented as is the growth in “mindbodyspirit” commodities, the Christian denominations that have grown the most in this period have been exactly those that were marginal at the time Lewis wrote *Elmer Gantry*. Mark C. Taylor remarks on this growth of these previously marginalized groups, noting that “It is extremely important to realize that these contemporary forms of belief and practice do not represent a reversion to pre-modern forms of life but are distinctly *postmodern* phenomena” (M. C. Taylor 2007, 258). The postmodern aesthetic detaches signifiers from their original context and floats them in a completely different context.

If marginal culture has moved to the center, what have the WASPs<sup>43</sup> who were and remain at the center of power do about their identity? Discussing postmodern colonialism, Terry Eagleton writes: “the West does not have a distinctive identity of its own, because it does not need one...It is other cultures that are different while one’s own form of life is the norm, and so scarcely a ‘culture’ at all” (Eagleton 2000, 46). Very ironically there is a distinct envy shown by those who were at the center for the “special treatment” given to minorities, women, and immigrants, particularly regarding affirmative action policies.<sup>44</sup> It is not only the political right who envies minorities and the marginal, the loss of authenticity middle class whites have felt has resulted in an intense quest for an alibi elsewhere. In the United States, after African Americans, the most thoroughly exploited culture has been that

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<sup>43</sup> White Anglo-Saxon Protestant. WASP was popularized by E. Digby Baltzell in his 1964 book *The Protestant Establishment: Aristocracy & Caste in America*. It designates the cultural elites, particularly of the Northeast and the dominance of a literary canon derived from England.

<sup>44</sup> Typical of this is this quote from a *Washington Post* article. “a David Duke supporter who showed up at a meeting in Fairfax County this week shouting about how white people were losing their “homeland” as minorities get special treatment. “Clinton Charms Affirmative Action Foes,” By John F. Harris *Washington Post* Staff Writer Saturday, December 20, 1997; Page A01

of Native Americans. In her analysis of the commercialization of Native American religion, Lisa Aldred remarks on the scale of the phenomenon, “Euro-Americans professing to be medicine people have profited from publications and workshops. Mass quantities of products promoted as “Native American sacred objects” have been successfully sold by white entrepreneurs to a largely non-Indian market” (Aldred 2000, 329). The sense that Native American religion or dressing like an African American “gangsta” is more authentic may be due to the success of the culture industry in rendering traditional American culture fake through endless repetition and reduction to genre. According to Vincent Jude Miller, the result of this total commodification of American traditional culture means that: “We have no folk songs handed on from generation to generation. Our ancestral recipes are made with Minute Rice and Campbell’s tomato soup” (V. J. Miller 2003, 159).

Only marginal groups outside the commodity system (generally because of extreme poverty) actually engage in authentic cultural production (Jameson 1979, 140). Until the 1970s, fundamentalist, Pentecostal, Charismatic and the other Christian churches in the United States which rather carelessly fall under the umbrella term of “Evangelical,” were excluded (sometimes as a result of their premillennial dispensationalist theology) from the middle class world. These were the churches of poverty and passion, glossallia and snake handling, none of which fit the WASP norms of appropriate behavior. Their rustic, anachronism gave them the patina of the lost golden age, evoking nostalgia for the mythic past. While the top income of the middle class may have embraced shamanism or Buddhism for authenticity, the bottom went toward Evangelism. The statistics bear this out with those with less economic and cultural capital moving toward Evangelical churches and those with more heading to Eastern, or New Religious movements.

The result is a curious homogeneity of heterogeneity. While monopoly WASP culture appears to have vanished, it lives on in WASP manners, or codes of behavior and

interaction. Aspects of minority or deviant cultural groups may be “naturalized” by adopting these manners, but the aspects become floating signifiers, no longer part of a particular cultural context but rather as displays of taste. The actual Otherness is boiled out, those aspects that would be alien or unpleasant to WASP manners are reified into commodities fungible with others in the middle class world.



### 3.5 Landscape as Signs

In a 2001 article, geographer Wilbur Zelinski notes a crucial difference between European cities and those of the United States. In Europe city centers are almost always dominated by a single structure, such as a cathedral. With the exception of Salt Lake City, religious structures do not dominate the downtown areas. Rather many churches are found near, but not in the center (Zelinski 2001, 566). He further notes the lack of sacred places, such as hills, groves, or sites linked to saintly individuals. “There is a tendency to invest buildings with spiritual significance far more readily than other sites or spaces; hallowed halls ahead of holy hills” (Zelinski 2001). Zelinski ascribes this to the youth of the United States, but as American Protestantism is rooted in the Reformed, Calvinist tradition, the building itself is unimportant. The church is wherever the congregation happens to meet, such as the tents of the Second Great Awakening, riverside baptisms, or humble storefronts in decayed inner city neighborhoods or run down strip malls. Thus the curious mutuality of Christianity and commerce appears once again. Place is not sacred.

Another thing Zelinski notes is the uniqueness of the American religious landscape. Unlike the Pew Forum and other social researchers who use the term landscape metaphorically, Zelinski actually means the appearance of the land. What he sees as an absolute difference in religious landscape is the ubiquity of the sign, the profusion of which is truly extraordinary. These signboards are not limited in function to advertising specific churches, but attempt “...to persuade the unredeemed or to reinforce the faith of believers with their brief homilies” (Zelinski 2001, 579-581). These can be giant billboards by the freeway, bumper stickers, or handmade signs nailed to telephone poles, almost all of them

apparently Protestant. “The signs plead, scold, and nag, and they are meant to shame or frighten into submission those of us who are in spiritual peril” (ibid).

There is nothing at all unusual in the ubiquity of proselytizing religious messages on signs set next to a sign advertising Budweiser Beer<sup>45</sup>. The persuasive techniques of advertising were developed by Arminian Evangelical preachers to encourage conversion, and, according to Jackson Lears, the most influential early 20<sup>th</sup> Century admen were trained as evangelical preachers (Lears 1995). American capitalism and popular religion present a chicken and egg problem apparently, one that can only be resolved with identity.

After an absence of six years I returned to Georgia for a visit. One of the things that struck me in the endless hours spent in cars was the sheer quantity of signs, not just religious signs or advertisements, many, if not most did not seem to serve an obvious purpose. “In emergency call 911” seems to appear every mile or so, but 911 calls have been around for at least twenty years. Shop windows bear the sticker with the slogan, “shoplifters will be prosecuted” under the picture of a policeman. City parks have placards with very long lists of prohibited activities on them in small print. In rural areas one is welcomed with hand printed “no trespassing” signs. It occurred to me that most of the signs I was looking at were similar to “no trespassing”: they are territorial markers, reminders of the power structure and authority. Although they may have some other obvious purpose, these signs are hostile displays of power.

These signs have generic properties. Standard signs are sold at hardware or home improvement stores with popular messages like, “keep out,” “Authorized Personnel Only,” “Beware of Dog,” “For Sale,” and so on. While not constituting a language of their own, they may make up a primitive language game or games in Wittgenstein’s sense that “the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life” (Wittgenstein 1953, 12).

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<sup>45</sup> I saw this strange juxtaposition off an interstate highway near Atlanta, Georgia.

Many of the signs discussed so far fall into the game of giving orders, even if they do not assume the imperative. To extend language games to signs, however, we are left with the problem of intention, whether the posting of the sign constitutes an utterance, the relationship of the poster to the sign (the gardener could have put it up on orders), and the veracity of the sign, such as window decals for electronic alarm systems when no such system has been installed. But the sign “Beware of Dog,” when there is no dog still has an intention, i.e. to keep strangers off the property, as well as a belief in the power of the sign (its fetish properties) to deter intruders even though there is no dog.

This begs a question: why do signs have authority. The ubiquity of signs in the United States shows that in American culture signs have authority. Yet in other cultures, the sign bears no authority at all. When I lived in Turkey in 1991 “No Smoking” signs were posted over each clerk, and each clerk invariably had a burning cigarette in an overfull ashtray. Similarly in my Istanbul neighborhood, we were accustomed to piling our household garbage under a sign that read “Do Not Dump Trash Here!” Signs were universally ignored. Only people had the authority to give orders. The acceptance of the sign’s authority in the absence of actual authority is general in the United States. A sign reading “Swim at Own Risk” next to a subdivision swimming pool can serve as a legal defense should someone drown at the unattended pool.<sup>46</sup> The long list of prohibited activities on the signs in Atlanta parks serve to authorize the removal of people who disturb business people who eat lunch in the parks. Perhaps the redundancy of signs like “Call 911 In Emergency” serve more to mark the presence of state authority than any actual attempt to inform the public. Signs serve to control space not by the messages they bear, but by their sheer presence.

A similar semiotic situation exists with badges. Herbert Smith describes it as deliberate semantic confusion. “Authority, not content with expressing itself in person,

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<sup>46</sup> However the sign itself is not sufficient. Local governments require fencing and restricted access to make it difficult for children to enter the pool area. The sign is not to inform the swimmers but to limit liability.

designates an *other* to represent it in the basic act of iconographic misrepresentation: the replacement of the signified with the signifier” (Smith 1988, 141). The presence of strangers at your front door is one thing, you can answer or not. But if badges are displayed, a magical transformation of the rules takes place. The state is entirely absent except for its signifier, the bearer of which also bears the authority of the state. The sign marks the presence of the state’s authority even if it bears no imperative message. The landscape is dominated by the signs, and as the bureaucratic state is an entirely abstract entity, the sign itself is its authority.

Commercial signs, which outnumber signs set by the state, also control space, but not as directly. If the imperative is used, e.g. Drink Coca Cola!, it does not command, but pleads. Billboards are on private property, but are constructed to require viewing from the public space of the road. Billboards also have no relation to the context where they are located, i.e. they are out of place. Rent on large signs on busy roads can be in the tens of thousands of dollars per month, a privilege only the most powerful interests can command. The control element of the Coke sign comes from its very presence in the drivers view, the presence of the brand. These types of highway signs seldom sell anything specific, as they will most likely only get the briefest of viewings, so the intention is to put the logo out on an image of somewhere pleasant *that is not the road*. To the harried, stressed driver, they offer the illusion of a pleasant or exciting elsewhere.

Before one can enter the controlled illusion of the mall or other built environment, these interior idylls discussed previously, one must pass through the hostile wilderness of the sign-encrusted road network. This outside is inhuman, built for the convenience of machines and according to the logic of machines. Goss describes mall parking lots as “bleak deserts” from which one escapes to the illusion of the mall which has no windows opening onto the bleakness outside (Goss 1993, 32). Sprawling Sun Belt cities like Atlanta, Los Angeles or

Dallas, may have ten-lane freeways leading in and out.<sup>47</sup> Should one's car break down in these circumstances, police advise motorists to stay in their cars so dangerous it is for pedestrians on these highways. Despite their huge capacity, heavy traffic still slows or stops traffic leaving one to look at the billboards and the back of the car in front, one that will often display some sort of decoration.

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<sup>47</sup> The maximum I have counted is 16 lanes on a short stretch of I-75-85 in downtown Atlanta.

### 3.6 Roads as Public Space

Bumper stickers and car decorations are popular commodities. Not only are they good sellers, they are frequently discussed in the media, and a source of urban lore as to the origin of a motif, such as “baby on board” that becomes so parodied that the origins are often difficult to discern. Despite the ubiquity of this decoration and the fashions it generates, coffee table books abound, but practically no academic research. It would be on the road, where the driver is alone, isolated not only by the glass and metal of the automobile but also the dangerous environment just outside the car, where the urban monad is found in a nearly pure state. Roads are public places, but the inside of the car is a private place. While there is some justification to compare driving and walking as public activities, the fact that driving an automobile is a hazardous, often deadly, activity makes such comparisons weak at best. With a sole exception, none of the few studies done on car decoration takes this into account.

There are three questions of interest regarding car decorations, particularly those that display text or symbols. The first is whether or not they are a form of communication, the second is whether or not they constitute a discourse, a question that is only partially dependent on their being communication. The third question is that of intention. If they are attempts at communication as seems to be obvious, what do they signify?

On the surface, the case for communication is handicapped by the lack, or near impossibility of interaction between drivers as well as their anonymity. Some crude signaling is possible, such as waving a hand to let another car merge, flashing headlamps to warn of approach (or the presence of police), or various obscene gestures expressing anger or rage. Unlike the case for Witness Wear, a bumper sticker cannot function as the basis for

initiating a conversation in traffic beyond obeying the injunction “Honk if you Love Jesus!” They are just signs that move. The environment precludes conversation, real time two-way communication in any substantive way. In this sense only one-way broadcast communication is at all possible in exactly the same manner as the signs by the road that are *not* moving.

A second case against communication is that bumper stickers and other car decorations are usually mass produced commodities bought from shops or online retailers alongside perhaps thousands of other similar items. The same display rack may easily contain stickers with contradictory messages. The production process is fetishized as well as the author or designer who may be an anonymous copywriter/artist. Also as commodities, the messages or symbols displayed are not generally those of the person who displays them. In a best case scenario the stickers function communicatively as a form of quoted speech, signifying another’s utterance in a particular context or rhetorical situation.

Quoted speech has different semantic properties than direct speech. The first logician to notice the difference between direct and quoted speech was Gottlob Frege in his 1892 work *On Sense and Reference*.

If words are used in the ordinary way, what one intends to speak of is their reference. It can also happen, however, that one wishes to talk about the words themselves or their sense. This happens, for instance, when the words of another are quoted. One’s own words then first designate words of the other speaker, and only the latter have their usual reference. We then have signs of signs.<sup>48</sup>

The analytic philosophy tradition has never settled the issue of quotation, but Frege’s original observation that quotations have very different semantic properties, that the words do not mean what they ordinarily would mean has never been refuted. Willard Van Orman Quine, the famous logician saw the logical properties of a quotation as similar to proper names, i.e.

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<sup>48</sup> Extracted from an online version of *On Sense and Reference* hosted by U.C. San Diego. [http://mind.ucsd.edu/syllabi/00-01/phil235/a\\_readings/frege\\_S&R.html](http://mind.ucsd.edu/syllabi/00-01/phil235/a_readings/frege_S&R.html)

the entire quotation is a sign, which cannot be parsed. In more familiar Saussurian terms, the quotation functions as a single signifier referring to a specific utterance of signifiers as its signified. Quotations then do not have their original meaning as that is determined by the original rhetorical context, but rather refer to the original. In larger texts where quotations are integrated, explained, and elaborated, a new rhetorical situation is created that substantiates the quotation. However, bumper stickers float without a “text” to provide an interpretive frame. They are things. Intriguingly, Bakhtin suggests that quotation can have icon-like qualities when text becomes isolated from its original context becoming a thing rather than language (Bakhtin 1981, 69). This icon quality, where language becomes disembodied from its origins, is similar to the logo construct, a signifier that doesn’t denote anything specific, but only has connotations, i.e. secondary meanings that associate the signifier *in general* with an amorphous group of emotionally charged signifiers. This is a primary strategy of branding

Bumper stickers achieved their popularity as an advertising medium following the Second World War. In Case’s 1989 study commercial advertising was the second most common category after statements of personal identity (Case 1992). As the medium is the message, bumper sticker can only function as advertisements due to the limited amount of space and the brief period when they can be viewed or read. Not only are they limited to one-way communication, bumper stickers must stick to slogans (or epigrams) if they have any effective text at all. Slogans are a form of rhetoric invested with intention and easy to remember, but communicate two possibilities due to their semantic poverty: solidarity or hostility. “Obama 2008” can be seen as an expression of solidarity with the Obama presidential campaign or with other Obama supporters, but it can be hostile to those who oppose the campaign.



If they function as a disembodied language game, then intention, the pragmatics of the display become the chief determinant of whether bumper stickers are a form of communication or not. Wittgenstein's primary observation about language is that it is an activity, invested with intention. It does something, even if it might mean nothing. Lending credence to the idea that the display of signs is an assertion of power is a 2008 study correlating car decorations with aggressive driving practices. The authors of the study found a direct correlation of aggressive driving practices<sup>49</sup> with degree of car decoration or personalization. This correlation was independent of the content of the message or the gender of the driver. The authors specifically ruled out identity (as expressed through the decorations) as having influence on aggressive driving (Szlemko, et al. 2008, 1678). The authors' conclusion is that car decoration functions as territory markers and that aggressive driving can be partially explained as territorial defense resulting from boundary confusion of the private space of the car with the public space of the road. They suggest that "hostility causes both territorial marking and aggressive driving" (Szlemko, et al. 2008, 1685). In this sense, stickers reading "Visualize World Peace," "I Brake for Animals" and "God is my Co-Pilot" have the same hostile intent as "No Trespassing." If we can think of posting signs as a sort of speech act, to use J.L. Austin's term, displaying bumper stickers has the performative effect of a warning.

Lessl's 2007 study of the Darwin Fish found an astonishing degree of hostility in his respondents (Lessl 2007). The Darwin Fish car plaque is a parody of the Christian Icthus car plaque that appeared on the backs of cars in the late 1970s. The Darwin Fish appeared in the early 1980s as a prank designed by Hollywood special effects designer Chris Gilman, this igniting the so-called "fish wars" (Gibson 2000, 8). The Darwin Fish has "DARWIN" written inside it and feet, suggesting evolution. Now thousands of parodies and counter-

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<sup>49</sup> The authors define this as the use of vehicle to express anger. (Szlemko, et al. 2008, 1675).

parodies (e.g. a large fish, TRUTH, swallowing the Darwin Fish) are available making the fish plaque a genre in itself. Lessl's article, appearing in the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, made him something of a minor celebrity. He was interviewed by National Public Radio and several major newspapers and magazines, very unusual attention for a professor of rhetoric. The attention he received would indicate that there is considerable public interest in the fish wars.

The study itself consisted of a three-item questionnaire with the following items: Why did you put this emblem on your car? What audience did you hope to reach? What does the Darwin fish mean to you? He distributed it by walking around parking lots and putting it under the windshield wipers of cars bearing the Darwin Fish emblem. His response was 51 out of 140, an astonishing rate for these types of surveys.<sup>50</sup> Further many responses went to several pages, indicating that people displaying these plaques had a lot to say and wanted to say it.<sup>51</sup> His analysis of the responses was that the Darwin Fish was not a parody, which would have the intention to deny the symbol's power, but rather an act of displacement, effectively hijacking the symbol from Christians to another religion he calls "scientism" (Lessl 2007, 133) His textual analysis of the responses indicates that this religion bears similarities to Christianity as an apocalyptic faith embodying purpose to history. "Thus we know that the "evolution" that these writers are talking about is not the "evolution" of science journals. It has become a purposeful agent through being set in a displaced narrative that recapitulates the older stories of God's action in creation" (Lessl 2007, 140). The fish wars have the order of a holy war, a cosmic struggle over truth with absolute consequences, at least according to many of Lessl's respondents.

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<sup>50</sup> Interview with Lessl <http://www.uga.edu/columns/991025/campnews.html>

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Lessl for the New York Times, 2.11.2003 <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/02/11/science/fish-evolve-and-multiply-but-not-in-the-traditional-way.html?pagewanted=2>

That “Scientism” is apocalyptic and teleological isn’t surprising considering the millennialism embedded in American political mythology and the Christian cosmology underlying Western civilization. Voluntarism is also present in many responses that express a persuasive intent for political, even historical ends. Lessl does not address the most interesting question, which is why people display such declarative signifiers in the first place. Lessl’s investigation of what the Darwin Fish represents is intriguing, and symbolic hijacking – or parody for that matter – of sacred symbols in public view is an aggressive, hostile act, and lends some credence to the “Culture Wars” argument. Yet, I have the conviction that a comparison between the responses from Darwin Fish displayers and Icthus Fish displayers would reveal far more cultural commonalities than differences. Given Lessl’s finding of Christian narratives in the Darwin Fish responses, I suspect that the underlying discourse would be close to identical.

The dueling fish have the form of logos in that they do not designate anything specific. “A logo,” writes Frederic Jameson, “is something like the synthesis of an advertising image and a brand name; better still, it is a brand name which has been transformed into an image.” This new type of sign does not designate any specific product or even a range of products, but at best designate genre (Jameson 1990, 86). Whatever the antiquity of the sign and its forever lost original context, the Icthus car plaque and its parodies resemble in size and materials the logos of the car brand. Often the original corporate logo is replaced with the various fish car plaque, effectively rebranding the car. It’s not at all clear what it means other than some generic Christianity, which is only imaginable if the entire history of Christianity is ignored. The Icthus car plaque as a logo only denotes itself. Its semantic properties are solely connotative, i.e. it is a floating signifier of the first order.

Bloch's 2000 study of political bumper stickers in Israel provides an almost convincing case for bumper stickers as "a form of mobile rhetoric... a setting in motion of Habermas's (1962/1989) concept of the public sphere" (Bloch 2000, 434). She cautions that the Israeli use of bumper stickers is of a qualitatively different order than in the U.S. as well as quantitatively different in that the majority of non-commercial bumper stickers in Israel contain political messages. Case's study found that "self-identity expressions" outnumbered political messages by more than ten to one in the United States (Case 1992). Arguing that bumper stickers provide a public forum for popular critical expression, Bloch describes these stickers messages as "...synecdochic representation of the claims or conclusions of an argument, frequently presented in hyperbolic style to emphasize the point" (Bloch 2000, 437). Synecdoche differs from a floating signifier of the logo as a fragment of a concrete, known argument. Synecdoche denotes as well as connotes. Her analysis of the "Shalom Chaver" cluster of bumper stickers shows a much richer communicative context than does Lessl's study of the Darwin Fish where the meaning of the symbol is ambiguous, i.e. the Darwin Fish is not a synecdoche. There is no specific, known argument of which it is part of.

Bloch's analysis is rich and informative, but the case for being a mobile public sphere founders on the idea of forum. There is no debate on the road, but elsewhere in the media world where the arguments are developed and exchanged by political elites. While it may indeed be the case that the expression of affiliation with Israeli political bumper stickers is much more definite and concrete than in with U.S. bumper stickers,<sup>52</sup> the forum where debate occurs is elsewhere, the stickers a commodified manifestation of it. Although Bloch does not investigate the association of bumper stickers with aggressive driving, she does say that

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<sup>52</sup> Sculle and Jakle give the example of a bumper sticker reading "Say No to Drugs" as enabling "...proponents of a cause to insert themselves into public discourse" (Sculle and Jakle 2008, 65). This unfortunate choice of examples could not be more different than the Israeli examples. While a case can be made that the "Shalom, Chaver" cluster are synecdoches, "Say No to Drugs" exhausts the discourse as this Reagan-era "just say no" anti-drug strategy had no more depth to it than the slogan.

“territories” are marked out where people with opposing bumper stickers might hesitate to park their cars for fear of vandalism (Bloch 2000, 442). In Salamon’s 2001 study of the same bumper sticker cluster in Israel, several of her respondents expressed hostility and/or fear regarding the display of political bumper stickers (Salamon 2001). This supports Szlemko’s conclusion that displaying bumper stickers is associated with aggression.

Sticking to the road context, the immediate rhetorical situation, bumper stickers as a form of communication appears to be limited to a pragmatics of hostility and aggression and the display of slogans or logo-like images. Szlemko et al.’s correlation between the number of decorations regardless of their content and aggressive driving practices supports this solely pragmatic conclusion. While bumper stickers are far more common in the United States than in Europe, there are present on less than one third of automobiles, hence this is a minority preoccupation. Anecdotal evidence where people display “Jesus Saves” bumper stickers or Icthus fish in order to blend in or avoid getting tickets from the police indicate a similar dynamic to signs, but this camouflage effect has pragmatic intent. Lessl’s study, particularly the more lengthy responses, would appear to also indicate frustration at not being able to communicate with their imaginary opponents. Roads are probably the most significant public space left in the United States, an unsegregated area where all social groups are present. However it is not a zone of dialogic contact for the simple reason that it is a public space for machines, not human bodies. There is no contact. If a driver feels like marking his otherness in an environment where everyone is other (and potentially a deadly one), then the other can be recognized in a commodified form of other drawn from other media discourses which are also commodified. Even if we concede that bumper stickers are a medium of popular expression, it is in the language used for this expression is not popular but rather the language of advertising, i.e. logos and slogans. As a language game, the display of bumper stickers is even more limited than signs as far as its range of meanings due to the impoverished context

of the road. The stickers can seldom draw from the context to enhance their meaning. A “Beware of Dog” sign is much more credible on a fence gate behind which is a large, ferocious dog barking and growling loudly than is one on the door of a 12<sup>th</sup> floor flat. They float on their own as alien to their environment as are the giant billboards that dominate the view, of which they are but a puny attempt at imitation.

On the second question, as to whether bumper stickers can be said to constitute a discourse, there is a good deal of superficial evidence that this is indeed the case. Both Israeli studies examine in great detail the origins and development of this cluster with complex interaction of fonts, puns, and substitutions. They also find many instances where the displayer has cut up and re-arranged words and letters to create new messages out of the parts, an excellent example of de-commodification. Further the numerous parodies are not all political with some merely irreverently mocking the slogans and stickers (Salamon 2001, 383). The Icthus Fish cluster (of which the Darwin Fish is just one of thousands of parodies) there is a strong element of the carnivalesque, as there is in the “Baby on Board” cluster, which was originally a parody of the yellow diamond hazardous materials warning on the back of trucks. The parodies can be perverse, scatological, sexual, and grotesque, embodying all the qualities of what Bakhtin calls “Rabelaisian laughter.”

