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New Perspectives on Religion Today: An Introduction

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Religion: New Perspectives was an inter-disciplinary postgraduate conference that took place at the University of Essex in June 2008. The conference was organised by the writers of this introduction as the result of a curious revelation: of the nine first year PhDs in 2008, five of us had chosen research topics relating very intimately to the subject of religion and spirituality in art in very diverse and interesting ways. These research topics include studies of the relationship between Christianity and Paganism in the colonial encounter; intersections of sacred and secular space in medieval illuminated manuscripts and church architecture; investigations of the spiritual impulse in the work of artists such as Michelangelo and Van Gogh; interest in how religion might be discovered within twentieth century art and film; and research on alchemy, ritual and the occult in the experimental films of Kenneth Anger.

This surprising convergence of interests led to a number of informal discussions where we speculated on the problematic place of religion and spirituality in twentieth century art history – we felt that maybe religion or aspects of it did not get the attention it deserved, such as the religious or occult theories of some modernist painters, for example. Although we might be comfortable in discussing the religious ideas of our distant ancestors within their historical context, when the artist comes closer to being our contemporary such ideas become, at best, anomalous eccentricities unnecessary to the understanding of the artwork.

Another topic of discussion dealt with the difficulty in thinking about religion as a significant factor in the politics and media of recent years – the widespread assumption of religion's anachronism in the context of modern secularisation makes it difficult to think about what it might mean as a contemporary phenomenon. We think this is where the outmodedness might really lie: in the old debates that rely on straightforward binary oppositions such as science versus religion, rational versus irrational, tradition versus modernity, and so on.

What is needed, it seems, is less some kind of synthesis between such oppositions but rather a practice of what Slavoj Žižek calls 'looking awry' – an anamorphic shift of perspective leading to a radical reinterpretation and estrangement of the familiar. The anachronism of religion in our future-oriented technoscientific world may be just such an anamorphic stain, troubling our vision with the possibility of some new, potentially disturbing or even shocking perspective. We believe that such a practice is already taking place in contemporary art.

The increasing evidence of religious themes in contemporary art and cultural theory over the past couple of years has been another inspiration behind *Religion: New Perspectives*. In 2007 at the University of Essex's gallery, there was the exhibition *In Search of the Miraculous*, curated by Sarah Demelo. Also in that year there were a number of major exhibitions around the world with titles such as *I Want to Believe*, *Afterlife*, *Cosmic Dreams*, *Beyond the Grave*, and *Choosing My Religion*, among many others. In 2008, the Pompidou Centre in Paris put together the vast retrospective, *Traces of the Sacred*, which examined the religious impulse in twentieth-century art. In Milan at the Villa Manin Centre for Contemporary Art was the exhibition *God and Goods: Spirituality and Mass Confusion* which charted the intersection of religion with consumer capitalism.

The recent work of Damien Hirst, such as his controversial diamond skull *For the Love of God*, also takes religion as its most important thematic structure. Recent Hirst exhibitions with titles such as *Beyond Belief*, *Superstition*, and *New Religion* make this interest clear. Many other major contemporary artists have begun in recent years to take themes of belief, religion, ritual, death and the desire for immortality seriously as a topic worthy of critical attention and analysis.

From a certain perspective, religion and its imagery, particularly that of Catholic Christianity, might be thought of as the dialectical opposite of contemporary art – as such, their convergence might appear somewhat perplexing. What are

these highly traditional images doing at the cutting edge of postmodern aesthetics? Rather than thinking of it as evidence for a neo-conservative turn in the arts, we contend that the high visibility of religion in these works might instead be thought of as an anamorphic turn; an attempt to find new perspectives on religion as a contemporary phenomenon, setting their sights on the non-religious with implications yet to be developed and understood. We believe that the basic orientation here is perhaps not the familiar one of the present looking at or appropriating the past, but rather a radical reversal of this gaze, offering us a critical, defamiliarising, auto-ethnographic type of perspective which attempts to refocus the present through the lens of its premodern past.

It is important to think of religion today as something new, as something that does not fit into what still may be a widespread, overly-simplified assumption of linear history and secularisation. We would suggest that, as yet, humanity simply does not have the conceptual tools to fully assimilate the politically and even epistemologically violent intrusion of religion into the world of science and technology, which many of us take for granted as the dominant power in the definition of reality today. In his essay 'Faith and Knowledge', Jacques Derrida deals with this very issue in which the recent return of the religious comes as a surprise, a shock which is somehow capable of bringing into question all other areas of social life – including the very structure of language itself:

Now if, today, the 'question of religion' actually appears in a new and different light, if there is an unprecedented resurgence, both global and planetary, of this ageless thing, then what is at stake is language, certainly – and more precisely the idiom, literality, writing, that forms the element of all revelation and all belief, an element that ultimately is irreducible and untranslatable – but an idiom that above all is inseparable from the social nexus, from the political, familial, ethnic, communitarian nexus, from the nation and from the people [...] and from the ever more problematic relation to citizenship and the state.¹

What Derrida seems to be expressing here is a conception of religion different from the one which associates itself with orthodoxy, with the outmoded, with the past, as something essentially de-activated and no longer significant to an understanding of the present moment, particularly to those areas which seem to lie outside of what we normally define as being religious. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida writes on how the spectre of religion today participates in a 'time out of joint' – a 'non-contemporaneity of the present time with itself' within the structure of globalising capitalism.² Derrida's neo-Marxist deconstructive approach problematises the linear progressive conception of history by invoking the spectre of the past as an eternal return where religion is seen to haunt even the latest developments in communications and media technology.

Derrida's Marxist deployment of the religious in the analysis of capitalism intersects here with the Lacanian Marxism of Slavoj Žižek, which sees fetishistic disavowal and objectified forms of belief not only in ecology as the new opium of the masses, but as also embedded in the unconscious structures of everyday life in capitalist society.

Both Derrida and Žižek present religion today as a challenge to thought, and as something which is capable of bringing the most taken-for-granted forms of lived experience and everyday life into question. From these kinds of perspectives, religion can be seen as something shocking and new with the potential to open up far-reaching and unexpected implications.

It was with the aim of pursuing this kind of approach to religion that we pushed for an inter-disciplinary postgraduate conference at the University of Essex, with the hope that students in other departments might have similar concerns. However, it seems that, with some exceptions, the predominant response has come from those studying the arts. The reason for this is unclear, although, following Derrida, it may be indicative of how belief is understood as something that is embedded in the structures of language or representation; that religion may be as much in the signifier as in the signified. The close historical link between art and religion may make this relationship an ideal allegory or barometer of the complexities arising between culture and religion today.

Derrida's innovations in the discourse on religion have taken a long time to be picked up by subsequent writers. The fact that an increasing interest in concepts such as 'post-secularity' and political theology is relatively new suggests that the production of new perspectives on religion are today in their infancy. This is an exciting opportunity to participate in an emerging debate and we would like to think that the conference *Religion: New Perspectives* and its collection of papers might make some contribution towards generating more interest in such a relevant and important subject.

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002): 44.

² Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of Debt, The Work of Mourning and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 2006): 29.

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God Is Love: Bataille's 'Madame Edwarda' and Mystical Experience

Keith Currie

Abstract

This article investigates Georges Bataille's conception of mysticism as articulated in the short story 'Madame Edwarda'. Furthermore, it seeks to investigate the perceived gulf between mystical and erotic experience. This reading of the short story is informed by the observations of a number of Bataille scholars, and by Bataille's own theoretical works, which are themselves concerned with the understanding of religion as a cultural phenomenon which engages with and mediates the most dangerous aspects of being.

*The most prostituted being of all is the ultimate being—that is, God—since he is the supreme lover to each individual; since he is the communal, inexhaustible reservoir of love.*¹

– Charles Baudelaire

This brief but thought-provoking observation recorded in the notes and aphorisms that would come to comprise the deeply confessional essay, 'My Heart Laid Bare', not only serves to unify two of Baudelaire's most persistent obsessions – religion and prostitution – but it is indicative of the palpable sense of Eroticism that pervades the Gospels and the numerous Christian doctrines that took their lead from them. Anyone familiar with *Les Fleurs du Mal* will already know the degree to which Baudelaire is intrigued by the numerous erotic possibilities offered by Christian iconography, but the above statement is, to my knowledge at least, the only example of a perceived affinity between the whore and the Christian God to be found in his work. After Baudelaire's death in 1866, an entire generation of Parisian artists laid claim to his work, and appropriated many of its principal tropes, yet this tantalising glimpse of a 'supernal prostitute' appears to have been unanimously overlooked, and remained undeveloped until the early 1940s. The cultural

theorist and erotic novelist Georges Bataille never proclaimed himself to be an 'inheritor' of Baudelaire's legacy, yet his commentary on Baudelaire in *Literature And Evil* clearly indicates that he was sympathetic to his project. It is in Bataille's fiction, however, that we find true engagement with the theme in question: His short story 'Madame Edwarda' (1941) expands upon the above aphorism without identifying it as its source, presenting the reader with an account of the alleged apotheosis of a lewd and arguably deranged Parisian whore that casts St John's maxim 'God is love'² in a new and troubling light. The story is celebrated both as a powerful evocation of feminine *jouissance*, and an unconventional commentary on Christian mysticism that traces the routes of those experiences that are considered 'mystical' to the Eroticism to which ascetics set themselves in opposition. While both readings of the text are equally valid, this article will focus primarily upon the latter interpretation; it will provide a brief outline of the structure and events of the story, and a reflection upon the experiential, erotic and religious stakes involved in a reading of the text.