...festive folk laughter presents an element of victory not only over supernatural awe, over the sacred, over death; it also means the defeat of power, of earthly kings, of the earthly upper classes, of all that opposes and restricts. (M. Bakhtin 1968, 92).

Precisely that anonymity that makes the roads an impossible forum empowers drivers to transgress cultural conventions displaying on their cars messages that they would never say to their perceived other face to face. It is, however, emasculated transgression due to the context, and essentially trivial not posing any sort of challenge to power relations or

indulging in the physical, immediate, riotous liberty of actual carnival. Reduced to naughty bumper stickers, transgression is neutered.

The carnival and the classical genre of comedy was always the world of people with low status. There appears to be a case for social class in the consumption of car decorations. Charles Case found an inverse correlation between the value of the vehicle and the presence of car signs, and concludes that bumper stickers have a “unique potential for “the common man” to interject ideas and perspectives into their urban, mass mediated cultural environment” (Case 1992, 114). Looking at elite publications discussion of bumper stickers, a high-low culture distinction appears, for example “bumper sticker thinking” is a derogatory term for people who express opinions in slogan form. A short archive search of the elite *The New York Times* found 34 articles in the past 12 months containing the term “bumper sticker,” 12 of them using the term in a derogatory sense.<sup>53</sup> The frequent comedy of bumper stickers and the play of parody in their composition assign the genre to the vulgar realms of low culture, perhaps also explaining the general lack of academic attention to it. Yet the medium is physically limited both by the space available for a message and the fact that these are *moving* signs that can be viewed only briefly. Such a medium lends itself easily for sloganeering as it can hardly do otherwise.

Sculle and Jakle. Writing of moving signs, they say, “Signs that move enliven landscape. They add a dynamic dimension to place. Caught in ‘flight’ so to speak, they engage the eye, energizing the gaze” (Sculle and Jakle 2008, 59). Adelberto Aguirre writes of California automobile culture and the display of bumper stickers as “...an extension of the self in the expression of one’s lifestyle” (Aguirre 1990, 92). Identifying one’s self on the freeway is something he sees as a “must” (Aguirre 1990, 94). His argument is more gushy introspection than substance, manifesting the curious self-reflexive postmodern notion of

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<sup>53</sup> Search conducted 3.1.10

identity through style and display, saying of declarative bumper stickers, changeable just as is fashion (Ibid 95). Case's study found the preponderance of bumper sticker messages to be self-identity statements. He also writes that bumper stickers give the individual an opportunity in opposition to mass-mediated sources such as television, books, magazines, and billboards (Case 1992, 117). Yet these bumper-stickers at best parody advertisements, and their mass produced nature as a very limited advertising medium result in endless repetition of the same forms, symbols, and genres does not lend much credibility to this conclusion.

The Israeli studies where Bloch argues that political bumper stickers are synecdoche for a larger discourse are intriguing, but in themselves bumper stickers are examples of advertising discourse as they are limited to the formal boundaries of advertising. Parodies can deface or even hijack a message, but do nothing about medium itself and actually through repetition they serve to legitimize it. While it is plausible that bumper stickers and car decorations are used by lower status groups to display messages that are not represented in conventional media and that higher status groups look down on bumper stickers as vulgar, the advertising boundaries still contain these messages, hence they are within advertising discourse and do not constitute a discourse of their own.

The final question of intent has already largely been answered. Szlemko et.al. conclude that self-expressed identity according to the content of the message made no difference in the incidence of aggressive driving and that display itself is the only indicator. While clusters indicate an interaction that generates new content, the clusters seem to indicate a genre in development, one where the original message itself may be forgotten. While Sculle and Jackle may express wonder and delight at the whirling world of moving signs with dynamic free play of signifiers, they are mistaking the map for the territory which is, despite its human construction is, on the territorial level No-man's-land. This cannot be separated from power dynamics either. The impossibility of conversation in the territory makes



communicative intent beyond warning implausible. The assertions of distinct ownership, decorations as territorial markers say more about the relationship between the driver to his or her car than it does about the relationship between the driver and other drivers who are unknown and unavailable. Pragmatically car decorations indicate to other driver's aggression and/or hostility.

If one were to put the sticker on a backpack or some other personal item that would be visible to others at school, the mall, or anywhere actual contact with people would be possible, then the display could have the effect as a conversation starter or topic. Of course then it ceases to be a sign but rather a possession, a thing, a commodity a person has cathected with meaning and other dynamics come into play to influence the conversation such as place, subway train, mall, gender, race and so on, none of which are present on the road.

The highways are the true “center” of the postmodern American city both in a geographical sense as well as a cultural sense. This postmodern city is organized to accommodate machines, i.e. automobiles, not people. The city has become a purpose-built environment itself not only in the architectural islands of shopping malls and office parks. The roads are the only place where everyone is present, in that it is a purely public space. However, no contact is really possible. As zones of control go, the highways are even more controlled than airports. The imperative of this control is “keep moving.” This imperative reinforces the atomization of society by making it extreme and for perhaps the majority of Americans who have no choice but to drive a car, it is mandatory. Contact on the road is to be avoided at all costs as contact – quite literally – is collision. Contact can only have negative outcomes in this public space. This mechanized public space has no properties of place, but rather eliminates place by collapsing space into time, i.e. the physical distance of a journey become an interval of time. Drivers seldom speak of journeys in distance terms like

miles, but in terms of time, hours and minutes. In this extreme manifestation of commodity structure, space is emptied of meaning to the point where it becomes time. The territory vanishes and is replaced by the map, the representation most commonly manifest in form only showing roads.

### 3.7 Colonization

This section examined the role of postmodern urban development and the effect of purpose-built environments on practice and thus identity. A major theme is the collapse of the urban-rural split, that is to say the extension of urban culture into previously isolated rural areas both through the physical expansion of conurbations by development and the effects of electronic media. Evangelical Christians, who had the strongest presence in rural, agricultural areas and had been able to tactically separate from urban culture found their territory overrun and their former way of life eradicated. The purpose-built environments, both in the vast road networks and in retail and office complexes replaced older, public or locally owned institutions. Purpose-built environments follow functional rationality, segmenting their use according to specific purposes. What an individual can do is dictated by the functional rationality of the purpose dedicated space, clerical work in an office park, travelling at an airport, and so on. Single use land use codes segregate functions by area, home, shopping and work may be located far beyond walking distance from each other.

Purpose-built environments such as shopping malls may function as social centers and even simulate public spaces, but their private ownership and intentional design seriously limits practice, mostly to shopping. As social fields, personal identity can only manifest itself in ways that do not disrupt the primary function of the purpose-built environment. This excludes private practices like singing, skateboarding, dancing, shouting, the use of vocabulary unacceptable to the middle class women who spend the most money in these malls, as well as public practices like picketing, witnessing (proselytizing), political campaigning, and demonstration. Expressions of identity are limited to display, that is fashion style, or advertisements printed on clothing such as T-shirts.

More directly the function of signs was also examined, particularly on public road ways both on the road and on the cars themselves. Bumper stickers as a mode of personal expression and communication was examined and rejected on the grounds that they are commodified bits of advertising discourse, that the rhetorical situation does not permit dialog between distinct interlocutors, and because of empirical research indicating a direct correlation between the number of bumper stickers on a car and incidence of aggressive driving. The latter argument suggests an intention of hostile territoriality to be the message of all car decorations placed on cars voluntarily.

Fragmentation of space according to function and the policing of that function seriously limit personal practices through which identity can manifest itself. The practices, and hence identities that can manifest themselves in these places are more or less uniform reflecting those of the dominant group. In the case of the shopping mall, this is what is acceptable to the middle class, mostly white, and predominantly female.

It is time to turn to commodity structure itself, the underlying logic to the machine city. Evangelical Christians in the past decades have not only been absorbed by this logic, been turned into “information” as in the Flannery O’Connor novel discussed in the introduction, but have done so with enthusiasm. This accommodation has removed much of the social stigma attached by former cultural elites to Evangelicals. However the commodification of Evangelical identity is removing that which made Evangelical culture distinct from urban, commercial culture. The otherness of Evangelical culture has always been something ambivalent. The turn away from “worldly” culture and the creation of separate cultural institutions has at the same time masked an indignant sense of being the true American culture, hence its evangelical mission to convert. Historically conversion was of individuals through the process of witnessing. The turn to the production of Christian branded cultural commodities is an attempt to convert American popular culture by

translating Evangelical Christianity into the language of popular culture and convert it through marketing. Some of these commodities have been very successful, but this success has had unintended consequences in the loss of the separate cultural institutions which had been built up over decades. In short accommodation is emptying Evangelical Christianity of its distinctive form of life.

## 4.0 Commodity Culture

This section discusses the evolution of cultural commodities in terms of religious aesthetics. Particularly important is the effect of commodification on the sacred and the sense of the sacred. Converting religion into commodities detaches religion and the sacred from its vertical reference mapping making religious commodities fungible with non-religious commodities. This flattening of the semantic field deprives religion of critical distance from “the world” converting it to a consumer identity that is politically impotent. Evangelical Christians have enthusiastically embraced religious commodities and the commodification of their identities. While this has partially been motivated by missionary zeal to win over the larger popular culture, the effect has been the rapid decline in the separatist cultural institutions and practices that have set Evangelical Christians apart from urban mass culture.

### 4.1 Fungibility

The Family Christian Stores website today is mostly taken up by a large, red sale advertisement reading: “3 Days only November 27-29 after Thanksgiving 3 Day sale \$5 and 50% off doorbusters doors open 7 a.m. Friday, November 27<sup>th</sup>,”<sup>54</sup> Family Christian Stores uses exactly the same language here as do other retailers at the opening of the Christmas shopping season, engaging the same Black Friday tactics of “cheap stuff at cheap prices”<sup>55</sup> that is the distinction of this annual stampede. Set in the generic suburban shopping centers and malls described in the previous chapter, Family Christian operates more than 300 stores “coast to coast” according to their marketing information. Entering one store is pretty much

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<sup>54</sup> Index page of Family Christian Stores accessed on 28 November 2009 <<http://www.familychristian.com/>>

<sup>55</sup> Daniel de Grandpre, the editor in chief of DealNews.com. Quoted in “Retailers Extend Deals Beyond Black Friday,” *The New York Times*, 25 November 2009.

<[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/business/26friday.html?\\_r=1&scp=5&sq=black%20friday&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/26/business/26friday.html?_r=1&scp=5&sq=black%20friday&st=cse)>

like entering any other, or any other corporate-owned book/gift shop such as Borders. The same table of sale items is in front of the door with the same sale markers. The division of commodities is similar as well, books, music, videos, kids, Bibles, apparel except that everything down to breath mints (Testamints!) is Christian branded.<sup>56</sup> Some of the items on sale are a bit peculiar, like TVGuardian<sup>57</sup>, an electronic gadget that automatically edits DVDs for offensive content, but this can also be purchased at Wal-Mart, the largest retailer in the United States.

The Christian bookstore is part of the separatist tradition that emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century from the tract societies such as the Moody Bible Institute in the 1890s. Small family owned shops sold Bibles and tracts, and other Christian merchandise, including books like Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*, published in 1970 sold more than 10 million copies through Christian bookshops and mail order only, making it the single bestselling book of the decade (Shuck 2005). Faced with competition from operations like Family Christian Stores and Lifeway, as well as Wal-Mart, Borders and other national secular book chains, and online retailers, the family owned Christian bookstore is in decline with little more than half their numbers now as in the 1980s<sup>58</sup>. Increasingly these independent specialty Christian retailers find their customers can buy the new best sellers like *The Purpose Driven Life* at mass market venues like Wal-Mart or supermarkets, along with pulp romances and Steven King thrillers. As successful as commodities like the *Left Behind* series of novels that sold some 65,000,000 copies, Christian bookshops cannot compete in a market that rewards

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<sup>56</sup> I visited two Family Christian retail shops and the similar Lifeway shops multiple times in July 2008 and July 2009.

<sup>57</sup> Advertising copy for TVGuardian: "Start Enjoying More TV Shows and Movies Today! TVGuardian® is a patented, award winning technology that automatically mutes out offensive language... while you're watching your favorite TV shows or DVDs. It's a proven tool for families with already nearly 12 Million TVG® Enabled DVD Players in homes. Start enjoying more of today's entertainment with your entire family today with TVG®." <

<https://tvguardian.com/dev/gshell.php?page=HOME&PHPSESSID=ba13a6cdb72040094133506a4b9e203a>>

<sup>58</sup> Source the Christian Booksellers' Association. Cited in "How to Save the Christian Bookstore" *Christianity Today*, d 4/11/2008 < <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/april/18.22.html>>

economies of scale. The owners of Wal-Mart do not care what they sell, provided that it does sell. It is already no challenge to go into a major chain like Borders and find Christian diet books in the diet section<sup>59</sup> next to diet books with New Age themes. It could be argued that the family-owned Christian bookshop was part of a different life-world. Cindy Crosby, the former owner of a defunct Christian bookshop in Bloomington, Indiana says the following about these shops:

“We read the books we sold and enjoyed hand-selling them to customers, many of whom we knew by first name and reading preferences. Serious reference volumes and niche books that met a felt need stayed on the shelf, sometimes collecting dust, waiting for the right pastor or customer to walk through the door. We talked with seekers, prayed with those who were hurting, did impromptu counseling, and hosted midnight music parties and pastors' breakfasts. Our staff members were encouraged to drop what they were doing if someone needed to talk. And we weren't alone” (Crosby 2008).

This loving description of service and sense of community, that they were doing more than selling books and other merchandise, is a lament that could be heard from practically any independent retailer who has gone out of business as a result of market consolidation by “big box” retailers in the last few decades. It's not just that the small shops were put out of business by bigger operations that are significant; it is that mainstream retailers have been the chief cause of this demise, selling Christian books and other Christian commodities in a shop that sells many other things. They are just a bit of a much larger general inventory. These books, while still commodities, played a role in a specific life world and were sold by people who cared and were knowledgeable about what they sold, something that is very rare in shop assistants at big box operations who rarely know much about what they sell. Stripped of its

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<sup>59</sup> Personal observation in suburban malls near Atlanta.



context, *Left Behind* is just another book amongst many that may have little to do with it. In a sense, the book has been alienated.

The emergence of Christian best sellers and the consequent effect it has had on small Evangelical bookstores is part and parcel of the extension of commodity structure on Evangelical culture, the very worldly effects on a religious culture that has traditionally separated itself from “the world.” Already Christian books and music, and to a lesser extent DVDs and video games, have worldly company, being just another choice among the disparate goods on offer. While the Christian bookstore is hardly a sacred place nor could books like *Left Behind* be considered sacred in the Durkheimian sense, most everything in the shop was considered “Christian” and the commodities were sold in a specific cultural context related to church, ministers, Bible study and so on. Now sharing shelf space with Daniel Steel and Stephen King scantily attended by clerks who probably know little about the commodities and very well may not come from the Evangelical milieu, what does this new context where these commodities find themselves do to the relationship of objects, of sacred and profane? Strictly from the commodity perspective, Christian cultural commodities have succumbed to the logic of value, where everything is fungible. Steven King’s supernatural thriller *Carrie* can be found in the immediate context of *The Purpose Driven Life* or *Left Behind*. From the standpoint of Wal-Mart, qualitative difference is trumped by quantification. Similarly from the consumer’s point of view, these commodities are just one among many choices in the hypermarket along with carrots, tampons, ammunition, GI Joe, and so on.

In Marx’s *Capital Vol. 1*, the triumph of exchange value for a commodity means, through the mechanism of money, that anything can be exchanged for anything else no matter what its use value. Marx defines use value as: “The utility of the thing makes it as a use-value...Use-values become a reality only by use or consumption” (Marx, *Capital Vol. 1*

1967, 36). Use value is *qualitative*, it is limited to the function of the object. Use values are not fungible in that a shovel is not useful for lace making, but are limited to digging. The second value that a commodity can have is *exchange value*. A shovel can be traded for say, ten kilos of potatoes, so one shovel in this scheme equals ten kilos of potatoes. Through the intercession of a third element, money, or a commodity that is pure exchange value, all commodities are fungible in the sense that they can be substituted through money into anything else.

In pre-Capitalist times, fungibility was not absolute. Frederic Jameson describes Aristotle's distinction between various types of work as incomparable. Artisanal labor was of a different category than agricultural labor and the distinction was the incompatibility of apples and origins. Jameson writes that, "It is only with the universal commodification of labor power, which Marx's *Capital* designates as the fundamental precondition of capitalism, that all forms of human labor can be separated out...and all universally arranged under the common denominator of the quantitative, that is, under the universal exchange value of money" (Jameson 1979, 131). So the commodification process works two ways, converting the product of labor into an exchangeable commodity with a monetary value but also converting labor itself, through wages into a quantifiable commodity at the same time.

Many argue that the dialectic between use value and exchange value vanishes or is corrupted with the advent of consumer capitalism. Use value is superseded by a secondary use value, that of the commodity sign (Featherstone 1991). In a situation of overabundance of consumer goods, such as clothing, actual use value in clothing, i.e. protection from the elements, staying warm etc., vanishes and differentiation such as fashion or branding, the sign value is what is consumed, not the actual clothing. Pierre Bourdieu's assignment of taste to displays of variable status within a society (Bourdieu 1984), only can function if there is mobility. Baudrillard amplifies this:

There is no fashion in societies of caste and rank; where social assignation is total, social mobility nil. In these societies, signs are shielded by a prohibition that assures their absolute clarity: each sign refers unequivocally to a (particular) situation and level of status (Baudrillard 1988 [1984], 136).

Fashion only becomes possible when this system begins to break down during the Renaissance in conjunction with the increase in trade and the emergence of urban centers. The purest form of the commodity sign is the corporate logo which is consumed on its own.

The logo has already been discussed as a floating signifier, a signifier with no referent. Baudrillard describes the situation of the modern sign as free of any determination, yet “dreaming” of reference, of some binding obligation to the real. The modern sign “produces only neutral values, those that exchange among each other in an equivalent world.” The “free and emancipated sign” can only produce equivalent signifieds, that is to say the values are fungible, one being just as good as the other (Baudrillard 1988 [1984], 136-137). The relationship between the signs is indifference, the semantic field is leveled no longer hierarchical. The ambiguous “code” which appears in so much of Baudrillard’s work, is a sort of teleonomy (as opposed to teleology), a negation of agency and history( *ibid* 140). Teleonomy is a term borrowed from evolutionary biology where purpose is inherent, all strategies oriented to the successful reproduction of the organism. The code is a permanent reification that reproduces itself through random substitution of signs. Capital is a “generic social code,” a random, idiot machine that can only reproduce itself, the fungibility of signs eliminating the possibility of reversal (*ibid* 141). Less dramatically, this is the critical distance problem inherent in reification, that there is no “outside” from which to launch a critique. The lack of an “objective” referent on which to ground a truth claim undermines the positive force of critique, and social theory becomes, in Adorno’s terms, “a melancholy science.” As discussed previously, postmodern culture has no margins. Capitalism has

effectively colonized and commodified the margins, thus enabling previously marginal culture to become fungible. In a totally reified society Lukacs' revolutionary concept that is dependent on marginality for its revolutionary effect, fades from view. Timothy Bewes argues that reification in this formulation and in these circumstances is obsolete as a politically useful tool. "Its implications...are politically paralyzing rather than rousing or catalytic" (Bewes 2002, 9).

Looking at Evangelical cultural commodities under the lens of globalization makes a great deal of sense. The poor rural communities where Evangelical Christianity predominated serve as an inner Third World of sorts, the economic changes brought on by the expansion of global capital are no less world shaking to Dayton, Tennessee where the Scopes trial occurred than in Nigeria or Egypt. David Harvey argues that there was a qualitative change in capitalist accumulation regime in the early 1970s. Stability to the economic system in the U.S. did not return until 1982. The new capital accumulation regime, flexible accumulation, was markedly different from the previous regime, Fordism. David Harvey defines flexible accumulation thus:

It rests on flexibility with respect to labor processes, labor markets, products, and patterns of consumption. It is characterized by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and above all, *greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation* [emphasis added](Harvey 1993:147).

While rapid change was a characteristic of modernity noted as early as 1848 by Marx in the much quoted, "all that is solid melts into air," the pace of change accelerates under postmodernity to the point where it is clear to no one what is going on. Talk of a "post-industrial" society is misguided according to Harvey as organizational innovations separate in

space production from consumption, e.g. low-paid Chinese workers make the televisions that Americans watch.

The breakup of Fordism resulted in fragmentation of economic life, the end of workplace stability, and rapid disintegration of organized labor as a political force. This process was parallel with cultural fragmentation that had begun in the 1960s. Harvey believes there is a necessary relation between the two: "...there is some kind of necessary relation between the rise of postmodernist cultural forms, the emergence of more flexible modes organization of capitalism." (Harvey 1993).

Glocalization is a term used to describe the simultaneity of globalizing and localizing processes. Roland Robertson uses the term against simplistic theories of globalization showing how global forms like McDonald's or Disneyland are given local content, showing the persistence of local culture. But the very adoption of these forms commodifies local culture making it fungible. Anthropologist Gregory Starrett finds that the ubiquity of mass produced religious commodities in Cairo has qualitatively changed Egyptians' relationship to the sacred. "Egyptians are coming to perceive such objects as integrated horizontally in networks of signification containing other commodities, rather than vertically through society in a generally set and recognizable system of hierarchical purity relationships" (Starrett 1995, 64). In Cairo shops the sacred word of Allah can be found on all manner of profane commodities such as key chains, vinyl stickers, clocks<sup>60</sup>, plates and so on, displayed in general shops among common goods, and more frequently made in non-Islamic countries like Taiwan.

Another study of religious glocalization is Asonzeh Ukah's examination of Christian video films in Nigeria. A recent import from the United States, Pentacostalism has grown rapidly in Nigeria at the expense of older mission churches. Nigerian video-films use

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<sup>60</sup> In Dubai I found an alarm clock that played the *ezen* or call to prayer.

American Pentacostal videos as the starting point, but syncretically code it with Nigerian occult narratives of witchcraft and evil spirits in ways American Pentacostals would find alarming. This bizarre hybrid “accepts the occultic as truly real, reinforces fear and anxiety among the youth who may begin to imagine themselves as afflicted by such problems” (Ukah 2003, 216). Ukah argues that Nigerian Pentacostals recast native religion as the internal “Other,” the films serving as advertisements for Pentacostal services such as vigils, deliverance, sanctification, that can combat this demonic underworld (ibid 221). Further Pentacostal entrepreneurs have borrowed the idea of “prosperity Gospel,” a notorious American Evangelical fragment that preaches that God provides material prosperity for those he favors.<sup>61</sup> Thousands of these video-films are produced each year and are phenomenally popular. Like in Cairo, the relationship to the sacred is changed by the commodity form.

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<sup>61</sup> Joel Osteen is currently the best known prosperity Gospel preacher in the United States. His Houston church, Lakewood Church, has a membership of over 40,000 and a vast media empire.

## 4.2 The Christian Aesthetic

“A commodity,” wrote Karl Marx in *Capital*, “is a mysterious thing, simply because in it the social character of men’s labor appears to them as an objective character stamped upon the product of that labor” (Marx, *Capital* Vol. 1 1967, 71). The product of labor becomes a commodity when the social relations that produced the product, are misperceived to be a relation between things. Marx’s definition of a commodity differs from the commonplace definition of standardized, tradable goods, in that the origins of a commodity are masked, *fetishized*, most importantly the social relations that resulted in the production of the commodity are obscured and become objects themselves. The appearance of a commodity in the market is magical in the sense of an illusion or conjurer’s trick. The consumer’s relation to those people who made the commodity are obscure, often impossible to learn. In other words, the commodity’s story is inaccessible to the consumer who can only evaluate the use value of the commodity by its appearance or, more commonly, by the pitches of the sellers. For Lukacs, the commodification was the “central, structural problem of capitalism in all its aspects” (Lukacs [1921] 1971, 83). Commodification is the basis for all reification. One important reification is the conversion of time into space, quantified and divided, and to be arranged as part of the production process. This time-as-space removes the quality of time and historical sense.

In medieval Europe, the physical distance between producer and consumer was usually very close, if not immediate. The vast majority of people were subsistence farmers or serfs, and the tiny amount of long distance trade there was consisted of exotic luxury goods. If they were not the same person, it was highly likely that producer and consumer knew each

other, so the social relations of production were transparent. As far as cultural commodities were concerned, there were practically none. High value symbolic goods tended to be either unique, as in the case of the relic, or immovable as in the Abbey Church of St. Denis. These were not things that could be easily traded, and unless one was a member of the tiny wealthy elite, they could not be consumed at home. It's important to note that participation in religious practice was very limited with the peasants and serfs often excluded from churches and ceremonies, or allowed to participate only on particular holidays (Duby 1983). The practice of official religion was restricted to elites. The lower castes had no particular place in it, generally speaking. Religious festivals were widely observed by all, but most enthusiastically by the lesser orders in small islands of overindulgence and laughter, the medieval inversion of hierarchy that was the carnivalesque.

It may seem a stretch to move from a suburban strip mall or big box outlet like Wal-Mart to medieval aesthetics, but this move leads to a very concrete discussion of religious objects attached to a hierarchy of values opposed to religious commodities whose value is fungible. Most interesting is the mode of representation – mimesis – and the single story that bore multiple – and diverse – representations. While the medieval world was pretty bare as far as a sense of aesthetic is concerned, art was produced, often of great beauty and profound message, even if it was the same one repeated over and over. Repetition had a purpose, as did everything else. Earthly art mimed eternal divine reality, the telos of history and life on Earth. Medieval mimesis was also characterized by depictions of the grotesque. Mimesis should not be confused with the “realism” of the photograph. It included deliberate distortions of “reality” in order to show it as reality. This included monstrous distortions, frightening (or hilarious) depictions of torture and suffering, as well as the transcendent beauty of the divine.



The most stunning representation of this symbolic economy of Salvation is *The Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri. For Erich Auerbach<sup>62</sup>, *The Divine Comedy* is the highest example of “Christian style,” what he describes as “figural realism” (Auerbach 2003, 196). The technique of figuration is an expression of apocalyptic time, a peculiarly Christian technique where present events are “prefigured” by events or prophesy in the past and thus fulfill them. The figure thus has two elements, but their relation is not one of cause and effect. They do not follow each other, but are part of the same event. Apocalyptic time is a paradox, with human time parallel to God’s eternity. The connections between the events of the figure are vertical, not horizontal. Auerbach contends that this style was the result of early Church fathers, such as Augustine of Hippo, who reconciled the New Testament with the Old, using the Old Testament as a “universal history” where events in the Old Testament prefigure events in the New (Auerbach 2003, 16). This process started as early as *The Book of Acts*. The telos of this Christian style is the divine plan for salvation, and all events are part of the unfolding of historical forces that lead to that end, hence a single interpretation and a single plot structured around The Fall, The Passion, and the Last Judgment (Auerbach 2003, 160). This had a comic counterpart in the form of parody and travesty of exactly the same narrative world that mocked all the seriousness of the “official” medieval depiction of reality (M. Bakhtin 1968). Bakhtin dates the earliest known grotesque parody of this narrative, “Cyprian’s Supper,” to the fifth or sixth centuries, at the very beginning of the medieval period.

The realism of *The Divine Comedy* is due to the vitality and vivid mimetic representations of people in the eternal realms, characters often based on people Dante actually knew. The figural quality is in its portrayal of God’s design in active fulfillment.

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<sup>62</sup> . Citing Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* specifically is difficult as his book is a work of cycles and repetition where ideas and concepts are further elaborated progressively. I have striven to faithfully represent his ideas, even if to complete them requires a synthesis of statements scattered throughout the book.

“The unified order of the beyond, as Dante presents it to us, can be most immediately grasped as a moral system in its distribution of souls among the three realms and their subdivisions” (Auerbach 2003, 190). In Dante’s work the vertical connections between human experience and eternity are rendered transparent through the narrative technique where Dante and Virgil (agents possessing freedom, still bound by time) travel through an eternal landscape whose inhabitants exhibit a “changeless existence,” boiled down to the essence of their being. It is an enactment of the Scholastic theology of Aquinas, portraying the correspondence of contingent reality to absolute reality. Although Virgil and Dante move through space, they do not progress from the past to the future in the process. Words such as “earlier” and “later” have no meaning in Dante’s world. M.M. Bakhtin writes of this particular chronotope, “The temporal logic of this vertical world consists in the sheer simultaneity of all that occurs (or “the coexistence of everything in eternity”) (Bakhtin 81, 157).

Mimetic representation of divine reality (Auerbach’s term, “a picture of the universe”) was not limited to literature. The great cathedrals of France<sup>63</sup> from the high middle ages buildings designed by theologians such as Abbot Suger of St. Denis to embody divine truth. Suger’s luminous theology was based on the single precept: God is light. According to medieval historian Georges Duby, “God was absolute light...This concept held the key to the new art – an art of light, clarity, and dazzling radiance” (Duby 1983, 100). In the renovation of the Abbey church of St. Denis, Suger demanded that the master builders make full use of the ribbed vault, particularly in the area of the choir which was the culminating point of liturgical processions at the eastern end of the church, toward the rising sun as all Gothic churches were oriented. The ribbed vault allowed more windows to be built, particularly in the clerestory of the nave, providing illumination from above and drawing the worshippers’ attention heavenward. The brilliant, open space of the church represented the oneness of

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<sup>63</sup> Medieval church architecture also had grotesque, comic, even obscene elements in its sculpture.

creation and the unification of all creatures in God's light. It was a monistic theology enacted through architecture, the evangelical mission of the building inscribed in Suger's words on the doors, "The dull mind, through material things, rises to truth. And, from its former submission by seeing the light, is resurrected"<sup>64</sup> (Auerbach 2003, 156).

The vertical element in this mode of representation, and the mapping of the horizontal, material world to it, is quite the opposite of the strictly horizontal postmodern aesthetics. Medieval art was imbued with meaning through figural realism that anchored contingent reality to truth. Bakhtin, writing about Rabelais use of medieval laughter through grotesque realism describes at length how this aesthetic is consistently misinterpreted as a result of a lost "ideological key" of "ambivalent laughter" that gives Rabelais grotesque imagery meaning (M. Bakhtin 1968). Lacking this key that was part of everyday reality to medieval people, visual representations can appear primitive, or child like to contemporary aesthetics based on subject perspective, and grotesque texts read as dominating, obscene or satirical.

In order to raise funds for the very expensive business of Crusading, noblemen mortgaged their estates. As there was nothing like a banking system in the late eleventh century, the chief sources of ready money were the monasteries (Tyerman 2006) (Ashbridge 2004). Not only did this radically increase the wealth of monastic orders such as that of Cluny, it also vastly increased the supply of money in circulation, and significantly contributed to the monetization of the economy. Franciscan monks such as John Duns Scotus (ca. 1270 – 1308) wrote the first economics treatises and also functioned as regulators of the novel institution of credit (Wharton 2006). The monasteries were first to benefit from the flood of wealth, and they used it for extravagant symbolic products.

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<sup>64</sup> Mens hebes ad verum per materialia surgit, Et demersa prius hac visa luce resurgit.

The Cluniac abbey basilica, unlike Suger's cathedrals, did not mimetically represent the divine order spatially, but temporally. Flush with pious donations and disdain for scholasticism, Cluny created churches whose purpose was for liturgical performance. The dualistic theology focused on the last judgment, and its sumptuous ornamentation was to signify the resurrection of the dead at the end of time (Duby 1983, 66). But far more important than what the basilica looked like, was what was done in it. According to Duby, the gorgeous churches were no more than an envelope for the splendid liturgy performed within; rich with music and vestments, these performances were calibrated to the church calendar. "They [the liturgical performances] developed throughout the year, like a sort of very slow ballet whose role was to mime human destiny and the progression of time, from the Creation to Judgment Day" (Duby 1983, 71). These performances of the divine calendar, acting out Biblical stories like Moses leading the Hebrews to the Promised Land in cycles culminating on holy days such as Easter, were identical in plot to the Fall-Passion-Last Judgment sequence acted out in profane medieval morality plays, except in the case of Cluny, these performances took place in a cloister without audience, walled off from the corrupt and corrupting world. Inside these walls, the monks enacted and became one with the cosmic time of the eternal. In other words, a Cluniac abbey in the late eleventh century was an aesthetic mime of the divine realms, or heaven.

In the three examples of medieval representation presented here, only a single interpretation is possible. While the representations are varied, they all refer to the same thing. This is the case for most medieval art that is not explicitly comedy (Auerbach 2003). For Roland Barthes, the mythical concept had an unlimited number of signifiers at its disposal; the abundance of forms corresponds to a small number of concepts (Barthes 1972, 120). The eschatological plot mostly exhausts medieval Christian representation, emptying out the future, the stretch of time between the present and the End, as lacking in value

(Bakhtin 1981, 148). Time was not yet money. The future was not organized. The representations of reality of the period, presented images of hope, but these images were not of this world. In a rather crude sense, medieval art functioned as a sort of advertisement for the salvation products sold by the purgatory industry.

It's is difficult to estimate how much economic activity was oriented to the economy of salvation. By the time of the Reformation, the trade in symbolic goods was so pronounced, particularly in the Northern European countries, that a substantial portion of people's wealth and the economy in general was devoted to it. Most infamous of these symbolic goods was the trade in indulgences. Beyond their heretical nature, Martin Luther in his 95 Theses had practical objections to the sale of indulgences. In thesis 45 he objects that money spent on indulgences could be better spent on charity for those in need, and in thesis 46 he says people squander their money on indulgences which would be better spent looking after their families (cited in Wharton). Reformation historian Diarmaid MacCulloch calls this the "purgatory industry."

The purgatory industry was the monetization of scholastic theology and the doctrine of merit, i.e. salvation through works. Not only could an individual purchase an indulgence for himself or someone else, he could pray for the dead. Better yet, he could hire someone to do this for him. This medieval example of outsourcing good works, manifested itself in precise calculations of years off in Purgatory for Masses performed in the name of the penitent, living or dead. Institutions, known as chantries, were dedicated to paid-for prayers for the dead. Some of the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge Universities were originally established as chantries (MacCulloch 2003, 10-15). Sin and merit worked as a system of Divine debits and credits in one's salvation account. This is explicitly set out by Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica* where he explained indulgences in terms of double-entry bookkeeping (Wharton 2006, 140-141) The church held a monopoly on a supply, salvation,

in the face of an inelastic demand for it. The church created various “salvation products,” indulgences of various terms, masses for the dead, indulgences for poverty relief and so on according to a sliding scale based on elaborate tables of social classes. Sin was graded according to severity in other detailed tables (Ekelund Jr., Hébert and Tollison 2002). MacCulloch stresses that this industry was most established in Northern Europe, where the Protestant Reformation was the strongest and most effective.

The Reformation was revolutionary, and created a new aesthetic ordering of things. Physical objects lost their sacred status as did plastic arts in general. The new hierarchy of meaning and authority was in the written text establishing a hierarchy of ideas and concepts, eliminating or setting the groundwork for the elimination of animated objects. Moreover what had come before in Christianity lost its authority. The history of Christianity, from which Christianity had developed into its late medieval form, was disallowed. Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli denied this history any importance as it was the work of men, erasing the past back to antiquity validating early Christianity and the Bible as the sole authority. The disjunction created a mythic, absolute past of early Christians, who knew the true Christianity, while at the same time dismissed the time between antiquity and the present as error and heresy, irrelevant. Humanism and the dispersion of ancient text of the Romans and Greeks also blotted out medieval thought and history as a barbaric intrusion into the Classic Western aesthetic. The Renaissance and Reformation were part of this same process of creating a new world.

It’s also during this time, particularly in Reformed circles, that post-millennial views of the Apocalypse gain traction. The future, far from being empty of value as in the medieval chronotope that Bakhtin describes, is full of meaning. For most postmillennialists the forces of darkness and sin will be steadily pushed back through the expansion of the Kingdom of God on Earth, a process predestined by Divine Providence and executed by Godly Christians.

Here is the kernel of “progress” ideology, that through human agency the world can be transformed and a state of perfection achieved. For postmillennialists, the Second Coming will occur when this perfection is achieved. Hence the medieval narrative is unhinged, and worldly events take on divine significance not by mapping to the vertical axis of Eternity as in figural realism, but rather as horizontal progress toward the redemption of the world at the end of history.

One of the most notable immediate effects was an assault on religious images, church art, even tombstones that often took the form of wanton vandalism. While John Calvin did not at all approve of mob actions, he took a dim view of images, religious or otherwise suspecting them to be examples of idolatry.

We believe it wrong that God should be represented by a visible appearance, because he himself has forbidden it [Exodus 20:4] and it cannot be done without some defacing of his glory (*Institutes* 1.11.12).

Not only did the representation of God, Jesus, and the saints deface the hidden god, the reverence attached to the representations, particularly the common popular belief that certain images had magical powers to cure problems such as infertility, or diseases, was idolatry plain and simple. God could only be approached through the Word, not image or rather that the spiritual realm cannot be approached through the mediation of the material world, as assumed in Catholic sacramental theology and piety, for infinitude cannot be conveyed by anything finite. Calvin also rather infamously sought to suppress frivolity in Geneva including card games, dancing, as well as the visual arts, although his success was limited resulting from his lack of control of the Geneva government. Calvin asserted that any art that existed for its own sake or enjoyment was inspired by the Devil and was sinful (Spelman 1948, 247). In Calvin’s Geneva, the only art permitted in churches was music, preferably the singing of the Psalms (Spelman 1948, 249).

Reformation iconoclastic destruction and hostility to things like figures of the Virgin Mary, and religious art in general, was accompanied by the purging of another category, perhaps a more fundamental category of objects once treasured. These were relics, a category of object that bears scrutiny as relics are a sort of anti-commodity. A relic is by definition unique, no matter how common its materiality. It's aura of authenticity extends beyond it being a piece of the real to having magical properties. A relic cannot be reproduced, and as a symbol, it has no referent as it is identical to its referent. A fragment of the True Cross does not stand for the True Cross – it is the True Cross. Art historian Annabel Jane Wharton provides a comprehensive definition of a relic:

A relic is a remnant of a history that is threatened by forgetting. It records duration and postpones oblivion. It offers reassurance that the past retains its authority. It collapses time. A relic is a sign of previous power, real or imagined. It promises to put that power back to work. A relic is a fragment that evokes a lost fullness. It is a part that allows the embrace of the absent whole. It is the living piece of the dead object. It is an intensely material sign entangled in a spiritual significance. A relic avoids intrinsically valuable materials. It works in part through the uniqueness of its survival (Wharton 2006, 9-10).

The evocative power of a relic, in addition to its perceived magical powers, can be potent. Contemporary chronicles and letters written during and after the First Crusade credit the discovery of the Holy Lance in June 1098 as the decisive factor in the desperate sortie to relieve the siege of recently captured Antioch. According to these sources, the discovery of the Holy Lance<sup>65</sup> and its presence in the battle reinforced the morale of the greatly

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<sup>65</sup> Historian Thomas Ashbridge is suspicious of the effect of the discovery of the Holy Lance on the successful attack on Sultan Kerboga's besieging army pointing out that two weeks separated the discovery from the attack and that during that time different tactics for relieving the siege were attempted. Ashbridge argues that the sortie was an act of desperation, even though the religious devotion and the presence of the relic were instrumental in holding together the morale of the Crusader army. This doesn't detract from the symbolic potency of the relic as in their own accounts; the Crusaders ascribe their victory to the relic.



outnumbered, half-starved Crusaders. Contemporary commentary said it had a even had a paralytic effect on the enemy commander (Ashbridge 2004, 221-240).

The Holy Lance was a bit of base metal, not intrinsically valuable as according to Wharton's definition. The power of the object, its value, came from its authenticity. Any use of the term "aura" in describing objects requires reference to Walter Benjamin. "The authenticity of a thing is the essence of all that is transmissible from its beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced" (Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writing on Media* 2008). This essence, in Benjaminian terms is "aura." The aura of a relic is the actual presence of the divine. The presence of God meant that relics could heal the sick, render barren women fertile, assure a good harvest, and even raise the dead. This is a form of sympathetic magic where "things that have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other from a distance after the physical contact has been severed" (Frazer 1993). Some of the most important plunder from the Crusades was relics, in particular the trove of relics removed after the sack of Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade in 1204. These relics were distributed over Western Europe where their instantiation in churches and shrines inspired passionate pilgrimages, medieval travel and tourism. The first travel writings were accounts of pilgrimages, and the first travel agents, the mendicant order of St. Francis (Wharton 2006). The power of the aura was so credible and so commonplace that ecclesiastical courts often sentenced felons to pilgrimages to important shrines as punishment for crimes as significant as murder (Ure 2006).

In their reforming zeal, these treasured material pieces of history, revered and lovingly maintained for centuries were unceremoniously destroyed, sometimes dumped in rivers. The historical past held little interest to the Reformed, and dumping relics also dumped the millennium of darkness and error that separated them from the ancient, absolute

past they wanted to fulfill in the present and future. Even the term “Gothic” for late medieval art and architecture implied the barbarism of the Goths who overthrew the Western Roman Empire. Medieval culture had little interest to the new men, sort of a shameful history of blasphemy, error and bad taste.

### 4.3 Idolatry and Simulation

*Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of **any thing**, that is in heaven above, or that **is**, in the earth beneath, or that **is** in the water under the earth.* (Exodus 20:4 King James (AV) translation) Emphasis in original.

So reads the Second Commandment – unless one is Catholic. The Latin Vulgate Bible ran the First and Second Commandments together, and the new Protestant Bible translators discovered this error, and used it as Scriptural justification for iconoclasm (MacCulloch 2003, 145-146). Byzantine Christianity was riven by the iconoclastic controversy in the eighth and ninth centuries, so exactly what idolatry is has been in dispute since ancient times, even though it has been of fundamental importance since Rome became a Christian empire. The most significant church father, Saint Augustine of Hippo, relates idolatry to something more fundamental than visual representation: it living according to man, not according to the spirit, the source of all sin (Augustine 1958). Idolatry is pride in man's creations over those of God. It is the source of original sin, and the source of all sin. "All who find their joy in truth and not in mere shadows derive their happiness from Him" (Augustine 1958, 111).

Augustine was heavily influenced by Plato, and the quotation refers to the Allegory of the Cave where people confuse appearance with reality. The works of man in the shadow world cannot replace the works of God.

Theologian Steven Grimwood argues that critics of postmodern consumer culture such as Jean Baudrillard and Frederic Jameson make accusations against the proliferation of images that are very like accusations of idolatry (Grimwood 2003). In Baudrillard's case this is clear as he makes an argument that bears a strong similarity to Augustine's where sin is a result of substituting man's creation for God's, only in Baudrillard's case it is simulations

that have been substituted for reality. In *Symbolic Exchange and Death* Jean Baudrillard elaborates on hyperreality where aesthetic representations substitute for reality in a self-perpetuating simulation that has no referent outside itself. Yet, some things are exempt. “There once existed a specific class of objects that were allegorical, and even a bit diabolical, such as mirrors, images, works of art (and concepts?); of course these too were simulacra, but they were transparent and manifest...In these objects, pleasure consisted more in discovering something “natural” in what was artificial and counterfeit (Baudrillard 1988 [1984], 146). The suggestion here is that these objects could somehow refer the viewing/reading subject to something outside itself, something *not made*.

As discussed above, Calvin insisted visual art had no place in Christianity whatsoever and was hostile to visual art in general. But a narrow reading of the prohibition of images as only visual representation is ahistorical, and I would venture that common American notions of idolatry have more to do with Cecil B. DeMille’s 1956 film *The Ten Commandments* than they do with scripture or theology, that is to say worshiping statues of the Golden Calf. The ancient language words translated as “image” is better understood as “likeness,” or “similarity” which is a “...resolutely non- or even antipictorial notion” (Mitchell 1984, 521). It’s not an image’s visual appearance that makes it idolatrous: a visual image (or icon) becomes idolatrous when it arrests the viewer’s gaze, determining its interpretation rather than leading the viewer beyond it. Grimwood, citing Jean-Luc Marion, describes the difference between icon and idol thus: “The icon is that which allows the gaze to pass through it, beyond it; the idol is that which stops the gaze, satisfies it, and ultimately, turns it back on the viewer in the manner of a mirror” (Grimwood 2003, 77). Suger’s Abbey Church of St. Denis was such an “iconic” space, built to foster contemplation of the light above, not the building itself.

It would be difficult to conceive that visitors to St. Denis today would experience the “beyond” in the way 13<sup>th</sup> Century French Christians would. Not to say that St. Denis hasn’t been commodified. As a popular tourist attraction, most visitors do not come for religious purposes, and will have no understanding of the building’s aesthetic or message. Visits are often arranged as part of packaged tours with guides who provide the tourists with a stock interpretation. In short visits, tourists will take photographs, and if they lack a camera, a plethora of images and other commodities with St. Denis themes are available from the gift shop. Using Wittgenstein’s suggestion that words and material images are in the same category, Mitchell argues that “pictures” also reside in language, “...are no more natural, automatic, or necessary than any other sorts of images we produce...” (Mitchell 1984, 531). What is seen is not determined by the eye but rather to the “language” of the viewer, the ideological map that assigns meaning to the “picture.”

The adoption of linear perspective as the general aesthetic of Western visual arts during the Renaissance drastically alters architecture and visual representation. This new perspective is subject centered built around the seeing capacity of the human eye. In architecture optical illusions are built into building to extend or foreshorten depth and make objects appear to be at different distances than they actually are. In painting, images are painted as they would appear to the view, and depicted objects are represented according to linear perspective emanating from the subject’s eye. This is a radically different aesthetic from those of medieval art, clearly putting the viewer outside the picture as a spectator. This new realism in representation is much different than the sorts of mimetic realism Auerbach describes in *Mimesis*. This is realism of what can be seen by the eye. The invention of photography hypostatizes linear perspective, freezing reality. Cameras can “see” differently than the eye. Fast shutter speeds in thousandths of a second are commonly used in sports photography freeze motion into an inhuman image, i.e. inhuman in that humans can only see

it through the mediation of a machine. This imbues fractions of seconds with reality and meaning. Photographs thus have strong truth claims, even though their aesthetic is the ideology of linear perspective, the subject as spectator. A photograph is no more natural an image as are 9<sup>th</sup> Century Byzantine icons.

So what of contemporary religious commodities in the United States? The Baylor survey on American Piety in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century found 44.3% of Americans had seen Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (The Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion 2006, 20). A.O. Scott for *The New York Times* panned the film as a failure, "'The Passion of the Christ' is so relentlessly focused on the savagery of Jesus' final hours that this film seems to arise less from love than from wrath, and to succeed more in assaulting the spirit than in uplifting it" (Scott 2004). Despite the near universal negative reviews in the mainstream press, nearly half the population viewed the film despite its "R"<sup>66</sup> rating, earning Gibson \$370 million on an investment of \$20 million. Gibson's dedication to realism included dialogue in Latin and Aramaic, languages dead or nearly dead requiring subtitles for all. Santana and Erickson argue that this linguistic maneuver "...Gibson interposes his film between the actual events and the gospel texts he claims to be following; that is, this depiction attempts to recuperate original text which, of course, does not exist. The film becomes a linguistic simulacrum attempting to mix the Gospels' authority with the primacy of the spoken language" (Santana and Erickson 2008, 99).

As films go, *The Passion* has little to offer to anyone familiar with the story. There is nothing to interpret or imagine. It is pure spectacle, an example of myth in Barthes' sense of a mode of signification, an example of the "falsely obvious." Gibson's dedication to "realism" is actually hyperreal, in short, idolatrous. Yet American Christian leaders

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<sup>66</sup> In the U.S. film rating system, R is Restricted, only to be viewed by those 17 years of age and above. Evangelical Christian's media attitudes usually are strongly against R rated films, particularly those with sex and graphic violence.

applauded the film. Saddleback Church pastor and author of the best-selling, *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren said, “Honestly, I can't imagine any pastor being ashamed or reluctant to use a film about the Cross. In a culture where visual imagery is the main language for many, it is the perfect post-modern evangelistic tool. It doesn't preach; it just tells the story in an unsanitized and authentic way” (Warren 2004). “Authentic” here appears to be faithful to the ideology of linear perspective and the graphic depiction of violence as humans would see violence. Unlike the grotesque medieval depictions of violence, this graphic violence has no meaning at all. It appears immediate, as real, and its authenticity is based on the filmic illusion of immediacy. Grotesque realism is clearly not immediate, but rather is an obvious medium to lead the viewer to think of something else. It graphic violence of *The Passion* is pure spectacle.

*The Passion* is mimetic, but not in Auerbach's sense of representing “fulfilled” reality, but a sort of graphic realism that has more in common with hardcore pornography than with *The Divine Comedy*. Santana and Erickson describe pornographic mimesis as “... a one-to-one relationship between that which is desired and that which is perceived” (Santana and Erickson 2008, 53). This representation claims to be unmediated, identical to what is being represented. It insists on being literally true, not open to interpretation as being anything other than what it is. The film is an excellent example of the parallel between Baudrillard's hyperreality and idolatry. The more real it appears the less real it can be.

#### 4.4 Mass Production

It is unlikely that the Reformation attack on images was directly connected to the emergence of mass, mechanically reproduced commodities, yet without printing and publishing the Reformation and the consequent debunking of relics and other magical objects would not have occurred. The Guttenberg Bible was the first mass produced commodity ever. While most of the discussion of the development of moveable type printing focuses on the undeniably revolutionary expansion of literacy and communications, and its effects in standardizing written language, and creating national languages, and so on, what is seldom discussed is the revolutionary effects produced by the consumption of mass produced commodities as commodities rather than specific commodities like books.