Despite innumerable studies of his life and work, Bataille remains a somewhat enigmatic figure, a paradoxical thinker whose thought, as he himself put it, 'is in perpetual rebellion against itself'.³ Commentators identify him interchangeably as a philosopher, sociologist, anthropologist and writer of erotic fiction: the diversity of his oeuvre prevents him from being successfully pigeonholed within any of the above categories. Moreover, this impressive discursive versatility is a testament to his creation of a thinking whose most commendable aspect is a refusal to accept limitations of any kind. Several constants that resonate throughout his oeuvre are preoccupations with eroticism, the development of taboos, with the religious institutions that enforced these taboos, and with the phenomenon of religion itself, whose essence he identified as 'the search for lost intimacy'.⁴ He is also noted for the development of the concept of *Atheology*, a schema opposed to conventional theology, which gives precedence to nonknowledge (that which is unknown or simply cannot be known) over knowledge, and to lived experience of the divine over philosophical contemplation thereof. We might go one step further, and state that *Atheology* is concerned not with the intelligible presence of

God, but rather with his absence. In this regard, Bataille is part of a significant philosophical tradition beginning with Hegel and reaching its zenith in the works of Nietzsche, which engages with the notion of the death of God. The core of his oeuvre is the so-called 'Summa Atheologica' (an evident parody of St Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologica*), a trilogy comprised of the texts *Inner Experience*, *Guilty* and *On Nietzsche*.

Today, Bataille is recognised as one of the most influential theorists of the twentieth century, and is considered to be one of the forefathers of post-structuralist thought, but during his life many of his notable works were at best ignored, and at worst ridiculed by his contemporaries. His acrimonious departure from the Surrealist movement prompted numerous disparaging remarks from its founder André Breton, published in the Surrealist's second manifesto. Further criticism was to come from Jean-Paul Sartre throughout the 1940s, beginning with a response to Bataille's essay *Inner Experience*, published in 1943 as 'Un Nouveau Mystique' ('A New Mysticism'). Sartre rebukes Bataille for rejecting the notion of 'project' so dearly prized by the existentialists, for the apparent 'anti-intellectualism' displayed in the text, and finally, as Jean-Michel Heimonet paraphrases, 'for inventing, by way of a detour through a critical approach pushed to its limits, a new form of religion, independent of dogma, rites of worship, and a church, and all the more impossible to exorcise since it is based, as in Kierkegaard, on lived experience'.⁵ According to Heimonet, this review 'should be accorded a prime place in the annals of great literary misunderstandings'⁶; nevertheless, it sparked a debate that was to continue throughout the decade, and an enmity that remained unresolved at Bataille's death in 1962. Contemporary commentators on Bataille return to this debate with startling frequency: while these commentators interpret the charge of 'mysticism' as an insult, they nevertheless agree that there are many similarities between Bataille's works and those of the mystics of the high Middle Ages. Indeed, the prevailing tendency in recent years has been to emphasise the mystical properties of Bataille's oeuvre rather than to downplay them. Amy Hollywood, for example, notes that the structures of many of Bataille's works are 'analogous to the "itineraries" of Angela of Foligno (d. 1309) and Teresa of Avila (d. 1582)'.⁷

That the model for such works should be the writings of female mystics is worthy of further comment, especially given the primacy of feminine erotic experience evidenced by 'Madame Edwarda'; Hollywood attributes this stylistic choice on Bataille's part to the appeal of the unconventional appearance of the texts by these writers, 'women who were denied access to the traditional genres of sermon, biblical commentary, and philosophical or theological treatise'.⁸ Thus, the Atheological Summa is comprised of numerous fragments of journals, letters, confessionals, and extensive excerpts of works by other authors. In addition, Bataille also made use of fiction as a vehicle for the communication of his thought, and it is to his fiction that we now turn.

Unlike his 'theoretical' writings, Bataille's works of fiction were widely celebrated during his lifetime; many of these (*Madame Edwarda* among them) have gone on to achieve cult status among readers of erotic fiction. These works should not be regarded as a corpus distinct from the so-called 'theoretical' writings: rather, they expand upon the themes introduced in these texts, and often in extremely lurid detail; for this reason they are able to affect the reader in a far more visceral fashion. This is not to say that the so-called 'theoretical' writings cannot do this also; as has been previously noted, the demarcations that usually separate theory, autobiography and fiction are noticeably absent from his oeuvre. This absence of boundaries is most apparent in the works that comprise the Atheological Summa. While evidently not part of this Summa, 'Madame Edwarda' certainly encroaches upon the same territory, presenting experience of the divine as an experience catastrophic to the thinking subject. In this respect, it bears a resemblance to other examples of Bataille's fiction, particularly the 1928 novella *Histoire de L'Oeil*. The status of these works as pornographic literature seems incontestable by dint of the fact that they contain explicit descriptions of the sexual act, yet they are not included for their own sake. Rather, the participants in these often lurid and disconcerting sexual scenarios appear to seek entrance into a sacred domain, a totality of being to which all religions have attempted to lay claim. Moreover, Bataille's 'pornography' departs considerably from the traditionally phallogocentric positions occupied by his

forebears in the genre. Rather, as Carolyn Dean has noted, these works ‘use sexuality as an allegory for the self-shattering of the phallic body’.⁹ ‘Madame Edwarda’ is by far the strangest of these texts; it is also, arguably, the most compelling. It is a text expressly concerned with an instance of ‘self-shattering’, but the process is not (as in *Histoire de L’Oeil*), a strictly physical one. It is achieved by physical means – namely copulation – but it is a feminine ‘body’ that is ‘shattered’. It is possible to argue, however, that the process is twofold in appearance; the dissipation of the phallic body as represented by the decreasing coherency of the narrative – relayed as it is by a masculine narrator – occurs in response to the witnessing of the dissolution of the feminine body. This state of affairs is described in acute detail by Bataille in *Eroticism* [1957]: ‘In the process of dissolution the partner has generally an active role, while the female partner is passive. The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity. But for the male partner, this dissolution of the passive partner means one thing only: it is paving the way for a fusion where both are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution’.¹⁰

‘Madame Edwarda’ has received numerous accolades since its original publication: Jacques Lacan drew influence from the text when formulating his theory of feminine sexuality, the American social commentator Susan Sontag¹¹ hailed the text as one of the most intellectually stimulating works of erotic fiction that she had encountered, and Jean-François Lyotard employed the story in order to annotate his observations on the kinship between late capitalism and prostitution in *Libidinal Economy*. The most insightful commentary on the story, however, comes from Bataille himself. This commentary appears in the form of a preface that he added to the story prior to its second publication in 1949.¹² Like many of his fellow writers of erotic fiction, Bataille was obliged to take great pains in order to avoid the wrath of the censors. Accordingly, ‘Madame Edwarda’ first appeared in print under a pseudonym, Pierre Angélique. By the time that this preface was written, however, Bataille was widely known to be the story’s author, and the need to preserve the distinction appears to have been, at bottom, an aesthetic one. In this instance, as with other examples of Bataille’s pseudonymous fiction, the

name by which the author is identified clearly serves a double purpose: his monikers, like those of Kierkegaard, are further comments on the texts to which they claim authorship. Lord Auch, the pseudonym under which *Story of the Eye* was published, for example, literally means 'God relieving himself'.¹³ In choosing to publish 'Madame Edwarda' under the pseudonym Pierre Angélique, Bataille succeeds in drawing a parallel between the protagonist of Madame Edwarda and St Peter, the 'rock' upon which the principle Christian Church was founded. 'Madame Edwarda', then, appears to engage with and reinterpret St Peter's hagiography, questions the nature of the God that he sought, and finally, undermines the stability of the 'rock'. Bataille makes no allusions to such implications in this preface, but sets out to define the nature of the experience at stake in the story. It begins with an evocation of comedy which appears to run counter to the tragic tone of the story: 'The author of this book has himself insisted upon the gravity of what he has to say. Nonetheless, it would seem advisable to underscore the seriousness of it, if only because of the widespread custom of making light of those writings that deal with the subject of sexual life'.¹⁴ At first glance, this remark has the appearance of an ironic assumption of accepted cultural norms; the story is clearly a 'tragic' one, but because it deals with the subject of the sexual life it is equally likely to be met with derisive laughter on the part of its reader. As the preface unfolds, it becomes clear that Bataille in no way wishes to alter the state of play; rather, he merely wishes to draw the reader's attention to the serious character of the taboo on sexual license. He reminds us that this taboo is enforced as strictly as those taboos connected to death. The principle difference lies in the response that the violation of each taboo merits in us; the former laughter, the latter fear and aversion. A brief outline of the narrative thread of 'Madame Edwarda' should make clear the fact that the story is concerned with both of these restricted areas of the sphere of human experience.

When we read 'Madame Edwarda', the first thing that we notice is that Pierre Angélique is a very bad story-teller: he constantly interrupts himself, and these interruptions (which are usually enclosed in parentheses to indicate their departure from the narrative) are often of a derisory nature, and have the

effect of further destabilising the text. It reads like a deathbed confession, and in the loss of coherency it experiences towards its close, it appears to document its narrator's slippage into insanity before ending in a paroxysm of self-repudiation. Interruptions aside, however, the story's events are easy to summarise. Angélique opens the story by describing an upwelling of a terrible anguish that took hold of him in a Parisian street. This anguish gives way to a desire for nakedness, and he removes his trousers and quickly replaces them, deciding to seek release from his agitated state either in an alcohol-induced stupor or an erotic adventure, noting mockingly that 'it's in stale flesh's tepid warmth I always suppose I'll find relief'.¹⁵ He enters a brothel whose name he gives as the mirrors, wherein he encounters Madame Edwarda, whom he selects on account of her exhibitionism. Once she joins him at a table, his attitudes toward her run the gamut from intoxicated attraction to horror as she attempts to provoke him with her exposed vagina:

Madame Edwarda's thin voice, like her slender body, was obscene: 'I guess what you want is to see the old rag and ruin', she said. Hanging on to the tabletop with both hands, I twisted around toward her. She was seated, she held one leg stuck up in the air, to open her crack yet wider she used fingers to draw the folds of skin apart. And so Madame Edwarda's 'old rag and ruin' loured at me, hairy and pink, just as full of life as some loathsome squid. 'Why', I stammered in a subdued tone, 'why are you doing that?' 'You can see for yourself', she said, 'I'm GOD'.¹⁶