The explosion of publishing led to the advent of what Marshall McLuhan termed, “Typographic Man,” and marked the end of the single medieval Christian eschatological narrative. “Print exists by virtue of the static separation of functions and fosters a mentality that gradually resists any but a separative and compartmentalizing or specialist outlook” (McLuhan 1962, 126). McLuhan’s great insight is the famous dictum: The medium is the message, meaning that any technological “extension of man,” has personal and social consequences (McLuhan 1964, 15).<sup>67</sup> In the previous chapter on American cities, we showed the message of a new medium, the automobile. This is exactly what McLuhan means. Each technological extension of man changes social relations in ways that are unforeseeable.

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<sup>67</sup> While often brilliantly insightful, McLuhan was wildly enthusiastic (and spectacularly naive) about the potential for new electronic communications technologies that could heal the rift opened by print. “Our specialist and fragmented civilization of center-margin structure is suddenly experiencing an instantaneous reassembling of all its mechanized bits into an organic whole. This is the new world of the global village (McLuhan, *Understanding Media* 1964, 102) .



According to McLuhan, print media breaks up the social corporate image (fragmentation) and leads to a prioritizing of sequence, the linear thinking of cause and effect. At the same time it leads to uniformity. The standardization of language following the Reformation has already been noted, and while print did make it much easier for changes in one place to be transferred over distance, the proliferation of texts ended the single narrative first through the republishing of the classic writers of antiquity, but this was rapidly overtaken by new writers. The contradiction of fragmentation and uniformity is resolved by the standardization of the commodified form of mass produced texts, whatever their content. The bestselling author of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century was Martin Luther whose works sold an estimated 300,000 copies (MacCulloch 2003). The dual nature of the Guttenberg revolution, the expansion of literacy through mechanical means, is central to McLuhan's argument. It simultaneously brought diversity and uniformity.

Introducing mass reproduction of cultural commodities forces a return to the issue of *authenticity* mentioned in connection to the relic. "Authentic" is an extremely contentious term being as it is intrinsically tied to true and real, opposed to fraudulent or fake. According to Jean Baudrillard, the demand for authenticity "...is reflected in an obsession with certainty – specifically, certainty as to the origin, date, author, and signature of the work" (Baudrillard 2005, 81). The authenticity of the relic comes from its material reality as a piece of history, a physical fragment testifying to the certainty of the past. The authenticity of a cathedral comes from its immobility: it is intrinsically part of its physical location. The English word "real" is derived from the French describing, fixed, immovable things. The more moveable a work of art becomes, the less "real" it is (Pirarbureau 2007). The act of reproducing symbolic goods (works of art) strips it of its aura of authenticity, the consumer no longer experiences the work of art in its establishing context, such as the concert hall, the nave of St. Denis, or the manuscript.

“technical reproduction can put the copy of the original into situations which would be out of reach for the original itself. Above all, it enables the original to meet the beholder halfway, be it in the form of a photograph or a phonograph record. The cathedral leaves its locale to be received in the studio of a lover of art; the choral production, performed in an auditorium or in the open air, resounds in the drawing room” (Benjamin 2008).

The Guttenberg Bible, combined with the consequent rise in literacy, made religion mobile, no longer tied to locations. A literate person had access to the Holy Word anywhere he (or she<sup>68</sup>) happened to be, and the easy portability of books made them ideal trade commodities considering the incredibly primitive communications of 15<sup>th</sup> Century Europe. Printing, in McLuhan’s terms, made the world smaller by increasing the speed by which ideas and information could be transmitted, enabling a movement like the Reformation to gather steam and adherents with relatively few missionaries. Particularly In Germany and in the Reformed tradition, it also led to a decentralization of doctrine with rival confessions and catechism multiplying as each city or principality read the books and decided on their own versions. Mark C. Taylor argues that this aspect of the Reformation is what actually begins modernity, and the Reformation never ended but is as yet continuing (M. C. Taylor 2007).

The Guttenberg Bible was the first cultural commodity as well as the first mass produced commodity. That is was also the first *religious* commodity, indicates the primary role of religion in Western culture at the time. Cultural commodities have solely symbolic use values. Beyond their language content, books (much less mp3 files) have little use as physical objects. Theologian Vincent Jude Miller defines cultural commodities as similar to literal products by being “...characterized by abstraction and reification; they are abstracted from their conditions of production, presented as objects valuable in themselves, shorn of

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<sup>68</sup> Female literacy also rose as a result, building on St. Paul’s discovery that women had souls.

their interrelations with the other symbols, beliefs, and practices that determine their meaning and function in their traditional contexts” (V. J. Miller 2003, 72). Frederic Jameson differentiates the consumption of cultural commodities from an aesthetic experience by positing that they succumb to utilitarian logic, no longer an activity with intrinsic satisfactions. Jameson gives as an example genre fiction like detective stories which is read for its ending, the solution (Jameson 1979, 131-132). This idea of consumption can easily be applied to hackneyed, formulaic Hollywood film genre, like romantic comedy, the basic plot of which was set down by William Shakespeare. One of the consequences cultural commodity fetishism is *recursion*: the commodities begin to create their own context through mass consumption. This can be easily seen in science fiction where a popular film or TV show, such as *Star Trek*, creates a very detailed, and entirely fictional, world of meanings.<sup>69</sup> *Star Trek* has been so successful that it has added words to everyday language, like “to beam” (from “Beam me up Scotty) meaning to teleport.

While Diarmaid MacCulloch’s description of the trade in indulgences and other symbolic goods I have termed “salvation products” as the “Purgatory industry” is rather fanciful, the Culture Industry as elaborated in Adorno and Horkheimer’s seminal work *The Dialectic of the Enlightenment* is not. The Purgatory industry was a manifestation of the power of the Church translating the doctrine of merit into money. The culture industry is a manifestation of the absolute power of capital, reversing the order and so translating money into meaning. More accurately, Adorno and Horkheimer’s culture industry hypothesis asserts that the mass production of cultural commodities (specifically radio and film at the time of writing, 1945), results in cultural uniformity, a reflection of the monopolies that produced them. The technology of industrial production entails a change in valorization from the true to the

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<sup>69</sup> About 390,000 people listed their religion as Jedi in the 2001 Census for England and Wales. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk\\_news/scotland/glasgow\\_and\\_west/8003067.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/glasgow_and_west/8003067.stm). The Jedi are a fictional religion from George Lucas’ *Star Wars* films.

useful. This technological rationale is the rationale of domination itself. It sacrifices “...whatever involved a distinction between the logic of the work [of art] and that of the social system” (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944]1997, 121). The result of this is a totalitarian control of individual consciousness whereby the doctrine of utility is sublimated into the social unconscious.

Even during the golden years of the Frankfurt School<sup>70</sup>, Adorno and Horkheimer’s culture industry thesis was contested. Walter Benjamin saw possibilities for human liberation in the mechanized production of cultural commodities, while at the same time seeing clearly that control over the new media technologies in Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy “aestheticized” politics by manipulating society’s “collective dream” into a nationalist nightmare. For Benjamin, the aestheticization of politics only results in war. Responding to the Futurist manifesto’s aesthetic of war where self-annihilation becomes seen as a pleasure, Benjamin writes, “Such is the aestheticization of politics, as practiced by fascism. Communism replies by politicizing art” (Benjamin 2008, 42). While Adorno and Horkheimer see the new media necessitating totalitarianism through an internal logic, Benjamin sees these media as neutral, and although used for totalitarian purposes by fascists, the media could just as well be used for human liberation. For Benjamin, the production of works of art by mechanical means put took the production of art out of the hands of the elite and potentially into the hands of anyone who could use the “apparatus,” i.e. the technology.

The dispute is not trivial. It is central to the possibility of human agency in postmodern society. If it is a society of total reification, then agency is impossible.

Benjamin’s position has been used (Detweiler and Taylor 2003, 18) to defend a

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<sup>70</sup> “The Frankfurt School refers to a grouping of Marxist intellectuals at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt am Main and their associates. Best known among these theorists were Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erich Fromm, Jürgen Habermas, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse. The school was established in 1923 and broke up in 1933 as a result of the Nazi rise to power. Many, like Adorno and Benjamin, were Jews.

“consumerist” position, particularly in computer technology where users can create their own media and publish them on the internet through common software and websites such as YouTube. Adorno and Horkheimer’s “productionist” position, where the ends are inevitably compromised by the technological means, is called by Todd Tietchen, “Frankfurt School anxiety.” Tietchen describes this anxiety as a rejection “...of the political possibilities of art – especially the “popular arts” – in Western society on the grounds that any mass-produced aesthetic is complicit in the master formula of production, even when it attempts to deploy an alternate discourse” (Tietchen 2001, 109).<sup>71</sup> The New Media explosion of the last decade or so, are(is?) yet another “extension of man” in McLuhan’s terminology (expulsion of man in Baudrillard’s), and there has been considerable attention to the participatory possibilities it enables, but “Frankfurt School anxiety” entails foreboding as to what the message of this medium is. Will it be some global village of deliberative democracy as envisioned by McLuhan, or will it eliminate the possibility of it where people become just “terminals” in the operation of the code as Baudrillard sees it?

The productionist position provides little or no importance to consumer agency. In response to advocates of this position, anthropologist Daniel Miller states: “What worries me is that this bogey of a deluded, superficial person who has become the mere mannequin to commodity culture is always someone other than ourselves” (D. Miller 2001, 229). While Miller is correct to take on the moralizing positions he terms “Veblenesque.” Miller argues that consumers can exercise agency through bricolage, using commodities to construct hybrid cultural forms. This culture is, “what might be called a posteriori rather than a priori culture. That is, we have to allow culture to be the product of the subsequent localization of global forms, rather than only that which has some deep historical and local tradition” (D. Miller 2001, 239). Like Walter Benjamin, the form is assumed to be neutral.

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<sup>71</sup> The most noteworthy critic of Adorno, and defender of the Enlightenment, is Jürgen Habermas. It would be entirely wrong to suggest that Habermas holds a “consumerist” position, however.

Another, more interesting critique of the culture industry thesis is the idea of “de-commodification.” Consumer commodities can be de-commodified when these mass produced commodities are stripped of their marketing story by the consumer and then cathected with personal meanings. Often in sociological literature Baudrillard’s functional language of objects is contradicted by good evidence that people consume commodities in different ways for different means according to class and other status deviations from the middle class “natural.” Mementos are examples of “de-commodified” commodities. On the shelf next to my computer is half a rubber ball filled with bullets. The rubber ball half is from a stun grenade fired at me by riot police in the 1999 Seattle WTO demonstrations. The bullets are bent 12.7 mm armor-piercing anti-aircraft rounds I picked up ten years ago on the battlefields near Mostar in Bosnia Hecegovina. These mass produced objects’ origins are still unknown to me, i.e. they remain fetishized, but my dragging around and displaying such junk is evidence that I have invested them with new meanings.

Jackson Lears, discussing Henry James and Marcel Proust literature of objects, explains the fragility of this distinction: “the boundary between collected goods and consumer goods, while not exactly flexible, can be crossed and re-crossed. Even some of the most cherished relics have been bought and sold at times” (Lears 1995, 393). Collections and collectors posit a different relationship between the consumer and the commodity. Benjamin associates them with memory, not utility but specifically regarding books. Regarding the book collector’s relationship to books, they can talk about the books themselves and their intrinsic value, but that is not the essence of the collector’s relationship to his collection. “This or any other procedure is merely a dam against the spring tide of memories which surges toward any collector as he contemplates his possessions. Every passion borders on the

chaotic, but the collector's passion borders on the chaos of memories”<sup>72</sup> (Benjamin 1931). David Harvey is less sanguine about the home museum or collections in the Benjaminian sense, as “a guard against the ravages of time-space compression” (Harvey 1990, 292). Or even more sinister, Baudrillard states that the collector “...feels alienated and abolished by a social discourse whose rules escape him, the collector strives to reconstitute a discourse that is transparent to him, a discourse whose signifiers he controls and whose referent *par excellence* is himself” (Baudrillard 2005, 114).

It has been argued that fan mobilization, like those of *Star Trek*, is a true example of consumer agency. Even though the show ran just three seasons and was cancelled in 1969, its success in syndication and the proliferation of Star Trek conventions and “trekkies” led to a new series, *Star Trek the Next Generation*, which ran for six years beginning in 1988, numerous spin offs (*Deep Space 9*, and *Voyager*), and a series of films, the latest version, the distinctly postmodern *Star Trek*, was released in 2009. The creation of a *Star Trek* subculture complete with marriages performed in the entirely made up Klingon language<sup>73</sup> would seem to support Miller’s claim to a postiori culture. Yet this de-commodification is immediately followed by re-commodification in the forms of new commodities, taking the bricolage generated by the fans and selling it back to them. Sam Caslin in her study of the militant fan response to the cancellation of *Firefly*, writes that this is not what it appears to be. Fans organized in internet forums, set up mailing lists, and sent petitions to Fox executives. However, fans also mobilized the mass purchase of the boxed DVD set of the cancelled series, as well as other products, such as comic books, novelizations, and a book of critical

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<sup>72</sup> More poetically, Benjamin shows the relationship of the book collector to a new city: "I have made my most memorable purchases on trips, as a transient. Property and possession belong to the tactical sphere. Collectors are people with a tactical instinct; their experience teaches them that when they capture a strange city, the smallest antique shop can be a fortress, the most remote stationery store a key position. How many cities have revealed themselves to me in the marches I undertook in the pursuit of books!"

<sup>73</sup> The Klingon language was created by Marc Okrand for the film *Star Trek III*. Paramount pictures holds the copyright to the official dictionary and other canonical sources. The weddings pages I viewed were from Las Vegas. Blogosphere article <http://ezinearticles.com/?Unique-Wedding-Packages:-A-Las-Vegas-Klingon-Wedding&id=257364>

essays about the series.<sup>74</sup> “With fans acting voluntarily as marketers and ‘guerrilla promoters’ for the existing *Firefly/Serenity* merchandise, not to mention their roles as consumers of that franchise, it is my contention that these fans are actually being absorbed further into the mechanisms of the culture industry with their identities becoming ever more tied to their sense of themselves as fans of *Firefly/Serenity*” (Caslin 2007). In the sense of furthering an interest that isn’t really theirs, the fans become “useful idiots” in Lenin’s description of positive, Western journalists. Cultural commodities that have this recursive power to generate context, sufficient to make the consumers of Fox Television do volunteer work for Fox, show the production of the fan by the culture industry, or in Jean Baudrillard’s words: “That is “mass production,” not in the sense of massive production for use by the masses, but the production of *the masses*” (Baudrillard 1994, 68). The Trekkie or the Firefly fan is in many ways like the collector. They collect the story, and the story cannot end “as the *presence* of the final object of the collection would basically signify the death of the subject” (Baudrillard 2005, 99). Fans are frequently devastated by the cancellation of a favorite show. Culture industry producers of compelling stories, particularly science fiction and fantasy, seek to create a fan world. The creators of the re-invented *Battlestar Galactica* generated a dozen two-minute mini-episodes that were never broadcast, but were available for free download on the internet. This feeds the collection urge, to find the missing pieces. A spin off series, *Caprica*, is now airing feeding on the *Battlestar Galactica* fan base.

People consume commodities in different ways according to what Pierre Bourdieu calls their *habitus*. In market researcher Douglas Holt’s study in Center, Pennsylvania, he classified his respondents consumption of antiques in four categories. *Bargain Antiquing* is marked by a passion for acquisition at the lowest price, the objects being less valued for their particular history than for the pleasure of bargain shopping. The display of the antiques is

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<sup>74</sup> A *Firefly* fan myself, I bought a set of three comics.



undifferentiated, jumbled even, serving as a showpiece for their shopping prowess. The second category is *Learning to Be a Connoisseur*, where consumers are very interested in the history of the objects they buy, buy books on the subjects, and yearn for other quality pieces they cannot afford. The third classification, *Expressing Personal Aesthetics*, where the display of objects is intended to say something about the owner's taste and personality but don't distract. Occasional purges and acquisition of new furniture occur from time to time with the exception of heirloom items that have high emotional value. The final category, *Bricoleur Construction*, invests personal labor to refinish or modify objects they have found and take pride in their salvage operations (Holt 1997, 334-335). These categories correlate to habitus and have some degree of predictability, and do show significantly different attitudes towards consumption of antique furniture. As commodities, antiques have a peculiar status in commodification theory which stresses the potlatch aspects of consumptions of new commodities, even if they are repetitions of what came before. Antiques and DIY furniture have the "aura" of the original whether from its age or its origins. Aura is closely tied to "authenticity," a contentious term that will not go away. Authenticity is a major selling point, possessing originals, or somehow a desire for what is lacking in commodity culture. "The quest for *authenticity* (being-founded- on-itself) is thus very precisely a quest for an *alibi* (being-elsewhere)" (Baudrillard 2005, 81). There is also a taste among upper middle class Americans for the "faux archaic," selling exact replicas of art deco clocks, steamer trunks, and other objects deliberately treated to appear aged and old (Brooks 2000, 94). Similar retro designs are common in expensive household appliances like toasters and blenders that are deliberately designed to appear out of date. Especially in kitchens, this theme can dominate the aesthetics of the room. Christian Thorn has stressed the selling power of the outmoded, particularly in the DIY market. "If you examine the signs next to the objects a Restoration Hardware and other such retro marts – these small placards that invent elaborate and fictional

histories for the object stacked there for sale – you will discover a culture recoiling from its commodities in the very act of acquiring them, a culture that thinks it can drag objects back into the magic circle if only it can learn to consume them in the right way” (Thorne 2003, 112).

In some of Holt’s categories, evidence of de-commodification is clear, particularly the do-it-yourself final group. But re-commodification is even clearer in the books about antiques, the weekend auctions, the periodic purging and so on. DIY often takes the form of a hobby, and considerable money and time is spent on acquiring the tools and materials, commodities themselves which then may be cathected according to quality and taste, another set of names to exchange. Hobbies, be they DIY cabinet making or going to antique sales are, according to Adorno, a “pseudo activity,” as a subjective compensation in a reified world (cited in Bewes 2002, 23). Further, resembling work, hobbies are actually the consumption of production, or better productive activity. In addition to the tools and materials mentioned above, there are DIY television programs a plenty, not to mention libraries of how-to books and magazines as well as weekend workshops and courses all aimed at a middle class audience

Sociologist Paul DiMaggio has investigated differentiation of taste finding that cultural tastes and their associated discourses are deployed in conversation as “a form of ritual identification and a means of constricting social relations (and knowing what relationships need not be constructed” (DiMaggio 1987, 443). Deploying taste in conversation also asserts status, i.e. possession of *cultural capital*. Douglas and Isherwood find that those with specialized tastes, and specialization is always a marker for higher status, enjoy the “sharing of names,” the specialized discourse of their shared taste (Ibid). In the case of fandom or hobbies, one clear purpose is to establish a connection with other enthusiasts, but deploying taste can also be an exclusionary move that asserts higher status. The

universality of electronic media detaches cultural commodities from any particular locale, and the more popular national commodities can make it difficult for local cultural products to gain an audience.

If contention by critics of the culture industry thesis that consumers can de-commodify cultural commodities and construct a new life world from them, the more successful they are at that, the more they run the risk re-commodification in the form of further iterations of the franchise, i.e. sequels, spin offs, as well as secondary commodities like books, documentaries, action figures, various collectibles, and so on. While there may appear to be a window for creative bricolage and consumer agency, it can close very rapidly. This is much like the process of “cool hunting” where market researchers trained in social anthropological techniques observe street culture to identify the trends which can be “monetized,” i.e. commodified.

The market and marketing of Christian branded commodities. Remarking on the incredible success of the *Left Behind* novels and other Christian apocalyptic cultural commodities, Christian Thorne describes the consequence for this success. “The first thing that needs to be noted about rapture novels, then, is that they signal, on the part of U.S. fundamentalism an unprecedented capitulation to pop culture” (Thorne 2003, 98). It is not just the tens of millions of copies sold, but a change in genre that is most significant. While *Left Behind* may establish a new genre, that of the Christian Apocalyptic novel, it borrows heavily from popular genres like science fiction, thrillers, and other action oriented narrative genres. Unlike its predecessors, it is familiar to readers both in form and content, an action thriller written in according to simplified form of premillennial dispensational theology. It is a dramatization of theology that rides on a popular format, hence it breaks through to the mass market and finds itself on sale in Kroger, Wall-Mart, and Sams’ Club as well as through Christian media outlets. Ironically, the breakthrough of Christian commodities into the

mainstream retail world, may weaken the base of Evangelical Christian society. A report in Christianity Today on the health of Christian booksellers illustrates the problem:

Ironically, Christian books have never been more popular. "Blockbusters like *The Prayer of Jabez* and *The Purpose Driven Life* ended up doing more harm than good for Christian booksellers," says Lynn Garrett, senior religion editor at the book industry journal *Publishers Weekly*. "The general-interest bookstore chains, discounters, and 'big boxes' picked them up and sold huge quantities at deep discounts that Christian stores couldn't match. I think that contributed to Christians getting in the habit of buying their books in places other than Christian stores."<sup>75</sup>

Producers of Christian cultural commodities have long sought to break through into the mainstream, as the mission of Evangelizing, proselytizing, and conversion remains paramount. Yet despite the best intentions of music industry executives and Christian musicians, cross over to mainstream acceptance has been mixed. Some bands like Stryper, Jars of Clay, and Sixpence None the Richer, have had a measure of success in escaping the stigmatizing Christian hyphen by writing out explicit references to God, Jesus, and anything explicitly Christian, rather focusing on the message without the explicitly coded referent (Hendershot 2004, 60-61). DiMaggio argues that world culture is declassifying, genre becoming blurred. For Christian music, this adaptation to popular forms has had the effect of reduced information value for Christian music, i.e. it is less identifiable as Christian. This is further complicated by music listeners misunderstanding (or just ignoring) lyrics in popular music genres. While there has been some crossover success with Christian children's video, like *Veggie Tales*, again the overt Christian message is excised, declassified. Film has been disastrous, with the only big Christian hit being Mel Gibson's, "The Passion of the Christ," a film made by a conservative Catholic Hollywood insider.

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<sup>75</sup> How to Save the Christian Bookstore, Christianity Today, 4 November 2008. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/april/18.22.html>

Like with the secular cultural commodities like *Star Trek* and *The Lord of the Rings*, *Left Behind* has generated a large variety of spin off products, including children's toys, T-shirts, action figures, a first person shooter video game, and a film version of the first novel in the series, a flop (Shuck 2005, 11) (Hendershot 2004). Out in the mainstream, although not necessarily crossing over, producers of Christian cultural commodities have found the takings considerably more lucrative than when they were limited to retail outlets like the family run Christian bookshop. Looking at the media genres adopted in this successful move, science fiction thrillers, video games, action figures, rock CDs, television programs, more or less all the popular media forms, it is hard to tell the difference between a Christian cultural commodity and a "secular" cultural commodity. While it is a bit more than the brand loyalty between partisans of Pepsi vs Coca Cola, it does show genre isomorphy, and provide for a Christian consumer lifestyle no different that of other consumers in their social category.

#### 4.5 Mythic Discourse and the Spectacle

“Culture,” write Adorno and Horkheimer, “is a paradoxical commodity. So completely is it subject to the law of exchange that it is no longer exchanged; it is so blindly consumed in the use that it amalgamates with advertising” (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944]1997, 161). They observe that cultural commodities are very cheap, or actually free in the case of radio.

Broadcast television followed this model as well. Advertisements have achieved the status of art in the sense that they now appear in museums, not only in corporate-owned museums such as The World of Coca Cola in Atlanta, Georgia, but also in “high culture” institutions such as the Victoria and Albert museum in London (Twitchell 2004, 257). In a world stuffed with art, it is the museum curator who gives it legitimate status by exhibiting it (Twitchell 2004). Advertising can be difficult to distinguish from programming on television, or can be the content. MTV, the wildly successful music video channel, consists entirely of advertising, albeit very sophisticated advertising. The June 2009 death of TV pitchman Billy Mays, who yelled pitches for products such as the stain remover OxiClean and something called “Soap-A-Dub-Slop Stopper,” set off a wave of mourning, particularly noticeable on social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter. A Google search containing the terms “Billy Mays T-shirts” returned 109,000 hits.<sup>76</sup> The commodities Mays promoted were the lowest status products, but his advertisements and infomercials became a cultural commodity themselves which then recursively generated a subculture, and even a TV show called

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<sup>76</sup> Search conducted 25/10/09

Pitchman. Among the young, Mays' death rivaled that of Michael Jackson in attention (they died a few days apart).<sup>77</sup>

The message in hard sell advertisements such as those of Billy Mays is more than clear. It's jack hammered into the viewer's head by repetition, volume, and hysterical hype. As advertisements go, Mays' were anachronistic, although his celebrity status and internet following are clearly postmodern. He is so obviously not cool that he is cool according to this aesthetic. More sophisticated advertisements use subtler techniques to get their message across, a message that is often not "buy this product." That representation has a message is nothing new. The previous discussion of medieval art used figural representation of the single Christian story line of The Fall, The Passion, and the Last Judgment (Auerbach 2003, 160). Up until the Renaissance, more or less all works of art carried the ideological message of the Church. The few representations of secular figures that were executed, fit them into the over arching Christian narrative. Medieval "advertising" also jack hammered a message, albeit in monopoly environment.

The transparent phoniness of Billy Mays was precisely it's attraction to teenagers. While few would take his pitches seriously, they could be consumed ironically, one of the great premises of postmodernism. This ironic de-commodification turned Mays, the most uncool of the uncool, into an image of uncool, which as Thomas Frank points out can be instantly re-coded as cool (Frank 1997). While at first an underground youth subculture, it wasn't long until Billy Mays was re-commodified in the form of books and a reality TV program. Here we have an instance of advertising, really bad advertising, recursively generating a context which was then capitalized.

The implied comparison of a Billy Mays infomercial and the Abbey Church of St. Denis fails when their respective audiences are considered, and the fact that infomercials are

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<sup>77</sup> During a visit to the United States in the summer of 2009, my friend's 15-year-old son was distraught over Mays' death and upset that Mays did not get much attention on the TV news or in newspapers.

cultural commodities while St. Denis clearly is not. St. Denis has the aura of the original and is immobile, tied to a particular place. The medieval audience was a community linked together vertically and horizontally in a concrete set of social relations. The infomercial audience is alienated both from Mays and from each other: they are atomized spectators who watch the commercials and then blog on special Mays fansites. The only thing they share is a taste. They are in no sense a social group, but a category of consumers.

“Each new product is ceremoniously acclaimed as a unique creation offering a dramatic shortcut to the promised land of total consummation” (Debord 2002, 34). It’s no accident that Debord uses the term “promised land.” The hard sell pitch developed from 19<sup>th</sup> Century Evangelical conversion tactics referred to in an earlier chapter. Interesting anecdotal evidence indicates that people were commonly “saved” multiple times in revival meetings, suggesting that salvation of this ecstatic sort doesn’t stick all that well. It is difficult to believe that someone who purchased a Soap-A-Dub-Slop Stopper would find the satisfaction promised so enthusiastically by Mays. Debord’s description of hard sell hype fits Mays’ commercials well, as does the following sentence in *Society of the Spectacle*: “The object that was prestigious in the spectacle becomes mundane as soon as it is taken home by the consumer – and by all its other consumers. Too late it reveals its essential poverty...” (Ibid). Responding to the altar call, the ecstatic moment of consummation is what is sought, and immediately lost. As spectacles go, infomercials are the crudest sort with low production values, predictable scripts, and little (if any) attempt at illusion. Yet the same logic of the spectacle, “ideology that pretends to be entertainment” (Wharton 2006, 190) prevails through cultural commodities, and according to the culture industry thesis it cannot be otherwise.

Roland Barthes and Guy Debord both write that spectacle requires the repetition of archetypal gestures by the performers. In Debord’s case these convey the underlying ideology of the spectacle, for Barthes, they evoke myth. In neither case are those gestures the



performers own: the performers are alienated from their performance. Comparing professional wrestling to a boxing match, Barthes describes different modes of understanding a story.

A boxing-match is a story which is constructed before the eyes of the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, not the passage of time. The spectator is not interested in the rise and fall of fortunes; he expects the transient image of certain passions. Wrestling therefore demands an immediate reading of the juxtaposed meanings, so that there is no need to connect them. The logical conclusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan, while on the contrary a boxing-match always implies a science of the future (Barthes 1972, 16)

The boxer in this comparison is not alienated from his movements, they are not gestures. The wrestler is rather conforming to ethical images in a sort of morality play which, like medieval morality plays, always tells the same story. “In wrestling, nothing exists except in the absolute, there is no symbol, no allusion, everything is presented exhaustively” (Barthes 1972, 25). It’s an utterly intelligible representation with no ambiguity, one of miming the Ideal, reassuring in its certainty.

The absolute representation is mythological, not historical. The spectacle is not the product of a process; it is appearance as absolute reality. There is no contingent cause and effect, nothing hidden, nothing unknown. In this sense it is like the absolute past of the classic epic, a closed world of completed events that exhaust all possibility. Like the wrestlers, epic heroes have no secrets, no inner life. “The epic world is an utterly finished thing, not only as an authentic event of the distant past but also on its own terms and by its own standards; it is impossible to change, to-rethink, to re-evaluate anything in it” (Bakhtin 1981, 17). Barthes is quite clear that myth isn’t limited to ancient epics and tales, but, like wrestling, are “examples of the falsely obvious” (Barthes 1972, 11). Myth, for Barthes,

cannot be an object. Rather, it is a “mode of signification, a form” (Barthes 1972, 109).

Myth as a signifying system uses language as its source and is thus parasitic upon it.

Paradoxically it is transparent, but by using signs as the signified, meaning is impoverished.

It distorts the historicity of the sign, but does not make it disappear (Barthes 1972, 121).

Instead of denoting meanings, mythical signifiers only have connotations, i.e. the movements of the wrestler are gestures signify suffering, justice, evil and so on. What myth does is transform history into nature an ideological move (Barthes 1972, 129). It sublimates the past into the cosmology of a culture. The myth of America as a “chosen land,” a special place comes from the sublimation of post-millennial and supercessionist theology brought over by early Puritan settlers. Or the sublimation of evil, the notion of Original Sin carried over into free market economics under the slogan “greed is good.” “New myths,” is thus not a contradiction: new myths are actualities. Myth is the mode of signification of marketing, branding in particular.

In section 2.2 on voluntarism in early America, I discussed the co-evolution of Evangelical Christianity and early commodity marketing. The relationship continued into the present with commodity culture being influenced by Evangelism, and later Evangelism being influenced by commodity culture. According to Wade Clark Roof, Enlightenment philosophy and the industrial revolution led to the rationalization of the world, challenged absolutes, and relativized beliefs. “Rationalization substitutes mastery for mystery...creating structures called bureaucracies” (Roof 1998, 61). As discussed before, this process began with the Reformation with the triumph of word over image, and relics losing their magical aura. The telos of Enlightenment science is to rid the world of mystery, particularly the mystery of the object. “The disenchantment of the world is the extirpation of animism” (Adorno and Horkheimer [1944]1997, 5). Rationalization removes the animus from objects, classifying them as types of things in possession of properties, not spirit. Arminism and the

Evangelical method of proselytizing, returned magic through the possibility of self transformation as an act of choice. While relics do return after a fashion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the form of antiques, the commodity is now what is embodied with transformative aura.

## 4.6 Branding as Alibi

According to historian Jackson Lears, advertising emerged from the pitches used to sell nostrums. These patent medicines had dubious ingredients, often whopping doses of alcohol and laudanum, and were sold as exotic elixirs to cure all ills. This was accomplished by telling a story about the exotic origins of the ingredients, ancient formulae, testimonials, and staged demonstrations (Lears 1995). Like in tent revivals where the preacher might plant a few ringers to start the procession of the altar calls, nostrum sellers engaged in identical tactics to start the buying frenzy. Literary critic James Twitchell states advertising pitches appeal to people's mythological understanding. "Commercial stories, while shallow, are usually drawn from the preliterate or pre-rational world" (Twitchell 2004, 27). Brand stories are syncretic; following the mythic mode of signification, they appropriate the signs of other stories and their associations, and integrate them into their own. They are ripped out of their significant context and used for other, frequently opposing, purposes. A particularly egregious example was the use of Credence Clearwater Revival's violently anti-patriotic song, "Fortunate Son" on a Wrangler Jeans commercial in 2002. The imagery was flags and other patriotic gestures, moving to the fast, aggressive opening of the song, but only used the first two angry lines "Some folks are born, made to raise the flag, ooh they're red white and blue." This strategic truncation turns a militant anti-patriotic song into a militant patriotic song, syncretically overlaying Wrangler's story over both patriotism and anti-war activism.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Having signed away his control over his back catalog, the song's writer, Dan Fogerty was horrified. To the *Los Angeles Times* he said, "It makes me angry when you use a song for a TV commercial, it trivializes the meaning of the song. It almost turns it into nothing." <http://articles.latimes.com/2002/oct/23/entertainment/et-baker23a>

The point of branding is product differentiation according to Twitchell. Toothpaste is toothpaste and there is an overabundance of it. Telling stories about the toothpaste your company makes differentiates it from competitors' products. Differentiation within a brand is also standard. According to Twitchell, Crest makes thirty different kinds of toothpaste, essentially identical, but with different stories. While there are a limited number of actual products, there are an unlimited number of stories. Branding "creates an aura of differentiation around the product that distinguishes it from all others" (Twitchell 2004, 40). Yet this is not the aura of authenticity as Benjamin describes for the original work of art where the aura emanates from the object. The brand aura draws attention *away* from the object as it is identical to competing products, the fact that must be concealed. It's actuality of identity is obscured by the brand story. Consumers buy the story, not the product, that is to say the commodity sign. In Barthes' terminology, the story functions as an alibi. This alibi is comes from an unlikely source, Romantic rebels against early industrial society. John Ruskin described the misattribution of human attributes to nature as a "pathetic fallacy." For Romantic poets, nature and objects had stories to tell and could "speak" in a sense, like in Keats "Ode to a Grecian Urn." The common advertising tactic of commodities speaking to potential consumers is derived from this tactic which was intended to deflate industrial culture. The Romantic rebellion did not just fail; it made industrial culture much stronger. Perhaps the material world becomes re-enchanted – or reanimated – but in a Faustian way.

It wasn't just the Romantic rebellion against industrial society that failed; all cultural movements that, in Todd Tietchen's words "attempt to deploy an alternate discourse" have failed, including that of the Situationists, the revolutionary movement Guy Debord was associated with in the Paris rising of May 1968. Not only did the Situationists fail to inspire a revolution based on *détournement*, the tactic of *détournement* was soon used in advertising (Harold 2004). The goal of the Situationists was not merely to expose inauthenticity, but to

re-establish it, much like the Romantics. *Détournement* is subversive parody, taking the mythic symbols and overlaying them with a seditious syncretic story. “*Détournement* reradicalizes previous critical conclusions that have been petrified into respectable truths and thus transformed into lies” (Debord 2002, 113). Each aesthetic movement that tried to recover authenticity from the alienation of industrial society, the impressionists, modernists, surrealists, the Beats, and the American 60s counter-culture, the punks and so on, has not only failed to upset capitalism and restore “real life,” but has succeeded in making the culture industry stronger by expanding the techniques available to colonize the margins of the commodity world.

Even the fully taboo and despised aesthetic of sadomasochism is integrated. David Brooks describes the domestication of deviance in *Bobos in Paradise*. Describing the promotional literature for an S&M convention, some of the workshops seem distinctly odd. Topics like nipple piercing and nude gagging are supposed to evoke images of debauched De Sades, but in this crowd paddling and punishing are made to sound more akin to bird watching or wine tasting...It’s all so temperate and responsible. It’s so bourgeois” (Brooks 2000, 190). Frederic Jameson sees that autonomous culture, far from declining as a result of mass media production, is, amoeba-like expanding and absorbing that which was once outside it, or hostile to it. An overtly political song by *The Clash* that attacks the system, is, as a song part of that system. There is no possibility of achieving critical distance as everything is inside. (Jameson 1990, 49). Perhaps it is worse than useless as advertising can sniff out cool and use it. In addition to S&M, punk, heavy metal, and reggae signifiers, signifiers of refusal, resistance, and rebellion persist in advertising and cultural commodities long after their political projects ended. They are now *styles*, the signifier of *identity*.

For Baudrillard, the endless proliferation of objects and images, the proliferation of myth upon myth has eradicated reality in the “simulation of an immanent, increasingly dense,

irreversible order, one that is potentially saturated and that will never again witness the liberating explosion” (Baudrillard 1994, 71). Explosion is impossible as there is nowhere outside the simulation, nowhere to explode into. Alluding to a Borges story Baudrillard states, “when the map covers the whole territory, something like the principle of reality disappears” (Baudrillard 1994, 123). Including sadomasochists, punks, metalheads, Rastafarians, Che Gueverra (on fashion T-shirts), the Black Panthers, fundamentalist Christians, homosexuals and so on into the order extends the map, including them in the simulation as signifiers. The inclusion of these strange, absent, enigmatic, and antagonistic Others is accomplished by the invention of difference (Baudrillard 2008, 116). Difference, and the disappearance of Otherness, does not mark the final triumph of the individual, but rather the extinction of the individual. Difference presupposes identity; the eradication of the other results in sameness. Eradication of the Other is the final act of the murder of reality according to Baudrillard. Baudrillard is inimically opposed to the postmodern ideology of multiculturalism. “The reconciliation of all antagonistic forms in the name of consensus and conviviality is the worst thing we can do. We must reconcile nothing. We must keep open the otherness of forms, the disparity between terms; we must keep alive the forms of the irreducible. (Baudrillard 2008, 123). Politically the effect of reducing Otherness to difference is devastating. The abolition of antagonism makes real politics, the impossible demand, vanish as difference can always be litigated (Žižek 1999, 198-205).

#### 4.7 Christian™ Brand: Jesus as Alibi

Luckmann's thesis that secularization in modern, industrial societies proceeds either through decline to the periphery of marginal social groups if the religious institutions continue to mediate a traditional universe of meaning, or the churches accommodate themselves to modern industrial society by taking on the function of legitimating that society (Luckmann 1967, 37). Evangelical accommodation to popular culture is widespread and accelerating. From separatist, marginal rural poor, Evangelicals are increasingly integrating with the consumer capitalist economy and the larger, homogenized American commodity culture. The expanded reach of commodity capitalism via freeways, television, suburbanization, and increasingly the internet has made cultural insularity, maintenance of Otherness or Godliness against worldliness, increasingly difficult. Otherness is alien, not on the same-different continuum. The fate of the Other in Western culture has almost invariably been objectification, invisibility, persecution, oppression, or genocide. The American Others that remain, those who can't or won't succumb to *difference*, suffer the consequences. Separatist groups like the Hassidim are often viewed with hostility, or in the case of the Anabaptist Amish, they are doomed to being "quaint." Sioux Indians on the isolated reservations of North Dakota have the lowest life expectancy and highest infant mortality of any minority population in the United States. So-called "racial profiling" is a well-known practice among police as well as in business. Recent studies cited in *The New York Times* indicate that university graduates with black sounding names get 50% fewer call-backs on job applications



than those with white sounding names<sup>79</sup>. From the days of H.L. Mencken and Sinclair Lewis, Evangelical Christians have largely been portrayed negatively in popular media, and door-knocking proselytizing and street witnessing are well loathed by most secular, middle class whites.

The last decades have seen rapid accommodation to popular culture on the part of Evangelicals. Suburban megachurches have already been discussed as have changes in worship associated with the megachurch format. Branded media like Christian music of all subgenre, self-help, cook and diet books, now sold at Wal-Mart or online, have become commonplace including many products that are produced by Christian creatives, but represent family values without mentioning anything overtly religious. In this section I will look at Christian as a brand, and what that means when Jesus become an alibi for T-shirts, theme parks, breath mints, diet books, all manner of *commodities*. While commodity capitalism borrowed the hard sell sales pitch from early American Evangelical preachers to its enormous profit, what happens when Evangelical Christianity borrows the soft sell technique of branding from commodity capitalism?

The borrowing and parodying of forms from popular culture has an agenda. “Evangelicals would prefer not to poach on mass culture; their preference would be to transform mass culture, making it entirely evangelical. In other words, if evangelical media producers and consumers constitute a “subculture,” it is one that aspires to lose its “sub” status” (Hendershot 2004, 13). Evangelicals marketing mission is to subvert popular culture from within to make Evangelical culture popular culture. In this they bear considerable similarity to Left wing attempts to subvert popular culture through detournement, culture jamming and other tactics. It has already been mentioned that megachurches have adopted cultural forms like rock music, casual dress, and self-help groups that were brought forward

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<sup>79</sup> John Luo, “In Job Hunt, College Degree Can’t Close Racial Gap.” *The New York Times*, 30 November 2009. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/01/us/01race.html?\\_r=1&scp=1&sq=race+job+seekers&st=nyt](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/01/us/01race.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=race+job+seekers&st=nyt)

by the counter-culture of the 1960s, forms long since commodified and stripped of political possibility.

Brand Jesus is lucrative. AllBusiness reports that U.S. retailers sell \$4.6 billion in Christian products annually.<sup>80</sup> This includes traditional items like crosses and Bibles, but increasingly rock music, video games, and clothing. The Baylor survey reports that of those spending \$50 or more a month on religious products, 54% of them are Evangelical Protestants (The Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion 2006, 20). Family Christian Stores is a privately held company and as such does not have to make public its sales figures, but a 2004 estimate of revenues was \$300 million, growing at double digits per year. In 2002 LifeWay Christian Resources, Family Christian's main rival, had sales in excess of \$400 million.<sup>81</sup> Madison Dearborn Partners, a private equity firm holds about 70% of Family Christian stores. Their other investments include more secular firms.<sup>82</sup> It's big money, attractive enough to get investment from a major financial player that has no religious mission. This is a long way from the family run Christian bookstore, despite the inclusion of the word "Family" in the company name. A July 2008 report in *Research and Market* described Family Christian's sales as "... exceedingly healthy, outperforming their general market counterparts."<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> "Religious products spoof popular brands" By Jay Reeves The Associated Press.

<http://www.allbusiness.com/society-social/religion-spirituality-religion/13630560-1.html> accessed 1.9.10

<sup>81</sup> "ONWARD CHRISTIAN SHOPPERS: Christian merchandise a big seller in big boxes and small alike" BY GLEN A. BERES *Retailing Today*, February 2004. <http://www.icsc.org/srch/sct/sct0204/page49.php>

<sup>82</sup> According to Madison Dearborn's website their main investments are in: basic industries (natural resources, chemicals, building products); energy and power (oil and gas exploration and refining, wind power); communications (media and wireless communications); consumer (retail, restaurants, and consumer products); financial services (asset management, financial outsourcing, and specialty finance); and health care (acute and ancillary care providers, and medical equipment). Although the company's stated typical investment range is between \$100 million and \$600 million, Madison Dearborn has gone well over the \$600 million mark at times. <http://www.answers.com/topic/madison-dearborn-partners-llc>

<sup>83</sup> "The U.S. Consumer Book Publishing & Retailing Market" *Research and Market*, July 2008.

[http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/659005/the\\_u\\_s\\_consumer\\_book\\_publishing\\_and\\_retailing](http://www.researchandmarkets.com/reports/659005/the_u_s_consumer_book_publishing_and_retailing) Accessed 9.1.10.

The mainstream newspapers have reacted to Christian marketing, particularly in fashion, with condescending amusement. A few headlines give the general impression:

- “Faithful and Fashionable; Clothing and Accessories Bearing Religious Themes are Being Snapped Up by Consumers,” Ruth La Ferla, *The Orlando Sentinel*, 2 April 2005
- “Style and Substance: Pop Culture Gets Religion; Whether Reverent or Ironic, Christianity Has Become Cool; ‘Homeboy’ T’s Speak to Teens,” Stephanie Kang, *The Wall Street Journal*, 5 May 2004
- “Preaching the Gospel With the Shirt on Your Back,” Lena Williams, *The New York Times*, 29 March 1992
- “Fish Lady Uses Journalistic Skills to Push Christian Clothes,” Elizabeth Freeman, *The Saint Louis Post-Dispatch*, 6 May 2002.
- “Year-old store specializes in Christian clothes ‘The truth is in what you wear,’” Shandra Hill, *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 20 November 1997

Most of the articles indicate that there is something strange in this trend. The *Wall Street Journal Article* points out that “Some of the merchandise works on two levels: fun fashion for the faithful, irreverent commentary for others. Either way, Christian apparel is enjoying a moment of hip legitimacy.” This is something I saw in a Family Christian shop in suburban Atlanta and a joke shop in downtown Seattle in the form of a Jesus action figure. Identical commodities sold in different contexts, one a serious children’s toy, the other a parody joke gift for some unsuspecting atheist. This is an excellent example of a floating signifier as well as commodity fetishism. The action figure came from a Chinese factory employing workers who, most likely, attached no significance at all to the commodity. As a signifier, the Jesus action figure has no binding obligation to the real or any other signifiers. In Baudrillard’s

terms, it is an “emancipated sign.” The joke shop Jesus and its Chinese origins show its indifference to meaning.

Witness Wear often uses parodies corporate logos and sales pitches, for example a red shirt with Jesus Christ in white letters in the Coca Cola font, with “king of kings,” replacing the slogan, “the real thing.” Witness Wear parodies are so close to the original as to provoke threats of litigation or actual litigation over copyright infringement (as in the Tabasco parody). Parodic detournement of Coca Cola, MySpace, and other ubiquitous corporate logos appears to place the Christian message in opposition to that which is being parodied, i.e. it is a critique of consumerism. Detournement, the symbolic sabotage of the spectacle advocated by Debord, has limitations discussed previously, and one wonders what Christian perversion of a corporate icon, that the Christian message is carried ironically, really has to say about this approach. Irony is a means to tear down, but has little power to build up. Bakhtin describes irony as a sort of reduced laughter. The symbolic “sacrilege” of “Jesus Christ” written in a Coca Cola font presents mind-boggling semiotic problems, utterly garbling sacred and profane. Again the parody play suggests the carnivalesque, precisely the inversion of sacred and profane. Except in this case, the profane begins on top, over the sacred. As clever as this inversion of the inversion is, it is still a T-shirt, an alibi for it to differentiate it from all the other identical T-shirts. Starrett’s observation of horizontal association by genre replacing vertical association by narrative in religious commodities in Cairo presents a problem. Is a T-shirt bearing the citation “John 3:16” integrated into the sacred word of the Bible or is it just a T-shirt to be folded up and put away with the rest of the underwear?

Christian branded commodities have the property of all commodities, fungibility. Freely exchanged, they can be used for any purpose, including the ironic display noted in the *Wall Street* Journal article cited above. Also, the parody humor is more likely to appeal to

the converted than to the unchurched, who might just see it as some weird form of proselytizing, or even a joke about Christianity rather than an ad for it. The intended subtext is only present for those who come from the Evangelical sub-culture. Ironic usage would be directly hostile to the proselytizing purpose stated in the pitch, i.e. it can just as easily be deployed as a signifier against Evangelical Christians as it can be deployed for them. A well-known example of this kind of “blowback” was the 1938 anti-marijuana government produced film *Reefer Madness*, which by the 1970s achieved cult status among young marijuana smokers who showed it at parties or special screenings.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps the greatest risk to commodifying Christianity into fashion is that it becomes fashion; ephemeral, superficial, and designed for obsolescence. You can only be cool for so long.

The “cool” of religious symbols is not just used by makers of Witness Wear, but is out in the broader world of fashion design. In 2005 the high fashion line DSquared released a collection with short Christian slogans. The collection was bought by prestige American retailer Saks Fifth Avenue. Previous DSquared collections were marked by “kitschy sexuality” (Colavita 2005). Other reports around 2005 indicate religious symbols in general were appearing on all manner of fashion designs, clothing, jewelry and accessories. Christian tattoos and tattoo parlors have also appeared along with the formidable popularity of tattooing -- once the signifier of the most marginal groups – among younger middle class whites. These and other developments indicate that Evangelical Christian motifs are out of the box, and are floating free of their context. It may well also mark a generational shift in Evangelical Christians, the younger have never experienced anything but postmodernity.

Christian cool as a marketing/proselytizing mechanism has another irony. Cool was the signature of 1960s counter-culture, and in American left nostalgia, it is the golden age of

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<sup>84</sup> A recent gaffe by the anti-Obama right who have organized “tea party” demonstrations to evoke the legendary Boston Tea Party of 1773. Some demonstrators called what they were doing “tea bagging,” innocent of its pornographic meaning, a gaffe upon which comedians such as Jon Stewart instantly pounced.

freedom. Not so long ago the Evangelical Christians and the political right demonized the counter-culture and the 1960s for corrupting the Idyll of Eisenhower's conformist 1950s. For American conservatives, the 1950s are the golden age, the absolute past of certainty, the time before the Fall. For the American Left, the 1960s are the golden age of freedom. In his Farewell Address, President Ronald Reagan, echoed this sentiment. "You could get a sense of patriotism from the popular culture. The movies celebrated democratic values and implicitly reinforced the idea that America was special. TV was like that, too, through the midsixties [sic]" (Reagan 1989). In this excerpt from Reagan's speech, representation – mediation – is pushed to the front of politics, and there are far more references to culture industry products in his speech than there are historical references. Reagan was an actor before entering politics, a Hollywood creature, so his attention to film and television is understandable, but the investiture of media with the power to corrupt or create American identity shows that even at the highest level of political power the confusion of representation and represented is taken as given.