He attempts to avert his gaze but she commands him to look at her crack, and despite his evident revulsion toward her he obeys. He follows her upstairs and copulates with her. Afterwards, at her request, he accompanies her out into the empty streets. Before leaving the brothel, Edwarda insists on dressing up: 'She put on a white bolero, beneath a domino cloak she disguised her nakedness. The domino's hood cowed her head, a black velvet mask, fitted with a beard of lace, hid her face'.¹⁷ This act appears to alter her demeanour dramatically, transforming the naked, indolent whore into an androgynous figure that appears to parody the robed and bearded Christ depicted by so

many artists of the renaissance. Pierre follows her through the deserted streets, and as she runs on ahead of him she appears to undergo a metamorphosis, transforming from a human into an animal with the aid of her bearded mask. This metamorphosis is, of course, a figurative one: while Edwarda may take on the appearance and behaviour of animals (her mask evokes not only Christ, but goats and satyrs also, and her movements during the frenzy into which she subsequently descends recall a pig at trough as it lowers its head and raises its rump), she never actually undergoes any kind of theriomorphic transformation. Rather, her animalistic behaviour indicates her departure from the limitations of human reality as the author sees it. Her perceived descent into animality is an integral phase of her apotheosis, for the narrator has to witness the destruction of her humanity before he can recognise her for what she really is. He finally realises her declaration of godhead to be true as she pauses under the arch of the Porte Saint-Denis: 'She waited for me underneath the arch – unmoving, exactly under the arch. She was entirely black, simply there, as distressing as an emptiness, a hole. I realized she wasn't frolicking, wasn't joking, and indeed that, beneath the garment enfolding her, she was mindless: rapt, absent. Then all the drunken exhilaration drained out of me, then I knew that She had not lied, that She was GOD'.¹⁸ He continues to follow her out of a desire to know her secret, and watches her descend into a trance-like state which soon gives way to an animalistic fury. She attacks him physically and verbally: 'She shouted in a ravelled, impossible voice, she screamed at the sky and, horrified, her whirling arms flailing at vacant air: "I can't stand any more," she shrilled, "but you, you fake priest. I shit on you" – That broken voice ended in a rattle, her outstretched hands groped blindly, then she collapsed'.¹⁹ Deciding to return her to the brothel, he carries her to a nearby taxi rank, and commandeers the services of one of the drivers. Once in the taxi, Madame Edwarda recovers consciousness, and seduces the driver. The narrator watches silently as they have sex; soon after this episode the coherency of the narrative disappears, and he insists that he can no longer continue with his story.

The most natural response to an initial reading of this story is confusion: its message – mutilated as it is by its narrator – appears incomprehensible, and

Edwarda's claim to divinity seems preposterous. It undoubtedly contains some very humorous events, but they are humorous precisely because they are absurd – even quite implausible. They may well provoke bawdy laughter in us, but Bataille would have us remember that 'What the hearty laugh screens from us, what fetches up the bawdy jest, is the identity that exists between the utmost in pleasure and the utmost in pain'.²⁰ In the Bataillean vocabulary laughter and horror essentially amount to the same thing: aversion. They are both associated with 'forbidden' subjects, and are governed by the pleasure/pain binary; any distinction between them, as Bataille makes clear in his preface, is arbitrary. In this respect, the erotic tale proves to be the perfect medium for Bataille to introduce a discussion on the affinity between these two responses, for 'If we are to follow all the way through to its last the ecstasy in which we lose ourselves in love-play, we have got constantly to bear in mind what we set as ecstasy's immediate limit: horror'.²¹ Accordingly, Bataille annexes horror, and includes it as a necessary phase in the erotic expeditions he describes, expeditions that lead, ultimately, to death.

Now this is all very well – it allows us to gain some insight into the peculiar nature of much of Bataille's fiction – but what exactly has it got to do with mysticism? To answer this question, it is necessary to define exactly what we mean by 'mysticism' in the first place. Bataille provides a clear demarcation of the term in *Literature and Evil*, observing that 'By mysticism I do not mean those vague systems of thought on which this vague name is conferred: I refer rather to the mystical experience, to those mystical states experienced in solitude'.²² While such a statement might allow us to do away with all notions of a 'system' pertaining to the achievement of such experience, and to redirect our enquiry to the realm of experience, it poses us an obvious problem with respect to 'Madame Edwarda'. If the attainment of mystical experience is a solitary affair, how can it be reconciled with eroticism? For Bataille, no reconciliation is necessary; erotic experience is an integral aspect of mystical experience, and both such experiences require a transgression in order to be attained. It is appropriate, however, to inquire as to the nature of the transgression involved, and to ask exactly what is at stake in the attainment of such experience.

Bataille's thinking with regard to eroticism – and indeed to the entire scope of human existence – is paradoxical, and is couched in terms of continuity and discontinuity, presence and absence. It acknowledges reason and the existence of the world of 'things', but it suggests the existence of a reality beyond this world, a reality devoid of reason, purpose and distinctions; Bataille refers to this state interchangeably as intimacy, continuity or the sacred. Human beings, according to Bataille, are finite and therefore discontinuous beings, and as such they are abstracted from this reality. Consciousness is the mark of the discontinuous being: to be conscious is to be conscious of one's being, and to be conscious of one's finitude. It is only with the loss of consciousness and the awareness of our finitude portended by the dissolution of the self that we may again return to continuity. There are, however, instances in which continuity can be said to be immanent: death (whether experienced or witnessed) and the act of copulation threaten to rupture the world of appearances, as they herald the disappearance of the self. Accordingly, situations which touch upon eroticism and death cause feelings of attraction and repulsion to arise simultaneously in us: we are repelled because we fear for the loss of our temporal, purposive notion of 'self', yet we are drawn towards the boundaries of that existence in spite of ourselves. Religion, Bataille argues, was borne out of our desire, as discontinuous beings which are nevertheless drawn towards the limits of our being, to mediate between these conflicting desires.

The history of religion, as Bataille interprets it, is a narrative documenting a series of attempts, each more vigorous than the last, to rationalise that which is irrational in Man. Religious schemas annexe the impulses towards eroticism and violence, and sanction their outlet at designated intervals, namely in festivals and acts of sacrifice. Such events are marked by the temporary suspension of taboos and prohibitions – in short, a sanctioning of lawlessness, excessive indulgence and, in the case of sacrifice, the violent expenditure of energy in the destruction of items possessed of significant use value. These festivals, in temporarily removing the restrictions necessary for the continuation of the purposive existence of the community, ensured that

order would re-establish itself, and that the laws would be upheld once again. Thus, the chaotic and dangerous forces whose presence the festival acknowledged came to guarantee the continuance of the profane world. With the advent of Christianity, however, this uneasy balance was to undergo a fundamental shift in favour of the profane. The prohibitions associated with the sexual life became categorical, and the acts of sacrifice that drew the community together were abandoned, and replaced with the notion of a 'Divine Sacrifice': to wit, the crucifixion of Christ, a vicarious act intended to remove the necessity for sacrifice thereafter. This 'Divine Sacrifice', moreover, exists in order to expiate the sins of the entire race: not only those sins that predated it, but also the sins to follow after the sacrifice. Accordingly, Christian doctrine implicates Humanity in its entirety in the murder of Christ, in effect condemning and absolving it simultaneously, and guarding against future sins by deeming them irrelevant. Thus it follows that Man need not sin since his sins are already accounted for, and can never compare to the ultimate sin in which he is implicated.

Bataille intimates that Christ's crucifixion is 'an extremely equivocal expression of evil',²³ an example of an experience in which discontinuous being is forced into confrontation with, and therefore an experience of its disappearance: he calls this vertiginous moment a 'summit experience'. Bataille's conception of the summit is adapted from Nietzsche's discussions of summit and decline moralities. In keeping with Nietzsche's identification of the summit and subsequent decline as types of morality, Bataille prefixes his conception of summit with the term 'moral'. Bataille's notion of morality is intrinsically linked with his notion of evil. His understanding of evil is fairly traditional in that it recognises it as existing contrary to 'good', yet he recognises it as a sovereign force without which no 'good' can exist. By 'good', he means the continuance of a life lived in accordance with reason, whose purpose is, ultimately, its continuation; evil is that which threatens to destroy such a project. For Bataille, morality mediates the individual's encounters with evil, as evidenced by his claim in the preface to *Literature and Evil* that Literature – which he identifies as a mode of intense communication which forces the reader into an encounter with evil – necessitates the

development of a 'hyper-morality'.²⁴ The summit is a moral event in that it is an experience of evil: a morality that embraces the summit, therefore, must be a morality of affirmation as opposed to prohibition. Bataille identifies the summit as 'the highest point, or most intense degree of life's attraction to itself that life can define'²⁵: it is an experience brought about by excess, and it is through this excess that life is experienced at its greatest intensity. The summit is a moment in which everything is at stake: in attaining it, we must risk the loss of our integrity as discontinuous beings, and accept the annihilation of the self as a distinct possibility. While Bataille does not echo Nietzsche in identifying Christ's crucifixion as one of the most sublime representations of the summit, he nevertheless recognises it as an extremely potent symbol. It is by no means the only way to attain the summit; indeed, there are many other ways by which it may be brought about. Heavy drinking, reckless gambling, or the indulgence in the most perverse sorts of sexual play are just a few of the examples that Bataille lists. All of these activities are in a sense reminiscent of the act of sacrifice, for they are engaged in wresting the objects and persons involved from the world of appearances, and obliterating their status as 'Things'. In addition to this list we might include the experience of extreme violence, whether administered or suffered; the crucifixion, of course, is an example of the latter. At first glance, such activities appear to be imbued with an element of intentionality, but Bataille insists that the summit cannot be arrived at by an act of will; if it is to happen it will happen providentially. This dependence on caprice is a key factor in 'Madame Edwarda', a narrative whose pivotal moments are chance encounters. These encounters defy the narrator's – and indeed the reader's expectations, as the experiences that arise as a result are wholly other than the experiences anticipated at the story's beginning. Angélique opens his account by recalling his desire to lose himself in another's tepid flesh, but it is painfully apparent that he never succeeds in achieving this desired self-loss. Rather, he is forced into passivity in order to bear witness, as the gospels inform us that his namesake St Peter did, to the tortured transports of the divine.