While there were some real changes in the 1960s as the result of political action, the Civil Rights and the anti-war movements in particular, the decline in the cultural hegemony of the "WASP Establishment" (Brooks 2000) had more to do with advertising than it did with political action. Reagan was mistaken: the change in popular culture began in the late 1950s on Madison Avenue. In his book, *The Conquest of Cool*, Thomas Frank demolishes both 1960s myths, documenting how it was the producers of popular culture that changed popular culture, not the consumers. The counter-culture was a media event, something that largely happened at concerts, on TV, in movies (Frank 1997, 8). Conformity was bad for the bottom line. A man only needed a very limited number of grey flannel suits.<sup>85</sup> Deviance from the

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<sup>85</sup> The grey flannel suit is a reference to a 1955 novel by Sloan Wilson and a popular 1956 film with the same title starring Gregory Peck. The story depicts the anonymity and sterile conformity of the business world of

perceived stifling conformity of the 1950s, was translated into “hip hegemony,” “...a cultural perpetual motion machine in which disgust with the falseness, shoddiness, and everyday oppression of consumer society could be enlisted to drive the ever-accelerating wheels of consumption” (Frank 1997, 31). Years before Debord wrote of détournement as a revolutionary tactic, the Doyle Dane Bernbach (DBB) agency was using it to sell Volkswagens, and in the process creating an icon of the 1960s. The 1959 ad campaign deliberately played up the Volkswagen’s ugliness, unchanging monotony, and small size parodying the inflated prose of car advertisements of the time. The “honesty” and self-deprecating humor of the ads played to consumer suspicion of car ads, investing this blatantly mass produced object with authenticity, thus transforming the Nazi car into the Love Bug<sup>86</sup> (Frank 1997, 67). DBB used consumer resistance to advertising, to the hype about the newest styles and models, to its advantage merely by reversing it. The tactic rapidly caught on and rebellion from the norm became one of the main sales pitches of the 1960s, and the recursiveness of advertising became fully established.<sup>87</sup>

As Evangelical Christians emerged in national politics, their discourse adopted a position of cultural resistance. Claims of discrimination in employment and in cultural practices were and are still common. Legal fights over issues like prayer in schools, the display of Christmas crèches on municipal property, and the display of the Ten Commandments in southern courthouses continue, with legal arguments using the exact same civil liberties statutes and precedents that were used in the great civil rights battles.

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the time and in the lives of the people who worked in it. The term “grey flannel suit” entered the language denoting oppressive conformity.

<sup>86</sup> “The Love Bug” is the title of a 1968 Disney film featuring a sentient – and cheeky – Volkswagen Beetle. It fully incorporates “hippie” signifiers in a fully “family” film. As an epitome of Ruskin’s “pathetic fallacy,” Herbie the Love Bug has an uncanny resemblance to this observation from Baudrillard’s *The System of Objects*. “We are taken as the object’s aim, and the object loves us. And because we are loved, we feel we exist” (Baudrillard 2005, 186).

<sup>87</sup> I owned one in the early 1980s, a 1973 model that perpetually leaked oil, had a broken heater, and a dodgy electrical system requiring that it be parked on a hill so it could be roll started.

Evangelicals have lost almost all these cases. Outside Evangelical circles, this argument of being a persecuted minority generates little sympathy, but considerable hostility.

I have argued that Evangelical Christians were a historically marginal social group. There is good evidence that their way of life, their distinctive culture is under threat, and perhaps it is in the process of vanishing entirely. “The Culture Wars” are a sort of mirage, a battle over the signifiers long after the referent of subsistence agriculture in isolated rural communities was abolished by development. Evangelical Christians as a subculture, as Hendershot calls them, shows them already inside the larger culture. This tension over signifiers is the distinguishing feature. The stakes, can be dire, even cosmic, and it used in sales pitches. The Truth T-Shirt Company explicitly describes Witness Wear(ers) as “walking billboards,” and paints the display of messages on T-shirts in dire, even cosmic terms:

The enemy is creative and will use anything he can to bring darkness into the world, even something as simple as a t-shirt. Why wear “witness wear”? We wear “witness wear” because our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.<sup>88</sup>

This is an apocalyptic sales pitch -- to sell T-shirts. Considering the absolute cosmic stakes in this pitch, the call to arms, to fight the powers of darkness, the rulers, and authorities, is to buy a T-shirt and become a walking billboard. The action is display. It shows a faith in the power of advertising as do the other pitches for Witness Wear examined here. The battle is to be fought T-shirt vs. T-shirt, sign vs. sign, not face to face.

This pitch does not appear to be the most common for Christian branded clothing, but it is selling the same items as the peppier pitches of Christian witness or Christian style.

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<sup>88</sup> <http://thetruthtshirtcompany.com/blog/2009/08/19/why-wear-witness-wear/>



While the effectiveness of these pitches is impossible to determine, the fact that Witness Wear sells does indicate that these narratives have some sort of resonance. There are many pitches for the same commodity. Another pitch shows another syncretic attempt. “This shirt has a design parodying Superman. “Jesus Christ - The First Superhero. By customer demand, we have also made this great christian [sic]shirt with the slogan 'the only superhero' as well.”<sup>89</sup> Literary critic James Twitchell demonstrates how advertisers have long borrowed religious language and symbolism to sell cars, hotels rooms, or even photocopy machines (Twitchell 2004). Often these ads were attacked as sacrilege, but this odd reversal, borrowing the story of Superman, a comic book character, makes one wonder. Syncreticism in advertising is always subterfuge; the attachment to a product (or brand) a familiar story that is alien to whatever it is that is being advertised. Religions syncreticism is an attempt to reconcile different, often contradictory beliefs, which would create the absurd reconciliation of belief in Jesus Christ to belief in Superman. The number of designs that borrow from popular culture runs to the tens of thousands, which seems to indicate an attempt to reconcile Evangelical Christianity with popular culture as a whole.

The term Witness Wear borrows from apparel marketing forms, e.g. sportswear, yogaware, leisurewear, and so on, that create niche markets for specialized clothing for specific purposes. Adopting, even ironically, this marketing scheme gives Witness Wear an equivalent value to the other “wares.” The full scale adoption of contemporary marketing strategies and discourse appears to be an utter capitulation to “the world” on the part of Evangelical Christians, or at least as far as the commodity world is concerned. Many of the pitches show an urge toward conformity, such as this one, featuring the insipid “smiley face” once ubiquitous in 1970s popular culture: “Smile! Your Mom Chose Life! These pro-life gifts proclaim a positive message. It shows you can wear anti-abortion clothing without being

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<sup>89</sup> Taken from [www.christianshirts.net](http://www.christianshirts.net). This particular shirt sells for \$14.95 and is describes as a “limited edition.”

accused of intolerance!” The variety of pitches for T-shirts make it difficult to determine which motivation, marketing the T-shirt, video game, or heavy metal CD, or evangelizing Christianity is more important to the vendors of these commodities.

The contradiction is only apparent. There is no gap between God and Mammon. In the earlier chapter on The Second Great Awakening and the theological revolution described there, I discussed the role of Methodist organizational tactics as well as the religious apology for capitalism. This is its legitimating function for the economic order required by Luckmann’s secularization hypothesis. Indeed companies that produce Evangelical Christian commodities see advertising their product as religious duty so closely is the sales pitch tied to the evangelizing message (Hendershot 2004). This shouldn’t be so surprising considering the common origins of the sales pitch and the Arminian call to choose salvation in the camp meetings of the Second Great Awakening. There is an identity between commerce and religion in Christian marketing, and this identity shows that even the most socially conservative see no boundary between religion and economics.

The intention of marketing is to create demand, i.e. desire, for a commodity. Both consumer and Christian desire are insatiable. Theologian Vincent Jude Miller sees this close similarity as a vexing problem for Christianity for the structuring of desire in the form of consumer practices threatens to “sidetrack [Christianity] in subtle but profound ways” (V. J. Miller 2003, 107). For Miller advertising has a particular disciplining role on the consumer, what he calls “the practice of ads.” Like religious practices, the practice of ads through activities such as catalogue browsing and window shopping has an imaginary function when while looking at advertisements, we imagine the possibilities owning the commodity would enable in our lives. “Rare is the religious practitioner who repeats a prayer or mantra as often in a day as the average person engages an ad” (ibid 125). With Evangelical Christian

commodities, at least as pitched, consumer practice becomes Christian practice, the snake finally swallowing its tail and vanishing into one of many lifestyles.

## 4.8 Hall of Mirrors

This chapter examined the effect of commodification on conceptions of reality, both ultimate and otherwise. Specific attention was paid to medieval aesthetics to show a situation of congruence between the articulation the sacred cosmos of institutional religion and everyday life. This is in contrast to the very private, ad hoc sacred cosmos of the contemporary “autonomous” individual who approaches ultimate meaning as a consumer. In the case of Evangelical Christians, Christianity has been converted to a brand of commodities otherwise identical to other “secular” commodities.

Commodities are poorly suited to being repositories of ultimate truth being first fungible, and second inherently deceptive as fetishized objects concealing their origins and the social relations that produced them. Further, the advertising that generates demand for these commodities promises the consumer transformation and even salvation, albeit of a temporary, secular nature. Since the Second World War commodity structure has colonized American culture entirely, even commodifying resistance to commodity structure as a selling point for more commodities. Developments in media, such as film, radio, television, and now the Internet infringe on the domain of institutional religion providing an overwhelming variety of competitors in ultimate significance.

Ultimate reality has been privatized, both in the sense that the individual is free to decide for him or herself what it is and in the sense that commodified fragments of significance are available from private vendors to satisfy the need to create a tentative version of the sacred cosmos at home. As fungibles, the commodity has no necessary function or meaning and is dependent on the consumer to assign significance to it. The difficulty is that as a matter of dubious personal choice between mass produced commodities, the individual

as agent is negated through the loss of a shared world of transcendent meaning. What was collective and whole and powerful, is now atomized, isolated, and impotent. The consumer of ultimate meaning cannot participate in the production, but must choose from the menu, in an infinite, mechanical progression of menus.

## 5.0 Conclusion

If there was something as silly as a “culture war” going on between Evangelical Christian culture and secular popular culture, Evangelicals have been utterly defeated. Their rural communities have been broken up, home production in the form of subsistence agriculture is not even nostalgia, and their small churches have given way to the mall-megachurch where their songs are no longer sung. The separate educational system of Bible institutes have largely adopted liberal arts curricula in order to gain accreditation, i.e. official respectability from a system of public educational authorities they denounced in earlier decades as inherently corrupt and corrupting. In politics their leaders make common cause with the Catholic Church on issues like birth control and abortion, the former foreign bogey and agent of Satan, now a strategic ally. Their Apocalyptic hope becomes a best-selling thriller, but the just society of the righteous does not come. The definitive speech act of witnessing reduces to the display of signs becoming fashion and advertising. Separated from its practice, Evangelical Christians are another marketing demographic, a consumer identity, a universe of ultimate meaning to be concocted by the subject in private.

There is no question that Evangelical Christian practices have significantly changed in the last four decades. Luckmann states that religions institutions in times of rapid social change struggle to keep the “official” religious like relevant to believers whose lives are dominated by other institutions of functional rationality (82-83). The hyperacceleration of cultural fragmentation in postmodernity has reduced religious institutions to secondary status in competition to other secondary institutions for articulating ultimate meaning. As has been

shown in section 2.1, the megachurch format borrows heavily from the “competition” for its cultural forms, and the emergence of Brand Jesus changes Christian practice into consumer practice. Changes in practice indicate changes in the other components that make up identity. In Bourdieu’s formulation, practice is the result of this formula: [(habitus)(capital)] + field = practice. Changes in the field have been discussed at great length, and the discussion of commodification in the preceding chapter indicates enormous pressure on habitus, the dispositions, schema etc. that guide subjectivity. From the evidence available this can only be inferred. Yet the radical changes in the material conditions of life have been so overwhelming in the past 40 years it would be very difficult to argue that there have been no changes in habitus or subjectivity as a result. Fragmentation in time and space, with domains governed by functional logic increasingly make it impossible for an individual to have a public identity, leaving the individual alone to come up with their selves in private with whatever odds and ends are available to create unstable models of ultimate significance.

Rural oblivion and separation tactics protected this island of the Evangelical Christianity of the early republic, the Age of Jackson, the Jeffersonian independent small farmer, all of which are features of mythic resonance. The “coming out” of this concrete society into the public world, was coincidental with historical processes that transformed American society and social life into its current postmodern incarnation. This was no mere coincidence. I have argued that their territory in a very real sense was invaded and overrun by the extension of the postmodern American city, a process that made physical separation no longer a viable tactic. One of the features of the postmodern city is that it is no longer a center of production as the modern city was, but rather a center of consumption. The commodity structure has fully penetrated even the remotest areas, areas that had been able to produce local life worlds that had some level of autonomy.

The collision between American commodity culture and indigenous cultures in the United States has never worked out very well for the weaker party. Most tragic has been the plight of Native Americans whose indigenous languages are vanishing at an alarming rate. Languages constitute worlds according to Wittgenstein. Evangelical Christians are qualitatively different from Native Americans and the cultural challenge is far less devastating, but the process is the same. The move into the public, i.e. urban media world apparently was motivated by a strategy of conversion, to use the commodity as a means of changing popular culture to Evangelical culture. This is an unusual response for a marginal culture challenged by a more powerful one, and the effort proved to have been Quixotic. Yet there is a certain logic to this. I have argued along with Luckmann that the “hidden religion” of the United States, its social, not institutional religion, the cult of the individual is a basic belief, and this individual is strongly influenced by Arminism, the omnipotence of the willing individual. Hence a strategy of conversion of individuals through marketing is not a deviance from Evangelical principles but an extension of them. But lacking a structural critique, the movement was hamstrung. None of the narrow political goals, such as reversing legalized abortion, have been achieved. The foray into politics was disastrous, earning the Christian brand a nasty stigma of intolerance, hatred, and even violence.

There is considerable evidence that within Evangelical Christianity there is a generational shift to abandon the strategy of confrontation and conversion, to a strategy of accommodation and cooperation. Within the millions of Evangelicals a return to separatism is not discussed. The strident absolutism of leaders like Jerry Falwell, has been somewhat replaced by the social justice ethic of leaders like Rick Warren. In the 2008 national election, religious and cultural issues barely came into play at all. Mark Pinsky, a religion writer for the *Orlando Sentinel* observed that “suburban families trying to get their kids into college don’t believe that the earth is only a few thousand years old, and they don’t join crusades to



post the Ten Commandments in courthouses” (Quoted in Fitzgerald 2008). A 2008 CBS poll showed the the most important issue for white Evangelicals was fighting poverty with abortion lagging in a distant second.<sup>90</sup> While this may show more wishful thinking on the part of cultural elites that Evangelicals are turning into liberals, the fact that major pastors like Warren and political candidates like former Arkansas governor and Evangelical pastor Mike Huckabee are stressing social justice and environmental issues and refraining from the confrontational rhetoric of the old guard shows there is a release of tension. According to Francis Fitzgerald this new generation seeks to end the culture wars and the attachment of Evangelical Christians as the “useful idiots” of the Republican Party.

According to the Pew Forum for Religion and Public Life, the effect on the outcome of the 2008 election was marginal with only a slight shift of Evangelical Protestants to the Democrats. Younger Evangelical voters were far more likely to have voted for Obama as were the 18-30 year-old demographic group in general. While none of the surveys on the 2008 election show much of a shift in party affiliation, this may take some time to play out. This generation of “Millennials,” defined by the Pew Forum as being born after 1980 has grown up in postmodernity with the Internet, GPS devices, and mobile communications devices a matter of fact than of innovation. The wild speculation and scaremongering about the effect of these new media on this Millennial generation only shows an awareness that the new media are changing the world and a high level of anxiety regarding the accelerated pace of social change. Indicators like the MRI American Kids Survey show very rapid adoption of the latest communications technology by children. The effect that these technologies will have on people’s experience of space and time are most likely to follow that of other electronic media in further fragmenting both. These new electronic media may bring into existence new social fields such as social networking, but it is likely that older social fields

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<sup>90</sup> Cited in “Evangelicals a Liberal Can Love,” By NICHOLAS D. KRISTOF. *The New York Times*, February 3, 2008

based on place will lose much of their coherence. Primary religious institutions are very likely to continue losing influence competing with these new secondary institutions that provide ultimate meanings, particularly in a situation where these media can hyperfragment time and space.

The 2010 Pew Research Center report on the Millennials finds that they are significantly less religiously affiliated than previous generations in their age cohort with 26% declaring themselves unaffiliated to the Baby Boomer level of 13% at the same age. The report also finds significantly lower levels of religious commitment in terms of attendance and a far higher tolerance of difference, e.g. homosexuals, than previous generations. Other marked generational differences include higher levels of education, lower rates of marriage, and lower birth rate (Pew Research Center 2010). A 2010 study by the Population Reference Bureau estimates that births to minority mothers will outnumber those to white mothers by 2012.<sup>91</sup> While these studies are inconclusive, they do indicate a progression to a much different America to the one known in the heyday of the Evangelical movement. The less educated, white, family with young children is in demographic decline.

The vanishing of Evangelical Christianity into the commodity world of popular culture shows both the power of commodification to absorb everything as well as the plasticity of postmodern religion. As culture becomes completely commodified, previously public fields such as religion are relegated to the private sphere where the individual is a consumer, choosing between fragments of sacred universes. Sacred and profane are hierarchical relationships of meaning, determining truth relationships. The leveling of the semantic field leads to a “Humpty Dumpty<sup>92</sup>” approach to the sacred makes heresy impossible, but it extends far beyond religious orthodoxy to any matter of belief and truth.

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<sup>91</sup> Cited in Sam Roberts, “Births to Minorities Are Approaching Majority in U.S.,” *The New York Times*, 11 March 2010. Accessed 13 March 2010.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/12/us/12census.html?scp=1&sq=minorities&st=cse>

<sup>92</sup> This is from Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*, Chapter Four. ‘When I use a word,’ Humpty Dumpty said, in rather a scornful tone, ‘it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less.’

The vanishing metanarratives are best exemplified by what has happened to religion. Everyone has the right to their own opinion no matter how baseless it is. If it is private, a matter of individual opinion, then there is no standard, no catechism against which it can be challenged.

This is in itself a religious belief, the belief that the individual has free will and that his or her choices are valid, authentic expression of that will. This individual functions as a monad, a unified, God-like will that determines meaning. This peculiar dogma, while validating individual agency, also cancels collective agency. Comparing the role of “the market” in late capitalism to Hobbes figure of the all-powerful Leviathan who rules through complete domination, Frederic Jameson writes of this consoling replacement for divinity, “Market ideology assures us that human beings make a mess of it when they try to control their destinies (“socialism is impossible”) and that we are fortunate in possessing an interpersonal mechanism – the market – which can substitute for human hubris and planning and replace human decisions altogether” (Jameson 1990, 273). This collective surrender to the will of the market, a mindless collectivity of individual wills, is a transformation of the individual subject into the object of the market, which itself has no will. The market is a sort of anti-God, a nullification of the divine monad that assigns meaning to the world. But the encroachment of the nihilistic market on previously autonomous areas of culture, commodifying the margins and niches is an expansion Jameson believes no longer leaves any outside position from which to launch a critique. Here is a diabolical contradiction: the more the individual is empowered to decide for him or herself, his subjectivity, under the omnipotent market transforms him into an object, the consumer. While a domesticated middleclass deviance expands the menu of ultimate meanings, actual transgression becomes impossible, or even criminal. In a 2000 lecture Baudrillard suggests a passive revolutionary

strategy of the consumer-object refusing to choose, to bring down the structure through revolutionary indifference.

In Western civilization Christianity has often taken the position of antithesis to social or political situations, playing the role of outsider, criticizing power on ethical grounds. This is a task for which it appears to be no longer able. In past times churches and religious leaders were instrumental in social movements. Figures such as Martin Luther King and John Rankin were able to use their moral status as ministers and Christian arguments for wider social causes. Leaders like Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson were unable to reach beyond their Evangelical circles to enlist support for their causes proving more divisive than unifying. Current figures like Rick Warren lack the moral authority of King and Rankin as well as the bellicose tone of Falwell and Robertson. Even though Warren largely preaches a social justice ethic, his invitation to give the invocation at Barak Obama's inauguration attracted widespread criticism from the left. While there are still activist churches and church leaders, the millennial rhetoric that evoked a shared vision of a better world fails to resonate in postmodern America.

Vincent Jude Miller sees the substitution of consumer desire for religious desire as eviscerating the potential for religion as a political force. The eschatological hope for justice to come, an irruption of an unexpected future and judgment on the inadequacies of the present constantly challenges the temptation to gloss over the injustices of current society (V. J. Miller 2003, 131). The "derailing" of Christian eschatology through the constant radical transformation promised by commodity marketing makes the inadequacy of the status quo something taken for granted rather than something to be challenged and redressed. The replacement of religious practice by consumer practice "...makes the moment of choice the fundamental means of self actualization... This results in a divorce between belief and practice, as people sincerely and mistakenly assume that they are acting on the beliefs they

are choosing” (V. J. Miller 2003, 225). The erosion of boundaries between religion and consumption makes it very difficult to see contemporary American religion, including Evangelical Christianity, as anything other than a leisure time activity.

Miller’s argument that consumer religion derails eschatology is the most potent criticism of postmodern, “secular” religion. Luckmann describes the consumer basis of the hidden religion, and it’s relegation to the private sphere as irreversible. Primary religious institutions and religious experts are in terminal decline, now competing as secondary cultural institutions whose forms now dominate. The inadequacy of the status quo is not only taken for granted and necessary for the functioning of consumer capitalism, it is also the way things should be. This is a monistic point of view, although a strange one. Individual salvation offers a way out, but at the same time excludes the immanent arrival of a just society. Frederic Jameson writes of the disappearance of utopia and utopian movements in postmodernity.

The market Leviathan Jameson describes may be the God of this hidden religion, but this God is brainless. This religion has no teleology, no ultimate goal or purpose toward which society is working. Complete reification results in the replacement of telology by teleonomy, the “partial systems” Lukacs writes about which automate the position of the individual in society as much as do programming codes for machines, or the genetic potential for living organism to reproduce themselves. With ultimate meaning reduced to the private sphere, society runs on automatic according teleonomic logic, the “system,” although a historical artifact and therefore mutable, becomes “the way things are,” ossified as the real world. “inner freedom presupposes that the world cannot be changed” (Lukacs 193).

Wade Clark Roof’s contention that American religion has taken a subjective turn is a step away from an engaged religion oriented toward God or to others. Instead religion has turned inward, towards cultivating the individual’s own development mirroring the personal

growth focus of popular culture since the 1960s. It can be argued that religion in America has just changed with the times as “consumer culture” has attained hegemony in line with Luckmann’s formulation of secularization. Religious revivals also run out of steam, lose their militant edge and become institutionalized. Since 2005 Evangelical Christians have rapidly lost their political visibility, with the current “Tea Party” populist movement having no religious component at all despite its otherwise conservative agenda.

Christianity has proven itself to be remarkably adaptable, and it is not that much of a stretch to argue that the underlying cosmology of Western culture is Christian emanating from the foundational writing of St. Augustine. Anthropologist Marshall Sahlins claims that Augustine’s doctrine of Original Sin, and the belief that man inherently wicked is a form of self-contempt, that “...does not appear to be a general preoccupation of humanity” (Sahlins 1996, 396). Using examples from non-Western cultures Sahlins argues that this self-loathing is unique to Western civilization. Wicked human nature, the love of self over love of God, is transformed in the Enlightenment, into the paradoxical arguments of Liberals like Adam Smith where the sum of “Private Vices” is “Publick Benefits” (Ibid 397). The ramifications of this transformation described by Sahlins are beyond the scope of this conclusion, except that the acceptance of evil as good results in a sublimation of evil in Western capitalist culture (ibid 398). Above all, man in this cosmology remains needy and insatiable, missing the one thing, proximity to God, which he cannot have in this world, and the market serves as a mechanism to satisfy these needs and desires, albeit temporarily.

Sahlins’ argument grounds the self-interested rational actor, man’s “second nature” in Lukacs’ discussion of reification, in historical contingency. But without the frenzy of the Second Great Awakening, this second nature, individual man as the agent, would not have fully taken root. The ideology of “freedom of choice” stems from the transformation of Protestantism in the United States from Calvinism to Arminianism, without which the

American Dream would never have formed. In a sense the commodification of Evangelical identity is the latest episode, perhaps the final episode, of the mutual relationship between religion and capitalism in the United States. The banal ubiquity of religion in everyday life is equivalent to the banality of religion in the United States. This commonplace “second nature” of humanity and the general acceptance of the everyday brutality under consumer capitalism is, in Hannah Arendt’s famous subtitle to *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, a “banality of evil”<sup>93</sup>.

Equating consumers to Eichmann is extreme, and intentionally so. The total reified society running according to its teleonomy, the partial systems of the rational rules of the way things are not only negates individual agency, but also involves, and implicates everyone in the vast damage to human life, the environment, and social structure itself. The absolute consequences of global capitalism have been astonishingly disruptive and damaging. Far from bringing about social equality, increased leisure, and in general a better world, in the United States at least hourly wages have consistently dropped since 1973, income inequality has vastly increased, yearly working hours have topped 2000 (In Germany the average work-year is 1550 hours), life expectancy in certain demographic groups is declining, and job security is nostalgia grandparents speak about. This entirely leaves out the effect of global capitalism on “developing” countries, such as the Congo where rare minerals used in mobile phones have financed civil wars that have killed millions. Arendt writes that Eichmann was normal, and that it was impossible for him to understand that he was doing wrong. This is exactly the position that consumers are in, each act of consumption has evil consequences somewhere out of sight. Baudrillard writes of the control mechanism of deterrence, that

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<sup>93</sup> I use scare quotes here to refer to the subtitle of Hannah Arendt’s book about the Nazi genocide of the Jews and the trial of Adolph Eichmann, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on Banality of Evil*. In the concluding pages, she states: “The trouble with Eichmann was precisely that so many were like him, and that many were neither perverted nor sadistic, that they were, and still are, terribly and terrifyingly normal...this normality was much more terrifying than all the atrocities put together.” It was more terrifying as the trial tried a new type of criminal, who ...”commits his crimes under circumstances that make it well-nigh impossible for him to know or feel that he is doing wrong” (Arendt 1963).

which replaces Foucault's discipline. The fear of social revolution to remake society violently, makes people put up with an otherwise intolerable situation.

I never had any fondness for Evangelical Christians. Attending a high school in an area dominated by powerful evangelical churches, my attested atheism attracted considerable witnessing, and occasional efforts at violent conversion. I've since come to better appreciate that rural Southern social milieu from which they came, particularly as it has been paved over and buried under Wal-Marts and Kentucky Fried Chicken franchises. The rationalization of their religious practices into commodities, and absorption into urban secular culture further impoverishes an already impoverished land. I think of Flannery O'Connor's "Old Man," and his insistence on being his whole free self, not information. This is one of the most eloquent attacks against reification on a personal level, even if it is a violent rejection of education and urban life.

Marxist points of view are always engaged and teleological. At a point in time where "real existing socialism" is no more and capital is global, where has the revolution got to? It is quite clear that the "end of history" trumpeted by Francis Fukuyama at the end of the Cold War hasn't happened, and the current economic chaos points out that the reified partial systems, the teleonomy of late capitalism isn't quite as permanent and impenetrable as Baudrillard and others would suggest. But for a new birth of freedom, a structural change to society requires changes in the hidden religion which puts ultimate meaning in the private sphere. The goal of social justice cannot be achieved individually, but only collectively. Such a religion where the object becomes the subject of history would be an antithetical religion that confronts social institutions, the code, the Leviathan, and the nihilism of postmodern society to invest it once again with telos.

It is practically conventional wisdom on the left to attack any teleological view of history and utopian aspirations as dangerous lunacy. Philosopher John Gray writes in *Black*



*Mass*, “The hope of Utopia spilt blood on a scale that traditional creeds cannot match, and the world is well rid of it” (Gray 2007, 209). The book, rather crudely, asserts that collective attempts to make things better always make things worse. Gray advocates a politics of “realism” asserting that “the pursuit of harmony envisions a form of life that humans cannot live” (ibid 198). Leaving aside for a moment the Gray’s utopian straw man, the abdication from social agency required by the abandonment of teleology leaves real historical processes to run unchecked according to the mindless code. Gray’s ridiculous conception is that evil is a product of human attempts to do good, ignoring the indifferent, everyday evil that results from humans not intervening in historical processes.

Jameson points out that while utopian projects have always “failed” in the sense that they were never fully realized, history progresses through failure. Utopian thinking is the horizon of possibility; it is not something achievable in the here and now but only as the negation of the here and now. It is not so much the feasibility of Utopia that matters as is the ability to envision something other, something better than the here and now. The extinction of modernist utopian vision doesn’t stop history, does not prevent disasters or suffering at all. The abdication of agency ensures at least the preservation of the status quo of injustice but also entails a passivity and de facto acceptance of things getting worse on their own. Evangelical Christians were quite right to attack secular culture for moral relativism even as they adapted themselves to postmodern nihilism. The here and now is unacceptable and this view is a majority one in the United States. Yet this is accepted with bovine passivity as there exists no utopian vision of what the here and now should be, much less the consciousness that this reality is a social construct. This is Lukacs vision, the only way to overcome reification is this consciousness that as a social construct reality itself can be changed.

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## Index

### A

Adorno, Theodor 7, 9, 64, 76, 90, 129, 153, 154, 155, 160, 164  
agency, 1, 2, 33, 49, 53, 54, 60, 77, 97, 129, 141, 154, 155, 157, 161, 181, 192, 196, 198  
aggressive driving, 111  
American Dream, 48, 51, 53, 59, 64, 68, 196, 202  
apocalypticism, 65, 69  
Arendt, Hannah, 196  
Arminian, 2, 3, 10, 12, 24, 51, 53, 55, 62, 63, 64, 94, 104, 184  
Auerbach, Erich, 135, 147, 149  
Augustine, 5, 49, 53, 86, 135, 145, 195  
aura, 142, 143, 151, 159, 165, 168, 171  
authenticity, 16, 18, 64, 77, 84, 94, 95, 100, 101, 142, 143, 149, 151, 159, 171, 172, 181

### B

Bakhtin, Mikhail 14, 86, 87, 89, 90, 95, 96, 110, 116, 136, 137, 140, 178  
Barthes, Roland, 138, 148, 166, 167, 171  
Baudrillard, Jean 22, 75, 94, 128, 129, 145, 149, 151, 155, 156, 157, 158, 172, 177, 181, 192, 196, 197  
Bellah, Robert 50, 56, 62  
Billy Mays, 164  
Brand Jesus, 176  
bumper stickers, 108, 110, 122

### C

Calvin, John, 54, 58, 68, 140, 141, 142, 146  
carnavalesque, 14, 89, 90, 116, 134, 178  
catechism, 25, 55, 59, 62, 152, 192  
Christian bookstore, 125, 127, 176  
Christian desire, 184  
coffeetalk, 91  
commodity sign, 18, 128, 129  
cool hunting, 161  
cultural commodity, 152, 163, 164  
culture industry, 9, 78, 101, 153, 154, 156, 158, 161, 166, 172, 180

### D

Darwin Fish, 111, 112, 113, 114, 116  
Debord, Guy, 9, 166, 171, 178, 180  
de-commodification, 116, 156, 157, 160, 165  
détournement, 171, 180  
Difference (and Otherness), 173  
dispersal phenomenon, 73  
domestication of deviance, 172  
Durkheim, Emile  
    Definition of religion, 27

### E

*Elmer Gantry*, 99

eschatology  
    as a political force, 3

### F

Family Christian Stores, 91, 124, 125, 176  
Fanon, Franz, 94  
flâneur, 78, 79, 80, 83, 93  
Flannery O'Connor  
    *The Violent Bear it Away*, 12  
flexible accumulation, 83, 130  
floating signifier, 113, 114, 129, 177  
forum, 87, 114, 116  
Frank, Thomas, 165  
Frankfurt School, 154, 155

### G

*gentrification.*, 83  
ghettos of sameness, 85  
glocalization, 131

### H

Harvey, David, 19, 29, 78, 84, 130, 131, 157, 202  
hip hegemony, 180

### I

identity, 1, 10, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 30, 31, 32, 42, 43, 46, 71, 77, 79, 81, 82, 85, 86, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 100, 104, 110, 111, 114, 117, 118, 121, 122, 124, 171, 172, 173, 180, 184, 187, 188, 196  
identity politics, 95  
illusion of place, 82  
informalization, 90  
Ironic usage, 178

### J

Jameson, Frederic, 16, 19, 21, 29, 96, 113, 128, 145, 153, 172, 192, 194, 198, 202

### L

Lears, Jackson, 49, 104, 156, 170  
*Left Behind*, 13, 66, 125, 127, 161, 163  
Leviathan, 192  
Lincoln, Abraham 68  
linear perspective, 147, 149  
logo, 106, 110, 113, 114, 115, 129  
Luckmann, Thomas 1, 3, 8, 26, 31, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 69, 174, 184, 187, 189, 194, 195, 203

### M

Manifest Destiny, 67  
McLuhan, Marshall, 150, 151, 152, 155  
megachurch, 15, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 41, 43, 175  
Mencken, H.L. 72  
Millennials, 190



mimesis, 134, 149  
multiculturalism, 95

## N

Native American, 101  
no place, 91

## P

parody, 111, 112, 113, 116, 117, 118, 135, 171, 177, 178  
*Passion of the Christ*, 148, 162  
post-industrial society, 9  
premillennial dispensationalism, 66  
private sphere, 17, 20, 27, 44, 191, 194, 197  
product differentiation, 170  
purgatory industry, 139

## Q

quoted speech, 109

## R

rational choice, 4  
Reagan, Ronald, 180  
real, 151  
re-commodification, 157, 160, 161  
recursion, 153  
reification, 5, 8, 201, 202  
relics, 142, 143, 144, 150, 156, 168  
res publica, 86  
risk society, 96  
Roof, Wade Clark, 15, 17, 29, 33, 47, 62, 97, 168, 194

## S

Sahlins, Marshall, 195

Scientism, 112

second nature

Lukacs, 8

separation.

Evangelical institutions, 11

St. Denis, Abbey Church, 134, 136, 146, 147, 151, 165

*Star Trek*, 153, 157

Starrett, Gregory, 131, 178

suburbs, 73

supercessionism, 67

Syncreticism, 183

## T

Tea Party, 195

teleonomy, 68, 129, 194, 196

transgression, 88, 89, 90, 116, 192

## V

voluntarism, 48, 50, 53, 55, 56, 59, 60, 64, 65, 68, 94, 168

## W

Warren, Rick, 40, 41, 148, 189, 190, 193

WASP, 100, 101, 102, 180

Wesley, John, 48, 49, 50, 55, 56, 60

Winthrop, John, 57

witnessing, 10, 11, 18, 92, 93, 121, 122, 175

Wittgenstein, 104

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 111, 147, 189, 205

## Z

zone of dialogical contact, 87

zones of control, 119

## **Sinopsis doktorske disertacije**

### **Poblagovljenje evangeličanske identitete**

»Ponovno se vrnimo k naravnemu stanju, kot da bi ravnokar izšli iz zemlje in nenadoma tako kot gobe dozoreli ne glede na medsebojne odnose.«

Thomas Hobbes, De Cive 1642

V pričujoči razpravi se ukvarjam z vplivom kulturnega poblagovljenja religiozne identitete evangeličanov v Združenih državah Amerike. Ugotavljam, da je rezultat poblagovljenja omenjene subkulture »normalizacija« evangeličanov. S tem hočem reči, da jih je absorbirala potrošniška kultura in da so zaradi tega izgubili osnovne značilnosti subkulture kot take. S tem ko so evangeličani množično sprejeli sekularne pojme in objekte, kot so televizijski programi, ceneni trilerji, knjige o zdravi prehrani, popularna glasba in moda, so se identificirali s potrošniško družbo in sprejeli iste navade kot druge potrošniške identitete.

Raziskava poblagovljenja evangeličanske identite odpira vrsto epistemoloških problemov, ki niso izraženi jasni in natančno. Eden od njih je deskriptivna moč izraza »evangeličanski«.

Slednjega pogosto uporablja intelektualna elita, ko hoče opisati določeno vrsto ameriškega kristjana. Pripadniki evangeličanske vere pa tak opis zavračajo. Drugi ameriški kristjani, ki jih ne uvršamo med evangeličane, pa vztrajajo pri rabi tega izraza. Glagol evangelizirati ima

striktno religiozen pomen širjenja evangelijske božje besede v protestanskem diskurzu, čeprav na splošno izraz pomeni bojevito gorečnost, kako spremeniti način razmišljanja. Morda je najbolj razločen značaj krščanskega evangeličana evangelizacija, torej spreobrnitev neodrešenih, da postanejo kristjani, po drugi strani pa je tovrsten čustven način prepričevanja tipičen za ameriško politiko oglaševanja in trženja. Ta podobnost ni zgolj naključna, tako religiozni kot sekularni evangelizem imata isti izvor v zgodnjih obdobjih republike, ko se je ameriška kultura soočala z razvojem, ki jo je ločeval od evropskih prednikov. To je precej problematično za analizo, kajti ločevanje krščanskih evangeličanov od njihove lastne kulture je nemogoče. Neinstitucionalna socialna oblika religije (oz. po Lucmanovi terminologiji svetovni nazor) vsebuje elemente tega preporoda, ki vsebuje versko individualnost in evangelizem kot tak. To pomeni, da je celo najbolj vnet ameriški ateist po svojem osebnem prepričanju, antinomianizmu in trenutni usmerjenosti – evangeličan.

Ameriško religijo raziskujem na dveh nivojih: kot primarno versko institucijo in kot izvedence, ki jasno artikulirajo sveti prostor kot tudi socialno religijo, ki je neartikuliran svetovni družbeni nazor kot tak. Za sociologe, še posegej v ZDA, se ti dve religiji pogosto prepletata in povzročata nemalo nejasnosti, ki pogosto rezultirajo v banalnih raziskavah, čeprav vemo, da so statistične metodologije v ZDA zelo izpopolnjene. Ena od težav je separacija povprečnega družbenega okolja (socialna religija) od skupine vernikov, ki pripadajo intelektualni eliti, ki jih imenuje evangeličani. Tako družbeno okolje, mitologija zlate dobe zgodnje republike, je ciljna publika na političnem (in komercialnem) področju za vsakogar, ki želi vplivati na širše množice. Je ena izmed glavnih legitimnih trditev, ki jo uporabljajo konzervativne krščanske skupine, ki zagovarjajo načelo, da predstavljajo nepodkupljivo, resnično Ameriko. To lahko utemeljimo s tem, da tisti, ki jih poimenujemo

evangeličani, prevladujejo v ruralnem okolju, v katerega je urban in moderen življenjski tempo posegel v preteklih desetletjih. Trenutna napetost, ki jo imenujemo kulturna vojna, je odmev razkola med urbanim in ruralnim oziroma med industrijsko in agrokulturno družbo. Hkrati je to odmev, kajti obe dihotomiji ne obstajata, ker sta razpadli v postmodernem času.

Specifični elementi evangeličanskega okolja so bistvenega pomena za razvoj potrošniškega kapitalizma. Prepričanje v lastno zmožnost, torej da ima posameznik svobodno voljo in z njo lahko vpliva na svoj položaj, izvira že iz arminijanske soteriologije in je ena izmed ključnih ideoloških potez za reprodukcijo kapitalizma. Antinomija ima svoj izvor v reformaciji, ki je odpravila kler in Cerkev kot posrednika med vernikom in Bogom, toda ameriška verzija temelji na tem, da vsak posameznik intuitivno odloča o večnih resnicah. Zadnji izmed teh elementov je trenutna usmerjenost v apokalipso, kar povzroča, da so ljudje usmerjeni k obljubam prihodnosti in da preteklost ni tako pomembna. Slednji element je popolnoma antikonzervativen, tukaj mislim na konzervativizem, ki ga je zagovarjal Edmund Burke v knjigi *Reflections on the Revolution in France*; knjiga je zelo nastrojena proti liberalizmu. Ironija ameriškega konzervativizma je, da so njegovi zagovorniki liberalni, proti povečevanju preteklosti, kot tudi proti medsebojni dolžnosti, ki ju Burke omenja v svojem manifestu. Medtem ko moderna doba svetu odvzame čarobnost, mu jo evangeličanski svet povrne, kar je pogoj za potrošniški kapitalizem. Potrošniška kultura ima krščanske korenine; njihovo trženje in oglaševanje vplivata na krščanske prakse.

Arminijanska doktrina odrešitve na podlagi osebne odločitve oziroma »priznavanje Jezusa« je to, kar teolog Tom Beaudoin opisuje kot najpogostejšo obliko krščanske herezije v Ameriki (Beaudoin 2003, 39). Tako dejanje se pogosto izvaja v ekstatični spreobrnitvi, ki je

stanje, močno nabito s čustvi, kjer gre za magično preobrazbo iz prekletstva v odrešitev. Oglaševalske obljube pogosto ponujajo podobno preobrazbo. Potrošništvo združuje pričakovanje in odlog. Upoštevajoč teologa Vincenta Juda Millerja takšna napačna usmeritev verskih želja iztira krščansko eshatologijo in jo kot politično moč nevtralizira. »Apokaliptično hrepenenje«, ki še zdaleč ni obup, ima moč, da uniči in oporeka nepravilnostim sodobne družbe in ponudi takojšnjo možnost pravičnega (V. J. Miller, 2003).

Institucionalno religijo, kot trdi Luckman, služi kot antiteza družbi in državi, s tem ko trdi, da se je ta oddaljila od duhovne poti in jo uporabljamo kot katalizator za spremembo družbene strukture (Luckmann, 1967, 67). Druge socialne religije ne morejo opravljati te funkcije, ker niso koherentne in jim primanjkuje institucionalna baza, ki lahko bila protiargument posvetni moči. Privatizacija religije, še zlasti v Ameriki daje religijo na stranski tir, tako da izgubi svojo javno ali politično funkcijo. S tem ji daje individualnost, kjer lahko posameznik neodvisno sledi svojemu prepričanju.

Rodney Stark je v svojem članku iz leta 1998 ponosen na zmago sekularizacijske hipoteze v sociologiji, za katero meni, da je tako stara kot moderna doba. Hipoteza temelji na dejstvu, da znanost progresivno posegav svet in v razvoj, kar povzroči, da je svet manj dojemljiv za religijo, posledično se zmanjšuje število vernikov. Starkov zaključek je pravilen, vsaj kar se tiče ZDA, zlasti v svoji pozitivistični formulaciji posameznikove pietete.<sup>94</sup> Hkrati pa se Stark moti, ker zanemari versko skupnost in jo označi kot nekaj, kar je v popolnem nasprotju s Hobbesovo aglomeracijo posameznika, ki ima svoje potrebe in hrepenja, in ker izpostavlja racionalne preference, ki stremijo k pridobitvi. Stark in drugi zagovorniki teorije racionalne

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<sup>94</sup> Stark tukaj misli na Petra Bergerja. Glej »Bleak Outlook is Seen for Religion«, New York Times, 25. april 1968, str.3

izbire v ZDA, ki aplicirajo kvantitativne neoliberalne ekonomske modele na *verske* navade, se na neki način lahko miselno. Religiozne navade lahko analiziramo s pomočjo liberalne kapitalistične ekonomije, to pa zato, ker se je zlasti v ZDA religija dolgo tega kvalitativno spremenila in spominja na oblike kapitalizma, hkrati pa pomaga oblikovati njegove neobičajne oblike.

Odnos med ameriško religijo in kapitalizmom je tako zapleten in recipročen, da postmoderna ameriški kapitalizem ne bi imel te oblike, kot jo ima, če ne bi bilo specifičnega razvoja religije. Hkrati pa postmoderna ameriška religija ne bi bila to, kar je, če ne bi bilo tako dinamičnega razvoja kapitalizma. Ko Laurence Iannaccone (Iannaccone 1995, 82) trdi, da lahko ljudje v svojem vsakdanjem jeziku govorijo o veri in cerkvi v smislu »zadovoljevanja svojih duhovnih potreb«, kar ni ne naključno ne »naravno«. Socializacija otrok v svet, kjer velja pravilo kvantitete in poglobljene realnosti, ki se ves čas posodablja, celo običajno izobraževanje vključuje strukturo takšnega poglobljenja skozi stalno ponavljanje in vsiljevanje. Še več: diskurz trženja in potrošništva je v sodobni ameriški družbi tako vztrajen, da se mu nikakor ne moremo izogniti. Kalle Lasn ocenjuje, da prejme povprečni Američan 3000 oglasnih sporočil na dan (Lasn 2000).

Možno bi bilo izdelati dokaj zanesljivo študijo verskega vedenja z uporabo teorije racionalne izbire, in če uporabimo frazo »verski trg« v neironičnem smislu, je to prikaz, kako se je diskurz poglobljenja infiltriral in uzurpiral moč drugih diskurzov, ki so bili prvotno avtonomni. Je teorija transparentne materializacije, kjer so »... starejše tradicionalne oblike človeške aktivnosti koristno reorganizirane in prilagojene, analitično fragmentirane in rekonstruirane glede na različne racionalne modele učinkovitosti in bistveno restrukturirane

vzdolž diferenciacije med namenom in ciljem.« (Jameson 1979, 130). Privrženci teorije racionalne izbire nimajo problemov, če želijo svojo motivacijo usmeriti samo k etiki koristnosti, saj je utilitaristično vedenje kot tako za njih racionalno (Iannaccone 1995, 82). Čeprav Iannaccone ne zavrača drugih razlag, ki zadevajo sociološke podatke glede religije, ga promovira s sociološkim načelom ekonomičnosti in s tem upraviči premoč teorije racionalne izbire nad drugimi izbirami. »Vse delce lahko sestavimo v enoten in realitveno enostaven model ... tako da vključimo analizo o prisotnosti religije v obsežnejšo raziskavo o gospodinjstvu in akumulaciji kapitala« (Iannaccone, 1995, 79).

Verska realnost oziroma področje je tako prežeta farani uporabljajo jezik poblagovljenja, ko govorijo svojih cerkvah in verskih navadah. Blagovna produkcija rezultira v materializaciji odnosov med ljudmi, saj jih spremeni v objekte. Leta 1921 je George Lukacs zapisal: »Materializacija od družbe zahteva, da se le-ta nauči zadovoljiti vse svoje potrebe v skladu z blagovnim prometom.« (Lukacs [1921] 1971, 91), vendar pa je od takrat blagovna ekspanzija blagovnega kapitalizma kolonizirala tako velik del življenja, da ni nič čudnega, če ljudje o religiji govorijo v smislu blagovne menjave. Ni treba posebej dokazovati, da ameriška religija govori jezik trga. Nič neobičajnega ni, kadar verski vodje pišejo o cerkvenih skupnostih kot o potrošnikih in o cerkvah kot blagovnih znamkah. Strategije za povečanje cerkvene skupnosti so uporaba izrazov kot »tržni delež« in »rast« cerkve. Da je racionalna izbira tako uspešno razlagala nekatere aspekte ameriške religije, gre pripisati univerzalni naravi strukture poblagovljenja. To nam tudi kaže, kako šibke so postale verske institucije v smislu primarnih socialnih institucij, saj si morajo za svojo kontinuiteto, ohranitev in rast sposojati od sekundarnih, sekularnih modelov.

Ta homologija med religijo in trgom in izomorfni institucijami, praksami, prostori ter diskurzi ni goli determinizem niti v vulgarnem marksističnem smislu, ki temelji na ekonomski bazi, niti trditev zagovornikov racionalne teorije, da je to naravni razvoj, ki temelji na človeški naravi, kjer so ljudje sebični in racionalni akterji. Bolj je ta homologija sodobni primer zgodovinskega procesa, pri čemer ni najbolj pomemben proces kot tak, temveč neverjetna hitrost, s katero se izvaja. Že od srednjega veka je prisotna medsebojna povezanost med religijo in ekonomijo, kjer vplivata druga na drugo, toda vloga religije kot institucije je bila dovolj močna, da je uveljavila del nadzora nad ekonomskimi praksami (na primer oderuški zakoni) in preverjala hitrost spremembe. Kar se tiče Amerike, je evangeličanstvo v zgodnjem obdobju republike raje skočilo v revolucionarno praznino, kot da bi preverjalo tempo spremembe in jo pospešilo, s tem ko ji je zagotavljalo sredstva za prepričevanje. Slednje je postalo oglaševanje, organizirane metode trženja, in kar je najbolj pomembno, sakralni kozmos za potrošniški kapitalizem.

Razcepljen posameznik, racionalni akter v ameriškem ekonomskem diskurzu, je zgodovinski izdelek, rezultat materializacije, ne pa rezultat družbe. To dejstvo zanemarja tranzitivno naravo današnje kapitalistične družbe, vemo pa, da so dejstva sama po sebi podvržena spremembi in reviziji. Lukacs opisuje nezrelost in neveljavnost takih teorij: » Determinante prevzamejo videz brezčasnih, večnih kategorij, veljavnih za vse družbene formacije«. (Lukacs[1921], 1971, 9). Kot primer naj navedem: teorija racionalne izbire trdi, da lahko razloži dane dogodke in procese, kot so reformacija, križarske vojne, pokristjanjevanje Rimskega imperija (Stark 1998) (Iannaccone 1998), in druge dogodke iz preteklosti celo takrat, ko so viri veliko manj zanesljivi in pomanjkljivi in vodijo h konfuznosti in kako lahko



statistične metode racionalne izbire ekonomije apliciramo na situacije, kjer nimamo učinkovitih podatkov.

Trditi, da je status quo nekega časovnega obdobja "naravni", je zelo hegemonsko.