While 'Madame Edwarda' is a narrative centred upon the attainment of the summit, it is equally concerned with the decline implicit in its attainment. The

decline morality, as Nietzsche and Bataille understand it, is the type of morality proclaimed by the principle doctrines of the Christian faith: it is the type of morality that develops in response to the summit, in turning away from it and desiring to stave off the moment of its return. Thus the crucifixion, which is the symbol of such a morality, may be understood as an equivocal symbol: it is an expression of evil in that it represents the destruction of a finite creature, yet it is subordinated to a 'good' in that it is employed to gainsay the continuance of the lives of those who imbue it with value. This being so it serves a temporal end, yet it possesses a teleological dimension that transcends temporality: those who live their lives in accordance with the morality that this symbol has come to connote are guaranteed salvation upon entry into the beyond. The characteristic trait of such a morality is asceticism, which expresses itself in the denial of the baser passions. The Christian mystics adapted the tenets of decline morality in order to develop a systematic means for the attainment of oneness with the divine. In *Literature And Evil*, Bataille notes that the efforts of the ascetics depart from theology in that they furnish us with experiential testimonies of their encounters with something which is wholly other to themselves. The various techniques that they employ in order to achieve such experiences – abstinence, meditation etc – are alike in that they are a means to an end, namely the desire to circumvent the need to communicate that is fundamental to discontinuous being. They do communicate, however, and this is attested to by the accounts that they leave for posterity, which are often reminiscent of works of Literature. The end that they strive to attain is akin to death, in that it requires the annihilation of the self, and indeed it is possessed of a certain savour of death, which is achieved via representational eroticism. Bataille attests to this fact, asserting that 'The basic crime associated with the saints is erotic, and related to the transports and tortured fevers that produce a burning love in the solitude of monasteries and convents'.²⁶ This meditation on tremendous suffering is a crime of sorts, to be sure, but the vicarious nature of the saviour prevents the crime of eroticism from being realised. Bataille is critical of Christianity for this very reason: in its disavowal of erotic experience, it shuts itself off from a means of realising one of its greatest prerogatives, namely its claim that man must die to the world in order to be born again.

What 'Madame Edwarda' appears to offer us, then, is an alternative to asceticism in the traditional sense, but it stops short of dismissing it outright. It seeks an alternative to asceticism in eroticism, a domain neglected both by Christendom and by the rapidly secularising society of the early twentieth century. Pierre Angélique begins his account with a description of the state to which erotic experience is relegated in the secular streets of twentieth-century Paris, proclaiming 'The sovereign is a king no more: it dwells low-hiding in big cities'.²⁷ Here, of course, he is alluding to the anonymous, clandestine sex acts that take place under the auspices of the whorehouse and its attendants. Yet for all their furtiveness these acts are possessed of a certain religiosity, as indicated by Pierre's visit to The Mirrors, the events of which bear an uncanny resemblance to the liturgy of the catholic mass. After achieving a premature orgasm in his first embrace with Edwarda, he achieves an ecstasy akin to the transports that one might presume to feel in church: 'It was as though I were borne aloft in a flight of headless and unbodied angels shaped from the broad swooping of wings'. This empty vision, which is no more than a naively romanticised version of religious ecstasy, soon gives way to shame, disappointment, and eventually a paroxysm of rage: 'I became unhappy and felt painfully forsaken, as one is when in the presence of GOD'.²⁸ Later, after Edwarda's shameless act of exhibitionism, he follows her upstairs, painfully aware of the ritualism of the act. He makes his payment to one of the attendants before doing so, and we are reminded of the donations that are deposited in the collection plate before the consecration of the host and the act of communion. Once upstairs, the 'communion' to which the rituals in the brothel were a precursor is, of course, the act of copulation with Edwarda, which takes place in a room whose walls and ceiling are adorned with the mirrors that are the establishment's namesake. Their presence, and the 'multiple reflections of an animal coupling'²⁹ that they cast lend the proceedings – which are uncharacteristically left to the reader's imagination – a grotesquely carnivalesque atmosphere. The presence of these mirrors and the act that they reflect, moreover, may be read as a further comment on the type of communication favoured by religious institutions. The Christian church, as we have seen, relies on representations of summit experience rather than

the experience of the summit itself: it requires that its followers attempt to communicate with the beyond, but this communication, unlike the communication of the summit, is subordinated to a temporal end, namely the purgation of all that is base from the human spirit. Thus, the mirror, in providing a multiplicity of reflections of the carnal act, supplants the deed with a representation, in much the same way that the image of the crucifixion stands in for the actual experience of crucifixion. The mirror distorts the image sufficiently enough to disarm it of much of its potency.

This passage, with its interplay between the represented and the 'real', serves to remind us that we are dealing with something representational, namely an artwork, a mode of communication similar to a pictorial representation of a 'real' object. It does not serve to nullify its author's criticism of an institution which relies upon representation, but rather acknowledges that representation is an indispensable mode of communication: the absolute reality which the story, and indeed the institution its critiques attempts to convey can only be presented representationally. The juxtaposition of modes of representation recurs throughout the story, but it is most evident in its author's account of his transports in the brothel. The vision of ascent described above is paired with a second transport that Pierre experiences apropos of kissing Edwarda's 'old rag and ruin', which, he reports, resembles a 'running, teeming wound'.³⁰ There are no angels to be found here. He is borne upwards, to be sure, but by no means toward heaven:

I thought I heard a sound of roaring sea surge, it is the same sound you hear when you put your ear to a large conch shell. In the brothel's boisterous chaos and in the atmosphere of corroding absurdity I was breathing (it seemed to me that I was choking, I was flushed, I was sweating) I hung strangely suspended, quite as though at that same point we, Edwarda and I, were losing ourselves in a wind-freighted night, on the edge of the ocean.³¹

This experience is a precursor of the ecstasy, and indeed the horror to come. The allusion he makes to the ocean is significant, as it implies the presence of

the abyss, the void into which being empties itself when in the throes of ecstasy. In this instance, however, Pierre and Edwarda do not lose themselves completely – in fact, Pierre is never to do so. After copulating with Edwarda in the brothel he returns to sobriety, and is freed from the hypnotic power she held over him before the completion of the act. He remains conscious throughout the remainder of the ordeal. He observes Madame Edwarda's numerous metamorphoses, and only recognises her for what she is when, tellingly, she temporarily ceases to be anything at all, as she passes under the arch of the Port Saint-Denis. Referring to this passage in his essay 'Georges Bataille And Divinus Deus', Yukio Mishima points to the possibility of arguing that 'this is in fact a theoretical God – a Cartesian God that was reached through the intellect awoken from sexual lust, through an illumination'.³² He is right, however, to identify this as a trick on the part of the author, for Cartesian sureties are to be swept away by the proceeding passages, which describe Madame Edwarda's animalistic convulsions and subsequent encounter with the anonymous taxi driver on the back seat of his cab. The description of the act is unflattering: it insinuates that what has taken place is an obscene act of violence, as opposed to an act of exhibitionist copulation. But if it is an act of violence, it is an act that Edwarda welcomes, and indeed instigates, as it provides the means for her apotheosis; she achieves orgasm, and suffers spasms that communicate a sense of powerful *jouissance*. In his reading of this episode in *Libidinal Economy*, Lyotard comments upon the apparent disconnectedness of the participants in the act from one another: 'The taxi driver will have shot his load as if it had been just another lay; but he will have paid nothing, his vehicle will have served as a hotel bedroom, he had asked for nothing, and finally it is insanity he held and penetrated'.³³ He offers no comment on the significance of Pierre's presence in this scene, but one cannot help but feel that the act has the appearance of a performance enacted for Pierre's benefit. In this respect, it is reminiscent of the sexual acts performed for the narrator of *Histoire de L'Oeil* by his female companion. This is a peculiar trademark of Bataille's erotic fiction, which seems somewhat at odds with the claims made for the nature of the sexual act in *Eroticism*, which appear to state that direct participation in the act is required in order to offer the male partner a glimpse of continuity. To call the

narrator a voyeur for passively observing this act would be inaccurate: it is evident that he takes no pleasure in witnessing the act, for his anguish prevents him from doing so. He has already chosen to bear witness to Edwarda's transports, and has elected not to participate in them, in order that his capacity for observation should remain intact. In any case, he has already come to the realisation that what the mysteries to which he has become an initiate foreshadows is his own, inevitable end. He declares that, in witnessing this final embracement of excess, he is observing something miraculous, something which, accordingly, reduces his own feelings to mere triviality.

After Edwarda's throes of passion have subsided the narrator props up her exhausted body, observing the signs that indicate the attainment of the summit:

Her eyes swung to rights and then she seemed to grow easy. She saw me, from her stare, then, at that moment, I knew she was drifting home from the 'impossible' and in her nether depths I could discern a dizzying fixity. The milky outpouring travelling through her, the jet spitting from the root, flooding her with joy, came spurting out again in her very tears: burning tears streamed from her wide-open eyes. Love was dead in those eyes, they contained a daybreak aureate chill, a transparency wherein I read death's letters.³⁴

This passage affirms the kinship between Eros and Thanatos that Bataille stresses so fervently in his preface. The narrator uses the ambiguous word 'love' to stress that which is absent from Edwarda's exhausted countenance, but what exactly does this word connote? The God with which he presents us is by no means benevolent, the love that it exemplifies is far closer to that of Eros than Agape, and is only extended to us at the moment of our doom. Tellingly, the narrative loses coherency soon after this moment. The glimpse of continuity that the narrator experiences clearly shocks him to the core, and he seeks, in vain, to make sense of what he has seen, and finally, of what he has written: 'I can't conceive of any "meaning" other than "my" anguish, and

as for that, I know all about it. And for the time being: nonsense. Monsieur Nonsense is writing and understands that he is mad'.³⁵ He goes on to declare that 'GOD, if He knew, would be a swine',³⁶ and brings his story to an abrupt end.

Now, in bringing my own account of the nature of this story to its close, I should like to address some of the implications, religious or otherwise, of this perplexing narrative and its even more baffling interruptions. The questions it poses are awkward: Should we regard Madame Edwarda in the same way that we regard Christ, as God Made Flesh? And why, moreover should God, in the last analysis, become a swine? Finally, is God truly only to be found upon entrance to vertiginous nothingness, and this being so, is there any point in seeking communion with God at all? While the story presents us with all of these questions, it refuses, in the last analysis, to answer any of them; for were it to endeavour to do so, the only possible outcome would be the complete destruction of its integrity. The story is an example of a self-revoking text, a text which turns in upon itself as it reaches its most crucial moment, unravelling into incoherence and calling itself into question in the process. It is an exemplary transgressive text not by virtue of the nature of its subject matter alone, but of language itself; in this sense the transgression it performs is twofold, and the text is both the means by which the transgression is accomplished and the limitation that is transgressed. It presents the reader with an attempted sacrifice of language, a feat that is, in the last resort, impossible to achieve; in failing to exceed its boundaries, it has no choice but to turn in upon itself. The text that remains is a sort of hecatomb, a testimonial to the existence of a domain whose chief attribute is silence. If it is a joke, then it is the killing joke: the laughter it wrings from us is bitter, the kind of laughter that ends in a profound and unbreakable silence. It offers us a vision of humanity caught in a double bind: on the one hand, the confinement of a world of distinctions in which beings are painfully separate, and on the other the promise of entrance into continuity at the price of losing our sense of being completely. Either way, the disappearance of our being is, at some point, inevitable. The division that this double bind creates in us, as Bataille intimates in his preface, is irreconcilable insofar as we remain conscious. It is

agonising: it lacerates us like a wound, and if Pierre Angélique is to be believed, God is riven by the same terrible wound, the evidence of which is attested to, and represented by the lurid description of Edwarda's 'old rag and ruin'. God, for Bataille, a thinker who is mistrustful of language and aware of its inadequacy for the expression of the paradoxicality of human existence, is an impossible word, a word which always implies the surpassing of the meanings prescribed to it, in short, a word that refutes all possible limits, a word that can never be accorded a satisfactory definition; this being so, it follows that God is engaged, always, in the surpassing of himself. If this is truly so, the narrator's assertion that God is a swine cannot be ascribed with any significance save that it is just one of a seemingly infinite number of attributes that may be assigned, ineffectually, to the word.

Throughout this article I have endeavoured to stress both the convergences and disparities between mysticism and eroticism, and between mysticism and Literature. I have followed Bataille in stressing the kinship between mysticism and Literature, but it now proves necessary to attend to the former pairing. Traditionally, mystical and erotic experiences have been considered two mutually exclusive domains. This is due, predominantly, to the former's sustained condemnation of the latter. In Bataille, however, a point of convergence appears to exist, but nevertheless it is a convergence that necessarily requires one to give way to the other. In 'Madame Edwarda', this point of convergence is unstable, and we can never be too sure of which experience takes precedence. They are both concerned with the dissolution of the self: The mystics, in seeking to render themselves similar to God – that is, similar to nothing – are engaged in an effort to surpass themselves; this is also true of lovers, in whose love-play the boundaries between distinct 'selves' are temporarily dissolved. Anguish attends both types of experience, and it is on an anguished note that 'Madame Edwarda' ends; it is this anguish that prevents Angélique from completely compromising his message. The approach of the mystics is systematic, and therefore purposive, 'but what mysticism could not say (at the moment it began to pronounce its message, it entered it – entered its trance), eroticism does say',³⁷ and not least because it is largely contingent upon chance; it opens out upon a domain which,

although similar to the one sought by the mystics, they nevertheless deny. This chasm is, in the last resort, an unbridgeable one; while Bataille the theoretician is eager to assert the notion of a kinship between Literature and the writings of the mystics, the author of 'Madame Edwarda' appears to deny any pretension to mysticism whatsoever. He rejects his story as he tells it, yet it is clear that he has been deeply affected by what he claims to have seen. He alleges to have glimpsed God in the extent of his horror, and admits to living in a state of fear and trembling, anticipating the moment of his death and at the same time fearing its onset. And since he is unable to properly describe that which he has seen, he lays claim to anguish, asserting it as sovereign before falling silent. The contemptuous cry with which 'Madame Edwarda' ends is an expression of this anguish, but it is also an affirmation of a tragic and inarticulable joy. If we are to have any hope of understanding this joy, we must abandon any hope of interpreting the story rationally: we must deny the existence of any limitations whatsoever, and open ourselves up to a world of limitless possibility. Moreover, we must accept that we run the risk of completely losing ourselves along the way. In the grip of this insensate joy, the story proclaims that what it is trying to say is unpronounceable, impossible to convey through language, and in revoking its message it celebrates its impossibility. Bataille ends his preface with an affirmation of this celebratory mood, and of the *jouissance* that pervades the text: 'the cry that breaks from a twisted mouth may perhaps twist him who utters it, but what he speaks is an immense alleluia, flung into endless silence, and lost there'.³⁸

¹ Charles Baudelaire, 'My Heart Laid Bare' in *My Heart Laid Bare and Other Prose Writings* trans. and ed. Peter Quennell (London: Soho Book Co., 1986): 190.

² *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (New York: Bartleby.com, 2000) [WWW documents] <http://www.bartleby.com/108//>, downloaded 17/11/08. John 4:8

³ Georges Bataille, 'Un-knowing and Rebellion', in *The Bataille Reader*, eds. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997): 327.

⁴ Georges Bataille, *Theory of Religion* trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Zone Books, 1992): 57.

⁵ Jean-Michel Heimonet, 'Bataille and Sartre: The Modernity of Mysticism', trans. Emoretta Yang, in *Diacritics* vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 59-73.

⁶ Jean-Michel Heimonet, 'Bataille and Sartre: the Modernity of Mysticism', trans. Emoretta Yang, in *Diacritics* vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 59-73.

⁷ Amy Hollywood, 'Bataille and Mysticism: a 'Dazzling Dissolution'', in *Diacritics* vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 74-85.

⁸ Amy Hollywood, 'Bataille and Mysticism: A 'Dazzling Dissolution'', in *Diacritics* vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 74-85.

⁹ Carolyn Dean, 'Introduction', in *Diacritics* vol. 26, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 3-5.

¹⁰ Georges Bataille, *Eroticism* trans. Mary Dalwood (London: Marion Boyars, 1987): 17.

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- ¹¹ Cf. Susan Sontag, 'The Pornographic Imagination', in Georges Bataille, *Story Of The Eye* (London: Penguin, 1979).
- ¹² This preface is reprinted in the 1989 edition of Austryn Wainhouse's translations of Bataille's 'My Mother', 'Madame Edwarda' and 'The Dead Man'. All quotations from the preface are taken from this edition.
- ¹³ Georges Bataille, 'W.C.', in Georges Bataille, *Story of the Eye* trans. Joachim Neugroschal (London: Penguin, 1979): 76.
- ¹⁴ Georges Bataille, Preface to *Madame Edwarda*, in *My Mother, Madame Edwarda And The Dead Man* trans. Austryn Wainhouse (London: Marion Boyars, 1989): 137.
- ¹⁵ 'Madame Edwarda': 148.
- ¹⁶ 'Madame Edwarda': 150.
- ¹⁷ 'Madame Edwarda': 151.
- ¹⁸ 'Madame Edwarda': 152.
- ¹⁹ 'Madame Edwarda': 154.
- ²⁰ Preface to 'Madame Edwarda': 139-40.
- ²¹ Preface to 'Madame Edwarda': 140.
- ²² Georges Bataille, *Literature And Evil* trans. Alastair Hamilton (London: Calder & Boyars, 1973): 12-13.
- ²³ Georges Bataille, *On Nietzsche*, trans. Bruce Boon, (London: Continuum, 2004): 17.
- ²⁴ Georges Bataille, Preface to *Literature And Evil*: VII.
- ²⁵ *On Nietzsche*: 26.
- ²⁶ *On Nietzsche*: 31.
- ²⁷ 'Madame Edwarda': 147.
- ²⁸ 'Madame Edwarda': 147.
- ²⁹ 'Madame Edwarda': 151.
- ³⁰ 'Madame Edwarda': 150.
- ³¹ 'Madame Edwarda': 150.
- ³² Yukio Mishima, 'Georges Bataille and Divinus Deus', in Georges Bataille, *My Mother, Madame Edwarda And The Dead Man* trans. Austryn Wainhouse (London: Marion Boyars, 1989): 14.
- ³³ Jean-François Lyotard, *Libidinal Economy* trans. Iain Hamilton Grant (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993): 140.
- ³⁴ 'Madame Edwarda': 157-8.
- ³⁵ 'Madame Edwarda': 159.
- ³⁶ 'Madame Edwarda': 159.
- ³⁷ Preface to 'Madame Edwarda': 141-2.
- ³⁸ Preface to 'Madame Edwarda': 144.

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Against the Grain: Man Ray and the Sacralisation of the Surreal

Peter Kwee

Abstract

This paper argues that Man Ray's photography in 1920s-1930s Paris had an important function of sacralising Surrealist activities and values of that period. Critical studies tend to focus on his use of manipulated photography, reading these works in semiotic and psychoanalytical terms. What is less often considered is that Man Ray was also a highly successful professional photographer, making a good living from fashion and portrait photography. Indeed, Man Ray himself tended to be somewhat dismissive of his own commercial photographic activities, and was always at pains to make a distinction between these and his work as an artist. This paper challenges the validity of such a neat compartmentalisation; it investigates the relationship between Man Ray's commercial and fine art photography, and explores some implications of the overlaps. Using Pierre Bourdieu's writings on photography, it argues that of Man Ray's work can be seen not only to solemnise Surrealist activities, but also as a kind of performative photography that normalises and confers a mocking sacralisation of Surrealist sacrileges against the grain of prevailing bourgeois social and cultural conventions. In order to understand the full significance of Man Ray's work, it must be seen in terms of its socialising function within the Surrealist group itself.