Hobbesovega "mushroom man-a", torej da je posameznik važnejši od družbe, najbolj osorno odpravi Theodor Adorno: " Ne samo, da je posameznik zlit z družbo; posameznik družbi dolguje svoj obstoj v polnem pomenu besede. (Adorno, 2005, 154). Ta kritika predpostavk liberalizma se pojavlja že od Hegla naprej, pa tudi post-moderne, post-kolonialne, feministične in druge kritične teorije opozarjajo na nevarnost opredeljevanja nečesa kot univerzalnega. Moč poblagovljenja je takšna, da so bile tudi te kritične teorije (vključno z marksizmom) podrejene tržni racionalnosti in so uporabile učinkovita sredstva za pospeševanje pridobivanja kapitala. Privrženec ameriškega 'Mita in rituala' Pat Werner govori o sokrivdi teoretiziranja industrijske politike kritičnih kulturnih teorij v "...obdobju, kjer se je besedišče trženja infiltriralo v akademijo in to nam dostikrat daje občutek, kot da smo asistenti prodaje korporativne univerze." (Werner, 2001, 764)

Teorije kot racionalna izbira so vložene v kontekst, kontekst sam pa jih tudi proizvaja.

Ta v mnogih pogledih veliko bolje kot drugi pristopi k sociologiji religije razloži sodobno religiozno vedenje, ker je racionalnost trga prepojena s praksami sodobnih Američanov, da ni nobene druge realne alternative za kakršnokoli drugo obnašanje kot za potrošniško. Tudi podatke lahko bolje razložimo s teorijo racionalne izbire, saj je velika večina podatkov rezultat javnega mnenja, s tem ko so anketiranci morali izbrati preference danih alternativ, saj naj bi to ponazarjalo potrošnika, ki izbira z menija, kjer ima vnaprej dane alternative, ter vprašanja, kjer med mnogimi odgovori izbiramo pravega, in kvantitativne prakse v

vsakdanjem življenju. Vendar pa kljub množici podatkov in prefinjenim statističnim metodam, ki so bile pri tem uporabljene (ali pa morda prav zaradi njih), rezultatom trivialne izjave očitno primanjkuje teža, s tem ko se osredotočajo na institucionalno religijo, ki je izoliran funkcionalni domet.

Tovrstne metodološke napake poznamo že od šestdesetih let naprej. Luckmann se posmehuje trivialnosti večine socioloških raziskav glede religije v knjigi *"The Hidden Religion"*, ki je bila objavljena leta 1967. Čeprav so bile izvedene nekatere bolj zanimive in informativne študije, ki so si sposojale antropološke tehnike, nam vztrajanje pri raziskavah javnega mnenja kljub poznavanju slabosti pokaže, kako šibka je kritična pozicija.

Lukacs govori o razcepljenem posamezniku kot o "sekundarni naravi" in nujni iluziji za kapitalistične družbe. Materializacija prikriva družbene odnose proizvodnje (in potrošnje), vendar jih ne odpravlja. Moč iluzije izvira v »takojšnji praktični kot tudi intelektualni konfrontaciji posameznika v družbi, takojšnji proizvodnji in reprodukciji življenja – v katerem obstaja za posameznika blagovna struktura vseh »stvari« in njihova skladnost z naravnimi zakoni v že skoraj končni obliki in kot nekaj stalnega ...« (Lukacs [1921] 1971, 92). V izogib kapitalistični totalnosti (tako Lukacs) je potreben kolektivni uvid, da je realnost proizvod družbe. Tako proletariat postane subjekt in objekt zgodovine. Gre za marksistično apokalipso, ko odkrijemo resnico in ko se realnost lahko obnovi. Čas Lukacsa, ki ga Theodor Adorno imenuje čas industrije kulture, ki je še morala razviti posebno moč za prikrivanje resnice. Kopičenje podob je bilo še v povojih. Guy Debord piše o materializaciji drugega reda

kot o spektaklu, ki »ni zbiranje podob, temveč socialni odnos med ljudmi, podobe pa imajo vlogo mediatorjev.« (Debord 2002)

Vizualne podobe postopoma nadomestijo pisano besedo na področju oglaševanja, novinarstva, poslovnega diskurza in procesa izobraževanja; imajo sicer večjo sporočilno vrednost, in čeprav so bolj kompleksne hkrati zameglijo primarno sporočilno vrednost. Geografska separacija produkta in potrošništva v globalnem in poznem kapitalizmu okrepi strukturo poglobljenja, ko se oddalji od potrošnika in posledično postane fetiš, ki nima nobenega materialnega izziva. »Postindustrijska družba« proizvaja iluzije, čeprav je samo po sebi umevno, da Američani konzumirajo industrijske izdelke. Pravi proletariat pa pravzaprav živi na Kitajskem.

Evangeliki v Ameriki so se od obdobja 70-ih do danes premaknili iz kulturno marginalne pozicije, ki je zunaj dosega medijev in politične kulture, k centralnemu položaju. Posledično so evangeliki v tem procesu izgubili svojo prepoznavnost (oznanilo sv. Pavla):

Ne podrejte se svetu: spreminjajte se tako, da obnavljate svoje misli, da lahko sami presodite, kaj je dobro, sprejemljivo in popolno, Božja volja. (Romans 12:2, King James Version).

Čeprav so evangeliki že po naravi problematični, že vsaj od 1890, se je diskurz zavračanja grešnega, urbanega sveta razvil, pa so se evangeliki distancirali od politike oziroma vsega, kar imenujemo »javno« življenje. Danes nanje gledamo kot na glavne volivce republikanske stranke in kot glavne akterje (morda zmotno) pri volitvah v ZDA. Nikakor pa niso več

marginalna skupina, trg pa jih obravnava kot skupino potrošnikov, ki razpolagajo z velikim številom znamčenega poblagovljenja.

Tisto, kar loči evangeličane od drugih, je ločevanje v praksi. Največja posebnost, ki razlikuje evangeličane od protestantov in katoličanov je *pričevanje*. Pričevanje je evangeličanski žargon za »proselitsem«, tj. prepričavanje ljudi v spreobrnitev, sledeč arminijanski doktrini izbiranja odrešitve v skladu s svobodno voljo. To je edino poslanstvo evangeličanskih cerkva in kulturnih ustanov, kot so književna društva in verske šole. Pričevanje je ključna verska *dejavnost*. Poleg funkcije prepričevanja v spreobrnitev in povečanja skupnosti verujočih, ima dejavnost tudi funkcijo osebnega deklariranja krščanske identitete. Ima podoben čustven naboj, kot ga lahko zaznamo pri homoseksualcih. »Pričevanje je globoko pomensko govorno dejanje, ne samo pragmatično pogovorno orodje. Pričevanje oblikuje in definira osebnost v lastnem smislu in v odnosu do skupnosti« (Hendershot 2004, 124). Pričevanje temelji na razgaljanju intimne osebne pripovedi, pogosto pred popolnimi tujci, podrobno pripovedovanje o grešnih, preziranja vrednih življenjih, preden so sprejeli Jezusa kot svojega osebnega odrešenika. Za to dejanje je potrebna velika mera poguma in vere, saj obstaja možnost zavrnitve in razveljavitve. Cerkve pogosto ponujajo možnosti usposabljanja in podporo, javno priznanje vere, kar je celo večji ritual kot molitev.

Podobnost med pričevanjem in oglaševanjem je več kot le površinska. Imata skupen izvor v prepovedu drugega velikega prebujenja. Tehnike, ki so v rabi za širjenje besede Kristus, bi lahko uporabili za širjenje besede Pepsi. Vendar je pričevanje osebna dejavnost, ki zahteva neposreden družbeni kontakt in osebno uganjanje. Pričevanje je lahko moteče, nepriljubljeno in nasilno glede na buržujsko predstavo o zasebnosti. Medtem ko je slednja globoko osebna

za tistega, ki jo izvaja, je to dejanje konfrontacije, do katere je »ugledna« družba skorajda netolerantna. Pripadniki evangeličanstva izhajajo iz revnih, pogosto ruralnih socialno-ekonomskih skupin, ki zatrjujejo, da se skušajo izogniti »posvetnemu življenju«, medtem ko se posvetno življenje izogiba njim. Čeprav so se preporodi pojavili tudi v mestih, je bilo militantno evangeličanstvo hitro obvladano in institucionalizirano, medtem ko se je v bolj revnih poljedelskih predelih podeželja na ameriškem jugovzhodu in srednjem zahodu obdržalo. Do nedavnega so se predkapitalistični načini proizvodnje obdržali v poljedelstvu in obrti. Šele v zadnjih nekaj desetletjih je nova struktura prodrla v to zaostalost, proces, ki sovпада s pojavom konzervativnih kristjanov kot nacionalne politične moči.

Konfrontacija med urbanim modernizmom in ruralnimi evangeličani, ki še vedno sledijo nauku popularnega krščanstva iz zgodnjega republikanskega obdobja, je imela veliko posledic, med katerimi je najbolj zanimiva doktrina o ločitvi. Ta ločitev je imela institucionalno obliko v književnih društvih ( krščanskih založbah), knjigarnah, Biblijskih inštitutih, teoloških seminarjih, katerih namen je bil prepričevanje o spreobrnitvi. Na nivoju osebnega izvajanja je obstajal kodeks obnašanja, ki je bil ključnega pomena za to, kdo je znotraj in kdo zunaj te skupnosti. Pravila so prepovedovala pitje alkoholnih pijač, ples, kajenje, gledanje filmov, igranje kart, in preklinjanje, ki so bili kazatelji zunanjega sveta, obsojenega na propad (Frykholm 2004, 23). Razlikovanje je bilo skrajno, v smislu absolutnih izrazov »rešen« in »preklet«. Arminijanska doktrina je prepustila odrešitev svobodne volje, vendar je bila le začasna. Rešen človek bi lahko postal ponovno preklet zaradi novih grehov, torej je ločitev imela funkcijo odstraniti posvetno skušnjavo in ohraniti integriteto duše.

Posledica vdora zunanjega sveta v svet evangeličanov je na prvi pogled znamčeni klon poblagovljene kulture. Krščansko znamčenje poblagovljenega klona oblik popularne kulture, kot so npr. težkometalna glasba, nakupovalni centri, videoigre, filmi in TV programi so dobro dokumentirani (npr. Hendershot 2004; Lyon 2000; Miller 2003; Twitchell 2004; Wharton 2006). Nekateri proizvodi, npr. *Left Behind*, romani Tima LaHayneja in Jerryja B. Jenkensa, so bili komercialno zelo uspešni. Ko piše o seriji *Left Behind*, Glenn Shuck navaja, da so romani goreč poskus ohranjanja integritete evangeličanske identitete, medtem ko se poskušajo, čeprav proti svoji volji, prilagoditi neizogibni spremembi, tipični za moderno dobo« (Shack 2005, 2). Kot zanimivost naj omenim, da La Hayne in Jenkins za prizorišče svojih apokaliptičnih romanov ne izbereta s trdnjavo obdanega mesteca, temveč vsakdanje predmestje Čikaga. Razlog za to je najverjetneje v tem, meni Shuck, da želita avtorja pritegniti širši krog občinstva, ker so manjša ameriška mesta že zdavnaj izgubila bitko in so se kot sateliti absorbirala v večje, gosto naseljene predele – konurbacije ali pa potonila v popolno revščino. Kloniranje, dokazuje Shuck, je poskus ohranjanja ustreznega nivoja trenja med evangeličansko in popularno kulturo (Shuck 2005, 4). Ker fizična ločitev ne obstaja, je strategija simbolična ločitev. Razmnoževanje krščanskih blagovnih znamk je bilo tako uspešno, da proizvode, kot so knjige, glasba, oblačila najdemo v nacionalnih trgovinah na drobno, npr. Wal-Mart. Tak uspeh kaže na prehod od tesno povezanega, naravnega sveta k *življenjskemu slogu*. To je škodilo prejšnji evangeličanski kulturi, ki je bila na obrobju in izolirana, in kot taka izginja zaradi poblagovljenja.

Dejstvo, da evangeličani niso več izolirani, nima samo kulturnega pomena, temveč vsebuje tudi geografsko komponento, ki se kaže v izgubi občutka prostorske pripadnosti. Ustaljena praksa je govoriti o »pokrajini« ali »trgu« v povsem abstraktnem pomenu, ki ne določa nič

fizičnega. V družboslovju to povzroča zmedo, zlasti ker se je fizično okolje, v katerem ljudje živijo, tako radikalno spremenilo v zadnjih štiridesetih letih. Verska pokrajina brez fizičnega telesa ali verski trg brez trga zanemari fizično stvarnost človeškega življenja, zlasti njegov vpliv na družbene odnose in kulturo. »Trg« dejansko obstaja samo kot klišejska metafora brez fizične reference na življenje na trgu. Racionalizirano nakupovalno središče lahko ponudi iluzijo trga, toda brez osvobajajočega učinka. Ko na primer Mihail Bahtin piše o pustnem obdobju v srednjeveških trgih, takole opisuje svobodne odnose in govorico trga:

Uradno so v palačah, cerkvah, inštitucijah in domovih prevladovali hierarhija in bonton, toda na trgu je veljalo pravilo posebne govorice, skoraj samosvojega jezika, ki se je popolnoma razlikoval od jezika cerkve, palače, dvora in javnih inštitucij. (M. Bahtin, 1968, 154).

Trg ni imel le funkcije menjave, temveč je bil tudi prostor za praznovanje osvobojenosti, preklinjanja, priseg, preobrazbe in zabave, ki so bile drugje prepovedane. Trg je bil stičišče, kjer so se ljudje fizično srečevali, prostor, ki ni imel klišejske podobe trga, ki ponuja različne vrste blaga, pač pa je imel vlogo druženja in s tem povezanih aktivnosti.

Omejevanje trga na utilitaristično menjavo in racionalni lastni interes, uporaba profane logike v sakralne namene, omejuje religijo na nadomestno blago, ki zadovoljuje potrebe. Obstaja trden dokaz, ki podpira to blagovno logiko, v smislu, da je popularna religija postala prijazna do uporabnika, oziroma »samousmerjena«, izraz, ki ga uporablja Wade Clark Roof (Roof 1998). Cerkve kot kulturni proizvodi postajajo vse večje in pod svoje okrilje vključujejo številne dodatne dejavnosti in s tem posnemajo koncept nakupovalnih središč.

Meje med verskimi in sekularnimi aktivnostmi so čedalje bolj zabrisane v postmodernem mozaiku. Religija, ki se sooča s konkurenco sekundarnih družbenih institucij, ki ponujajo podobne proizvode, si navdušeno sposoja kulturne oblike, ki so nastale ali pa so postale izjemno priljubljene v »dekadentni« antikulturi šestdesetih. V najhitreje rastočih cerkvah v ZDA težko najdemo kaj takega, kar bi imeli za »versko« pred štiridesetimi ali petdesetimi leti.

Mestni razvoj sledi sistemu avtocest, integrirani mreži večpasovnih cest z omejenim dostopom, ki povezujejo mesta zgrajena v 1950-ih in 60-ih. Te hitre ceste omogočajo ljudem, da živijo daleč od svojih delovnih mest v mestnih centrih ali drugih nepovezanih področij. Avtoceste so najpomembnejši element pokrajine in človekovega odnosa do nje. Mnogoterost napisov in znakov, postavljenih s strani države kot tudi za oglaševalske namene, zlahka preseže njihovo količino kjerkoli v Evropi. Ta način vizualnega posredovanja sporočil premikajoči se populaciji je endemitska lastnost blagovne kulture. Celota cest in znakov skupaj ustvarja pusto pokrajino, kjer ni nič zgrajeno za človeka. Omejitve rabe prostora ga delijo na družinske domove, trgovine, lahko industrijo in druge in tako onemogočajo razvoj lokalne družbe. Javnih mest ni več, v smislu prostora, kjer se vsi srečujejo, razen seveda na cestah samih.

Če obstaja post-moderni občutek za refleksno identiteto, ki je osnovana na izbiri namesto, da bi bila določena z okoliščinami, potem potrebuje prostor za manifestacijo, kjer je razlika poudarjena. Nenadoma postane pristnost katerekoli prostovoljne identitete ogrožena zaradi omejitve prostora, zgrajenega po načrtih blagovne kulture. Jameson opisuje svet poznega kapitalizma kot »celostno sestavljen in postavljen,« tako da »prostora v Združenih državah ni



več« (Jameson 1990, 127). Tako postane mesto individuuma kot fizično del pokrajine in kot člana dejanske (namesto izmišljene) družbe težko vzdržljivo. Ustanovno deljenje modernega življenja v skladu z uporabno racionalnostjo, kjer je posameznik odklopljen in omejen glede na funkcijo, osebnost potisne v osebno sfero, od koder se posameznik svetu približuje kot porabnik in ustvarja direktno kratkotrajno identiteto v skladu s kulturo in elementi kulture, ki ga trenutno obkrožajo (Luckmann 1967, 97-106).

Pogosto obstajajo razhajanja med dejanskimi družbenimi odnosi in potrjeno identiteto v smislu, da je družbena kultura postala zamišljena in vseprisotno nacionalna, ali da mednarodni okusi (v Bourdiejevem smislu) prevladajo nad vsakršno lokalno kulturo. To kaže tudi na nemoč primarnih verskih institucij pri vzgajanju ljudi v skladen pogled na svet. Ta razhajanja so lahko tudi posledica odločitev, kot jo je videl Douglas Holt v raziskavi v univerzitetnem mestu Center, Pennsylvania (Holt 1997), ali pa kot rezultat razvoja ali ponovnega razvoja, ki povzroči priliv ljudi na določeno področje. Živeti v določenem okolju in ne biti del le-tega, ne le ni nemogoče, ampak je za premikajočo se populacijo Združenih držav skoraj pravilo.

Poblagovljena identiteta in življenjski stil imata osnovno napako. In sicer izkjučujeta vse, ki si tega življenjskega stila ne morejo kupiti. Kakršnakoli identiteta se bo spopadla z avtentičnostjo in odnosom moči in prevlade nad drugimi. Beli najstniki lahko kupujejo rap glasbo in se oblačijo v ustrezna oblačila, a le vizualne reprezentacije te skupine so družbeno dovoljene. Identiteta skozi porabo je trivialna identiteta, omejena na tiste, ki imajo sredstva za uresničevanje le te. Svoboda izbire je zavajajoča, ker je izbira med blagom le formalna svoboda in človek mora biti v položaju, da izbira, da potem sploh lahko izrabi to formalno

svobodo. Nakupovalno središče ni tržnica. V teh javno-privatnih prostorih je identiteta odsev blagovne kulture in vsa medosebna interakcija je poenostavljena na komunikacijo preko vizualnih podob.

Opustitev taktike ločevanja, s katero so evangeličani poskušali ohraniti lastno kulturo, in njena zamenjava s spopadom kultur, je bila manj namenjena ohranitvi lastne kulture in je bolj težila k preobrazbi ostalih v njim podobne kulture. Za razliko od priseljene afriško-ameriške skupine ali drugih skupin, ki so bili žrtev kulturne dominacije, evangeličani trdijo, da predstavljajo izvirno ameriško kulturo. Za razliko od prvotnih ameriških prebivalcev, katerih kultura je bila vsiljeno spremenjena v blagovno kulturo, so evangeličani to storili sami sebi. Njihovi poskusi preoblikovanja masovne kulture so spektakularno propadli, in med to prostovoljno preobrazbo lastne kulture so njihove ločene kulturne ustanove izginile ali postale težko ločljive od njihovih dvojnikov popularne kulture. Medtem ko so bili uspešno prepoznani kot narodna politična usmeritev, se njihovi socialni nazori in načrti niso vključili v splošno kulturo. Splav je legalen, molitev ni dovoljena kot obvezen del šolskega reda in nobena oblika kreacionizma se ne predava kot del biološkega učnega načrta. Njihovo strogo nasprotovanje dodelitvi pravice glasovanja homoseksualno usmerjenim ljudem je sprožilo večji val podpore gejem kot pa nasprotovanja. Tudi med samimi evangeličani ta vprašanja niso več točno določena in očitna znamenja evangeličanske identitete, zlasti v zadnjih letih. Poleg majic, nalepk in vse ostale drobnarije, ki je označena s krščansko značko ali logom, je od njihove očitne ločenosti ostalo bore malo.

Tak metodičen pristop izvira iz marksistične tradicije, natančneje, kot sta jo uporabila pri opisovanju postmodernega obdobja Frederic Jameson in David Harvey. Lukacs trdi, da je

predpostavka dialektičnega materializma, da človekova zavest ne določa njegovega obstoja, ampak njegov socialni obstoj določa njegovo zavest (Lukacs [1921] 1971, 24). Lukacsova formulacija poudarja socialne odnose kot glavno ustvarjalno moč zgodovinskega procesa, torej učinek, ki ga ima materialni svet na dejanja, mnenja, prepričanja in razmišljanja ljudi. Jamesonova trditev, da v postmodernosti kapitalizem popolnoma prevzame kulturno sfero, je še posebej uporabna ob opazovanju spreminjanja evangeličanske identitete. Harvey deli svoj pristop z Jamesonom, toda kot geograf posveča posebno pozornost fizičnemu svetu, spremembam razumevanja časa in prostora, kot tudi učinku pozno kapitalističnega režima akumulacije v mestnih okoljih.

Sodobna evangeličanska identiteta je rezultat zgodovinskih procesov kot tudi posledica integracije v moderno družbo. Uporaba te metodologije na podatkih iz anket pokaže, kako hitro in radikalno se je vera v Združenih državah spremenila od 70-ih, ko se je pričela pospešeno zlivati s popularno kulturo. To ni revolucionarna sprememba, saj je ameriška vera prevzela sekularno obliko že v zgodnjih dneh republike. A hitrost in velikost spremembe zavoljo akomodacije sekularne kulture naredita to obdobje edinstveno.

Spremembe fizičnega prostora v tej dobi veliko prispevajo k temu, kako se identiteta manifestira v javnosti. Že v 1840-ih je francoski pesnik Charles Baudelaire opazil in komentiral, kako izrazito drugačna je identiteta v modernih mestih v primerjavi s prejšnjimi obdobji. Nov je bil stil, vizualna podoba v obliki oblačil ali obnašanja, v mestih, kjer sta obnašanje in izgled nadomestila tradicionalno komunikacijo kot primarno obliko medčloveške interakcije. Stil pokaže tudi vzpon meščanske privatne sfere, ki se je lahko prvenstveno kazala skozi modo. Isto opazovanje je razširil Walter Benjamin v 20-tih in 30-ih

letih prejšnjega stoletja. Prostori, po katerih se je sprehajal in jih opazoval Boudelaire, so dandanes opazno drugačni, polni namensko zgrajenih postmodernih prostorov, kjer se srečujejo današnji »urbani nomadi«, in temu sledi določena manifestacija identitete, pogojena samo z namenom prostora.

Na tej stopnji analize, totalnosti socialnih odnosov, ni potrebno zaiti pregloboko v subjektivno identiteto, ne smemo pa prezreti njene pomembnosti. Mnenja in misli posameznika so manj pomembni od njegovih dejanj za namene te analize, npr. praksa. Praksa je produkt socialno pogojene subjektivnosti in področje za to analizo. Je dokaz identitete, in določene prakse bi morale odsevati določenost in razlikovanje identitete. Je omejena na področje, prostor dogajanja, nekatere posebne prakse, ki določajo skupino ljudi pa so še posebej zahtevne ali nemogoče za izvedbo na nekaterih prostorih.

Refleksivna inentiteta pa je značilnost postmodernega razmišljanja o identiteti. Eden glavnih podpornikov, Ulrich Beck, trdi, da razrešitev mej spola, rase, socialnega razreda in nacionalnosti dovoljujejo posamezniku, da si izbere lastno identiteto izmed ponujenih (Beck). A ob takem izbiranju identitete pride do takojšnjih problemov. Prvič, meje ne izginejo, postanejo le neuradne in s tem veliko močnejše. Nadalje identiteto zaradi porabe resno ogroža blagovni fetiš in nakupovalne navade. Nakupovanje postane eno najpomembnejših socialnih aktivnosti postmoderne dobe, če ne kar najpomembnejša.

Kulturno blago ima močan učinek na verska obredja in navade, predvsem z uničevanjem pomenskih stavb. Tu je najpomembnejše Baudrillardovo delo o hiperrealnosti, saj propad in padec svetega v prostaško preko zmagoslavja menjalne vrednosti okuži vse vpletene. V preteklih desetjih so se evangeličani z velikim navdušenjem prilagodili na blagovno kulturo

in proizvajajo knjige, pop glasbo, in celo vrsto znamk oblačil. Preprosto se je evangeličanstvo prelevilo v znamko popularnega blaga. V tem procesu so se določitvene aktivnosti in prakse evangeličanske skupine izgubile ali se sprevrgle v oblike izražanja kulture, sprejemljive za preostanek populacije in se ločijo le po oznaki. Rezultat je brezupen semiotičen nered, ki demonstrira propad verske institucije v neprepoznavnost, a hkrati prikazuje skrito vero.