The very first issue of the Surrealist journal *La Révolution Surréaliste* was published on 1 December 1924, and had on its cover three photos of leading members of the surrealist group at the *Bureau de Recherches surréalistes*, taken by Man Ray. The caption underneath the photographs reads '*Il faut aboutir à une nouvelle déclaration des droits de l'homme*' ('One must strive towards a new declaration of the rights of man'). This caption serves as a reminder that Surrealism as a movement in France in the 1920s and 1930s was concerned not with rethinking ways of making art, but rather with making a different way of life. Their explorations of the unconscious can be considered as part of a project to construct a new society, one whose values and attitudes would be based on a reconciliation of the conscious and the unconscious. In such a project, it was not enough for the Surrealists to reject existing bourgeois conventions and morality – Dadaists (amongst others) had already led the way in this regard with their stridently nihilistic works. Reflecting this shift in intention,

the strategies adopted by surrealists therefore had to encompass not only subversion, but also the development, presentation and advocacy of alternative thinking and values.

In this paper, I investigate how Man Ray's photographic work contributes to this surrealist attempt to construct an alternative society – specifically, I shall examine the relevance that aspects of Man Ray's commercial photography had for his personal practice as a Surrealist artist. Man Ray himself tended to be somewhat dismissive of his own commercial photographic activities, and was always at pains to make a distinction between these and his work as an artist. He remarks in his autobiography that 'I was going to make money – not wait for recognition that might or might not come. In fact, I might become rich enough never to have to sell a painting, which would be ideal.'¹ It is tempting to accept Man Ray's own neat compartmentalisation between his commercial and his artistic activities at face value.

However, this opposition between commercial photography and painting as personal activity was quickly invalidated by developments in Man Ray's practice, since he virtually abandoned painting altogether in favour of photography not long after his experiments with photograms – or Rayographs, as he called them – a form of camera-less photography. I shall argue that such a convenient differentiation would be mistaken because it is these overlaps that sometimes shapes the very meaning of his work as a surrealist artist. I begin by examining these overlaps and how they affect his status among the Surrealists, arguing that Man Ray's commercial work gives him a special status of consecrant within the Surrealist group. I then examine the implications of this for some of his other works, particularly in books, demonstrating how because of his status as consecrant, some of Man Ray's work can be better understood as acts of mocking sacralisation – acts that, rather than simply desacralising the subject, in fact go much further by consecrating surrealist transgressions against bourgeois conventions. My aim is to show, with a mainly sociologically-based reading, how Man Ray's photography performed an important integrative function for the surrealists not only directly through his social portraiture but also because it served to normalise surrealist values in unexpected, subtle and

surprising ways, by sacralising their symbolic sacrileges against the grain of convention.

The Man Ray photographs that illustrated the first cover of *La Révolution Surréaliste* might appear unremarkable to bystanders, but they held a particular significance for the Surrealists. The *Bureau de Recherches surréalistes* was established on 11 October 1924 at 15 *rue de Grenelle*, Paris. This was an important occasion for the Surrealists because it gave the group its first physical presence, an address and a home. Less than eight weeks later, they launched their first journal *La Révolution Surréaliste*, another important milestone. This was a time of dynamic action and exciting growth for the Surrealists, in light of which the group portraits assume much greater significance than mere cover illustration – they don't merely record the establishment of the Bureau, they solemnise it; their presence on the journal cover links these two milestones in the life of the group, and also formally links the individual surrealists portrayed in the photos to these two events. Such portrait photography is strongly rooted in its social function, as an instrument of solemnisation; this type of practice fulfils a need that sociologist Pierre Bourdieu calls its family function, which is 'that of solemnising and immortalising the high points of family life.'² According to this argument, the high points in the life of any group are key moments when it solemnly reaffirms its unity as a family. By supplying the means of solemnising such occasions, photography itself becomes an instrument of solemnisation, vital to the consecration of these climactic moments in the life of the social or family group. Furthermore, on such occasions the group celebrates not just the specific reasons for coming together, but also the group's sense of itself as a social unit. The photograph, in expressing this sense of celebration, thus also expresses the identity of the group as community or family. It bears witness to the individual's presence in, and therefore affirms his membership of the group. The photograph therefore performs a strong socially integrative function, affirming both the overall unity of the group and the membership of each individual within it.

Man Ray's photos for the cover of *La Révolution Surréaliste* perform this very function for the surrealists. In the central photo, the sense of the group as one

unit is underpinned by their formal poses and united gaze towards the camera. The photo on the right depicts the group all intently following a waking dream séance while a secretary scribes; it captures and celebrates the group's united and deep engagement in its investigation of dreaming and automatism. *La Révolution Surréaliste* was published for the benefit of the surrealists and their followers, not for the public at large, for whom the photos would have had little significance. But for the Surrealists, these photos effectively affirm and reinforce the group's identity and the photographs themselves become, as much as anything else, the group's image of its own integration. Being seen to be a member is of course part of this process of integration, and an early group portrait of Paris Dadaists in 1921 touchingly illustrates this. Man Ray had not yet provided himself with the necessary equipment to operate his camera remotely, so Eluard obligingly holds up a large portrait of Man Ray to stand-in for him.³ The cover illustration for *La Révolution Surréaliste* is only one of countless instances of Man Ray's use of the photographic portrait as an instrument of solemnisation for the surrealists. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s he is usually present at key Surrealist moments and events as well as their social and informal occasions, recording them on film for posterity.

The fact that Man Ray is the photographer who makes these photographs has a particular significance for his role among the Surrealists. This use of portrait photography to solemnise occasions points to a ritualistic dimension in this social function of photography as performance, insofar as photography becomes an integral part of the social rite, and it is the act of photographing that consecrates, leaving the photograph as record. This ritual use of photography places the photographer in the role of officiant and consecrant. The choice of photographer to fill this role therefore cannot be, and is not simply left to chance. As Bourdieu points out, '(amateur photographers) can duplicate the function of the professional photographer, the officiant whose presence sanctions the solemnity of the rite, but they can never replace him.'⁴ In other words, because of the ritualistic nature of this photography the role of consecrant is not conferred by the group on just anyone; the competence or otherwise of any photographers who may happen to be present on such occasions is secondary to the status of the photographer as a 'professional',

which is the basis of his authority as consecrant. It was therefore natural that Man Ray fulfilled just this function for the Surrealists.

Of course, several others in the Surrealist movement were accomplished photographers – names like Bellmer, Boiffard, Brassaï, Cahun, Kertész, Parry, Tabard, Ubac, all come readily to mind. However, Man Ray's work differed from theirs in at least one important respect: he was a highly successful social photographer by profession. Man Ray arrived in Paris in 1921 to further his career as a painter, but almost immediately began to make photographic portraits, largely as a financial expedient. Although he continued to paint, it was as a portrait photographer that Man Ray first made his reputation. He quickly became successful as both a fashion and a portrait photographer, and within a year the magazine *Vanity Fair* had published Man Ray's portraits of Pablo Picasso and James Joyce. His contacts within the Dada and Surrealist groups in Paris gave him an *entrée* into the literary and artistic avant-garde circles, and into the higher echelons of French society. This, together with his growing reputation, brought him a broad range of assignments, from photographing high society balls through to a funerary portrait of Marcel Proust. Man Ray's reputation as a professional photographer is consolidated by his position in the book and magazine publishing field, where he is often cited as 'official' photographer. For example, Gertrude Stein in her autobiography recalls Man Ray joking that 'I am your official photographer'. Sylvia Beach, who ran the Parisian publishing house Shakespeare and Company, refers to Man Ray as her 'official portraitist'.⁵ Therefore, as a member of the surrealist group and close to its leading figures, and because he was also the professional photographic portraitist of choice for Parisian high society, Man Ray was uniquely placed within the Surrealist group to be considered its official photographer. The evidence of the group's own photographic portrait records – the consistent presence of Man Ray as the photographer at Surrealist gatherings, both formal and informal, social and official – shows that the Surrealists did indeed confer upon Man Ray the role of their *de facto* consecrant, their officiant who solemnised the high points of the group's life.

My discussion of Man Ray's portraiture so far has established its conventional role as a socialising instrument, as well as Man Ray's role as consecrant for the Surrealists. There is nothing particularly subversive about this portraiture, which generally depicts the group engaged in conventional and socially acceptable behaviour. However, I would now argue that Man Ray's role as consecrant in turn has significant implications that should be taken into account when reading the meaning and function of Man Ray's other, more personal and intentionally artistic practice. Alongside his more conventional portraiture, Man Ray produced many works that involve both blatant and covert challenges to bourgeois conventions, works dealing with issues central to Surrealist debates, such as identity and gender, sex and desire, and the unconscious. My argument is that because of Man Ray's status as the Surrealist group's official photographer, much of this latter work should not be considered as desacralising photography but can be better understood through Pierre Bourdieu's notion of 'mocking sacralisation'. According to Bourdieu,

As an instrument of solemnization, the photograph can give a mocking sacralization to a symbolic sacrilege . . . an act of solemnization against the grain, against all the rules of good taste, an infringement of the rules of good taste which expresses and, by expressing it, reinforces, the controlled lack of control.⁶

In other words: because photography is an instrument of solemnisation, when a symbolic sacrilege is deliberately enacted for, or staged in front of, the camera the result is not desacralising photography but a sacralisation of that sacrilege – against the rules of convention, and in spite of those rules. This use of photography has the effect of mocking those conventions against which the sacrilege is committed; and by thus mocking, it reinforces the symbolic sacrilege and emphasises the breakdown of conventional values. Such photography therefore subverts those conventions at two levels – through the symbolic sacrilege portrayed, and also through its mocking sacralisation of that sacrilege. I believe that some of Man Ray's Surrealist work operates in just such a way: that it is best seen not as desacralising photography, but photography that sacralises 'against the grain'. In doing so, Man Ray's mocking

sacralisation goes beyond simple transgression of conventions – and this is perhaps the key significance of Man Ray's role as consecrant – it emphasises the breakdown of conventional values by normalising the counter-values that the symbolic sacrilege represents. By reinforcing the sacrilege, it underpins the surrealists' commitment to their transgressive values. Man Ray's sacralisation against the grain does not merely subvert conventional values but establishes Surrealism's counter-values as new social norms; such works by Man Ray constitute, in this very positive sense, the building blocks of the Surrealists' proposed new way of life.

Before I discuss examples in Man Ray's work, I would like to elaborate further Bourdieu's notion of mocking sacralisation. Bourdieu gives just one example '...the act of photographing a friend's wife in a ridiculous or even improper posture...' and goes on to state that 'acts of tomfoolery for the photographer, or photographs of tomfoolery, deliberate barbarisms which derive their comic power from their character as ritual sacrileges, should not be seen as having the effect of desacralising photography.'⁷ Bourdieu does not develop this notion any further, but at least three elements emerge from the foregoing that appear to characterise Bourdieu's mocking sacralisation: first, humour is somehow involved, perhaps ironic or sarcastic, that invites the viewer to laugh with the photographer, as if at an in-joke; second, photography somehow complicit in committing the symbolic sacrifice; and third, despite this complicity, photography retains its sacralising effect, because of a continuing association with its conventional social function. All three characteristics are involved in the following instances of mocking sacralisation in Man Ray's work:

In 1934, Man Ray published a book entitled *Photographs by Man Ray: 105 Works, 1920 - 1934* which is often referred to as a retrospective survey of Man Ray's work made during his time in Paris. More than just a collection of photographs, it provides interesting reflections of Man Ray's status as a surrealist and avant-garde artist that fall outside the scope of this paper, but I would like to examine just one section that is particularly relevant to my present enquiry. The section entitled 'Men before the Mirror' contains eighteen portraits of men. Viewed individually, these photos can be read like normal portraits,

valorising the sitter in conventional fashion. However, there is therefore a visual consistency about the photographs of this section that presents the portraits as a coherent series; these photographs (with one significant exception, discussed below) are all variations of head or head-and-shoulder poses, and are all captioned with the subject's name. Such visual consistency emphasises the sense of the subjects portrayed as a cohesive group. It is as if Man Ray is more interested in portraying a group rather than a collection of individuals. In fact, this may well have been the case, because the evidence suggests that Man Ray did not choose the best of his work – he chose the individuals he wished to include, and made photographs if none were considered suitable. This is supported by Man Ray's own anecdotes in his autobiography,⁸ indicating that he actually selected at least some of his subjects and then photographed or re-photographed them for the book, rather than selecting photographs from his stock of work already done as one might expect from a retrospective survey. His priority therefore appears to be the selection of appropriate subjects for inclusion in the group rather than selection from his best or most representative portrait work to showcase his prowess as a photographer. From the thousands of portraits that Man Ray made during this time, he has included portraits of Man Ray (i.e. himself), Salvador Dalí, Tristan Tzara, Sinclair Lewis, James Joyce, Paul Éluard, André Breton, André Derain, Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, Pablo Picasso, Marcel Duchamp, Brancusi, S.M. Eisenstein, Le Corbusier, Arnold Schoenberg and George Antheil. This in turn begs the question – what is the nature of that group, and why? The portraits, on closer consideration, appear to depict each person not as an individual but as a member of a social, cultural grouping – a group of what might popularly be described as the contemporary cultural avant-garde – famous artists, composers, architects, writers; but what Man Ray has also done here through editorial selection is of course to insinuate himself and his close Dada and Surrealist associates (Dalí, Tzara, Éluard, Breton and Duchamp) into this group of well-established modernists in the field of cultural production.⁹ This ambiguous and perhaps ambivalent gesture by Man Ray, on the one hand, consecrates both himself and leading Surrealist figures into a (male) pantheon of modernist cultural production, whilst at the same time subtly mocking and subverting the very notion of such a pantheon. This results in a rather tongue-

in-cheek joke by Man Ray, a complex dual gesture of simultaneous consecration and mocking, created through a tension between the valorisation of his portraiture on the one hand, and the subversive effect of his editorial choice, on the other. It is also noteworthy that Man Ray's prominent inclusion of a camera in his self-portrait asserts his own status as the group's de facto consecrant, and underpins his right and ability to make such a gesture. The whole thing is made possible by the inventive use of very simple devices, and is realised structurally through compositional uniformity of his portraits, and the book's organisation, captioning and visual layout.

This subtle mocking continues in Man Ray's last photograph in the same section of this book, a portrait of an anonymous, androgynous male. We know from various other documents and photos that the subject is in fact an American named Vander Clyde, a female impersonator who was better known under the stage name of Barbette. Arguably a legitimate agent within the field of cultural production, Barbette's anomalous position within this distinguished group is underlined by Man Ray's photographic and graphic treatment of his subject – in contrast to the other subjects, Man Ray uses a full-length portrait left without any caption.¹⁰

Man Ray's inclusion of Barbette in "Men Before the Mirror" goes beyond the subversion of modernism's pantheon of avant-garde heroes – it is also part of another visual device that is used in a broader attack on conventional notions of gender. As David Hopkins has already noted,¹¹ the previous section of the same book entitled 'The Faces of Woman' contains the opposite anomaly – a whole series of nameless feminine faces ending with a rather masculine portrait of Edith Stein, photographed and presented in a way that would make it more naturally a part of the following section than the portrait of Barbette. Hopkins observes that

What is clear from this orchestration of text and image is that a form of gendered mirror reversal is effected as the reader flicks from Gertrude Stein to Barbette. Stein as mannish woman initiates the changeover from the sequence of females to male. . . . At the

other end of the process, Barbette, as male-to-female conversion, completes the cycle.¹²

The resultant blurring of figurative boundaries between woman and man challenges conventional social constructions of gender and identity, and raises questions about masculine and feminine subjectivity. Characteristically for Man Ray, it does so in a coded and tongue-in-cheek fashion.

In the above examples, what is of particular interest to this essay is the relationship between Man Ray's role as consecrant and his actions as transgressor; a tension and a balance is maintained between the solemnising function of Man Ray's portraiture on the one hand, and the symbolic sacrileges in which they are complicit. In *Photographs by Man Ray*, at one level Man Ray sacralises through his *de facto* status as Surrealism's consecrant, reinforced through his general observance of the conventions of portrait photography. Where he does apply unconventional techniques such as solarisation, these have been used commercially elsewhere and do not interfere with the valorising function of portraiture. For the most part, the portraits in themselves continue to fulfil their ordinary 'family function', being read conventionally as social portraits that consecrate their subjects. The symbolic sacrileges are contained not in the photographs directly. At another level, the photographs in themselves and in their arrangement are certainly implicated. The sacrilege is committed by the photographer-as-consecrant using his own photographs not directly, but within the structure of the book and are committed subtly through the relationship between image, text and page. In the process, the symbolic sacrilege is solemnised incidentally and almost unnoticed; in passing, as it were. This perhaps helps to explain why the work has remained so uncontroversial – it subverts conventions at two levels, but at both levels the operation is coded, hidden; the visual cues remain subtle, and the photographic techniques themselves do not give the game away.

In *Facile*, another of Man Ray's books, the photograph as medium is more directly involved in both the sacrilege and the sacralisation, and it therefore provides a more direct instance of mocking sacralisation. In this book, published

in 1936, Man Ray and the poet Paul Éluard collaborate to produce a suite of photo-poems with a delicate visual interplay of text and image. *Facile* contains a suite of love poems written by Paul Éluard, all addressed to an unnamed woman as “you” in the French intimate form of *tu* and *toi*. Man Ray produced twelve photographs to accompany the poems, all but one of these are of a female in various nude poses. Conventional readings of this work tend to emphasise the lyrical and erotic quality of both poetry and image, and the strikingly intimate and graphic quality of the image-text relationship. Far from taking a subordinate place to the poetry, the photography dominates the pages. It bleeds to the edges of the page without framing and interacts freely and intimately with the lines of text so that they often appear to form one coherent entity rather than independent visual elements. The extent of Man Ray’s involvement in the authorship of the book is reflected in the credits, which grant both Paul Éluard and Man Ray equal weight.¹³

However, another example of social transgression and its mocking sacralisation is hidden within the text-image relationship. Nowhere in the book is either the poem’s subject or the photographer’s model named, and the nature of the symbolic sacrilege is understood only if and when the reader understands her to be Nusch Éluard – that is, Paul Éluard’s wife. Here then, is a double transgression involving both Paul Éluard and Man Ray, who are two close friends – not only do the two men revolve intimately (metaphorically and visually) around one woman, but one of them is her husband writing intimate love poems to her while the other man is making erotic nude photographs of her, another man’s wife.¹⁴ The book raises a number of challenges to conventional attitudes towards marital relationships, sexual freedom and desire which fall outside the scope of this paper, but what I wish particularly to draw attention to is the way in which the subversion is carried out – the actualisation of the symbolic sacrilege and its sacralisation – because three notable points emerge that demonstrate the operation of mocking sacralisation: first, in this instance photography is directly implicated, more clearly than in the previous examples, because the symbolic sacrilege (nude erotic poses by another man’s wife) is actually committed in front of and for the camera. In *Facile*, Man Ray’s photography executes a double move, both enacting the sacrilege

against social convention and simultaneously sacralising it against the grain of that convention. Secondly, the transgression is only completed on the printed page because without Paul Éluard's poetry, Nusch would not be translated from nameless artist's model into 'another man's wife'. The symbolic sacrilege itself is committed through the complicity and active collaboration of three people, a feature that is characteristic of much surrealist work. Éluard's printed words complete the sacrilege within the very space of Man Ray's photography of the nude Nusch through their intimate placement on the page. Third, the mocking laughter that its knowing audience is invited to share, is not directed at the subject of the photography but the social conventions that are being flouted through the photography. In *Facile*, the intimate and sensitive treatment of this delicate subject is crucial to the way that it normalises for its audience the notional sexual liberation that the book embodies in its text-image relationships.

The difference between the effect of desacralising photography and Man Ray's mocking sacralisation on its intended audience can also be illustrated by reference to the reception of his work by fellow surrealists: Paul Nash, an English Surrealist, described the book as 'exquisite'¹⁵ and Roland Penrose, another English Surrealist neatly captures this sense of sacralisation against the grain, when he says of *Facile* that 'It is an admirable work of love and tenderness, which in spite of its purity was at the time considered quite indecent'.¹⁶ The responses to the book thus reflect the way surrealists valued love and desire as liberating creative forces and sought to privilege them over the constraints of bourgeois social conventions and institutions, rather than just to subvert those conventions. More than attempting to destroy such conventions, *Facile's* mocking sacralisation thus acts as an integrative function by providing a vehicle to normalise and reinforce surrealism's alternative values for its Surrealist audience.

Mocking sacralisation, as I have argued above, is characterised by the presence of humour, sacralisation and sacrilege in the work, and in Man Ray's work discussed above two conditions exist that I believe help to maintain a dynamic balance between these elements: first, Man Ray did not maintain any meaningful technical and aesthetic differences in his approach to his

commercial and personal work. Many of his works were interchangeable and at times were indeed interchanged, and even where the works are clearly intended for private or commercial use, the techniques used are undifferentiated – for example, Man Ray's use of solarisation in his portraits and fashion photographs. At the least, this blurred if not obliterated any meaningful visual or technical distinction between Man Ray the commercial photographer and Man Ray the Surrealist, making it possible for the solemnising function of Man Ray's photography to also cross these boundaries. Secondly, the book as medium has been instrumental to Man Ray's enactment of mocking sacralisation in the above examples, and it may well be that the book is structurally important if not critical to its operation generally. As demonstrated above, the book provides an arena where subversion and sacralisation come together in the tension that results in mocking sacralisation, and it provides a forum where the boundaries between Man Ray's professional status and personal work can be intentionally blurred, as a pre-condition to mocking sacralisation. As we have seen, in some of these books this social effect or function of Man Ray's photography comes into play in curious and unexpected but important ways. In each of the examples discussed, the conventional social function of the photograph as instrument of solemnisation is not prejudiced, because the operation of the symbolic sacrilege depends structurally on its context within the book, rather than as individual photographs. But perhaps as importantly, the book provides a convenient medium in whose structure the symbolic sacrilege can be coded and hidden, thus making it easier to effect a mocking sacralisation rather than produce a more straightforward desacralising work. For its intended surrealist audience, the result of this coding is rather like an in-joke, and the butt of the joke is not the subject of the photograph itself, but the fact of transgression; the knowing viewer laughs as a fellow-conspirator at the deliberate and systematic destruction of conventional social strictures, but in the process it also normalises their (surrealist) values and beliefs against the grain of bourgeois convention. The form of the book therefore provides important opportunities for the operation of mocking sacralisation, not available to the single photograph or even a set of photographs. But by the same token, the limited distribution of these books, and the fact that their audience, actual as well as intended, was restricted to the

surrealists and their close supporters numbered at most in the few hundreds, indicates that for the surrealists, the dream of a new society began at home rather than in the larger public arena.

Man Ray's commercial activities placed him in perhaps a unique position within the surrealist movement: the overlaps and the blurred boundaries between his professional and his personal artistic work cast Man Ray himself in the role of consecrant for the Surrealists. In this role, Man Ray's photography was characteristically a force for construction rather than destruction. Perhaps ironically then, Man Ray's commercial activities turn his camera into an instrument of integration in the service of Surrealism. His solemnisation of their social and formal events had positive and integrative effects within the group. His acts of mocking sacralisation were not intended to provoke negative reactions from outside the group, so much as to underpin the group's own commitment to transgressive values and to affirm these counter-values. If the Surrealist discourse in France between the wars is thought of as a project to construct a society sympathetic to its own emergent alternative beliefs and values, then Man Ray's photography contributed not a little, through its sacralisation of the Surreal.

¹ Man Ray, *Self-Portrait* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1963).

² Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990): 19.

³ See Timothy Baum, *Man Ray's Paris Portraits: 1921-39* (St Petersburg, FL: SDM Editions, 1997): Plate 2.

⁴ Bourdieu, *Photography*: 20.

⁵ Sylvia Beach, *Shakespeare and Company* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980).

⁶ Bourdieu, *Photography*: 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*: 27.

⁸ Man Ray recounts his invitations to Brancusi, Matisse and Derain to pose for new photographs for inclusion in his book, and the circumstances of the portraits' actual execution. See Ray, *Self-Portrait*: 211-2; 215; 222.

⁹ It is interesting to note that Louis Aragon is absent from this grouping – he had already defected by this time, otherwise he might have had at least as strong a claim for inclusion as any of the others.

¹⁰ Man Ray's choices appear deliberate; he had made at least one head-and-shoulders portrait of Vander Clyde that would have been consistent with all the other portraits in this section – for instance, see Baum, *Man Ray's Paris Portraits*: plate 21

¹¹ David Hopkins, 'Men Before the Mirror', *Art History*, Vol. 21 Issue 3, 1998: 303.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ According to Renée Riese Hubert, *Surrealism and the Book* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and Nicole Boulestreau, 'Le Photopoème Facile: Un Nouveau Livre, dans Les Années 1930', in *Le Livre Surrealiste* (Lausanne: L'Age de l'Homme/L'Université de Paris III, 1982): 165-168, Éluard and Man Ray had earlier produced designs for the book, but these were subsequently revised and replaced by Man Ray working in conjunction with Levis-Mano. Arturo Schwarz, *Man Ray: the Rigour of Imagination* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1977) goes further by suggesting that in *Facile*, the intention may have been that Éluard's poetry was to illustrate Ray's images rather than the other way around. Be that as it may, Éluard appears to defer to Ray by allowing the latter's images to take on such a dominant role, and in any event, the significant contribution that Man Ray made to this enterprise is underlined by the accreditation on the book's cover, which gives his photography equal visual weight to the poetry of Paul Éluard and thus acknowledges him as a co-creator of the book.

¹⁴ Bourdieu also refers specifically to such an example of social sacrilege. 'Thus, the act of photographing a friend's wife in a ridiculous or even improper posture can make people laugh the louder because it amounts to an act of solemnisation against the grain, against all the rules of good taste'. Bourdieu, *Photography*: 27.

¹⁵ Paul Nash, 'Surrealism and the Book' in *Signature, A Quadrimetrial of Typography and Graphic Arts*, no. 4, November, 1936: 10.

¹⁶ Roland Penrose, *Man Ray* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975): 104.

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The Possession of Thomas Darling: Adumbrations of a Jungian Psychohistory

Kevin Lu

Abstract

Applying Jungian psychology to this microhistorical instance, I try to understand the potential, psychological significance of Darling's possession experience. Using the frontispiece – "The Witch of Endor" – to Glanvill's 1682 text as a springboard, I attempt to locate the contribution of a Jungian approach by critically comparing it with historical perspectives on possession. I argue that Darling's possession may be understood as a *compensation* to his devout Puritan upbringing and that recurring themes of symbolic rebirth – evidenced by the constellation of the *dual mother archetype* – suggest that the ordeal was a manifestation of a process of psychological maturation Jung called *individuation*. I argue that a Jungian interpretation of the individual, possession experience does not contradict certain historical assertions but, in many ways, supports them. The witch symbol – one representing transition and liminality – elucidates the Puritan position during Elizabethan England, where possession was used as a political statement to assert religious identity in the face of persecution.

Introduction

'The Witch of Endor' (fig. 1) is the frontispiece to Joseph Glanvill's book, *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, published in 1682 after his death. An English philosopher, clergyman and writer, he argues in the text for the reality of witchcraft, criticising those who challenge its existence. The picture depicts 1 Samuel 28: 3-5, where King Saul of Israel – in disguise – consults a 'witch' after falling out of God's favour. Ironically, Saul had banished all mediums and wizards from the land after the prophet Samuel's death. Unsure of how to combat the assembled army of the Philistines, Saul requests that the witch resurrect the spirit of the prophet, the advice of whom Saul paid no heed during the former's earthly existence. The woman reluctantly does so, only to realise that Saul – the very monarch who banished her and her kind – was making the request. After ensuring that no harm would come to the necromancer, he asks

her to describe the spirit coming forth. Realising that the 'divine being [...]
wrapped in a robe'¹ was Samuel, Saul falls to the ground, prostrating to the
spirit of the prophet. His ghost, however, provides Saul with neither comforting
words nor the advice he so desperately seeks. Instead, the spirit predicts the
death of both Saul and his son during the next day of battle.



Fig. 1: frontispiece to Joseph Glanvill's book, *Sadducismus Triumphatus*, published in 1682.

The witch in the frontispiece is haggard and old, holding a candle in her hand. As witches are usually associated with darkness, her possession of fire possibly symbolises her function as a mediating guide, the 'enlightened' possessor of forbidden knowledge.² When initially looking at the picture, however, our eyes fall not to the witch, but to Saul, placed in the centre and the only figure

kneeling. Although his 'sanctity' is depicted by a halo encircling his head, the audience is aware that his piety is ultimately tainted; he has lost God's favour and is now dabbling in the forbidden arts. It is questionable, then, whether Saul's dialogue with Samuel is divine (due to the sanctity of God's prophets) or demonic (because the vision was resurrected by an 'impure' witch). The picture remarkably represents the tension between the demonic and the divine not only present in the narrative specifically but indicative of the cultural atmosphere of early modern England more generally.

Elizabethan England struggled with its religious identity, as those considered Puritans – including Conformists, Presbyterians and Separatists – came into conflict with the government through their varying degrees of opposition to the Elizabethan Religious Settlement. Based on strong, anti-Catholic sentiment and an emphasis on both discipline and frivility, Puritans believed that the political arrangement – which preserved a Catholic-style hierarchy and departed little from Catholic rituals – did not go far enough in changing the religious structure of England. By 1590, with the death of key Puritans including Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, Walter Mildmay, John Field and Francis Walsingham, a campaign to denigrate the Puritan cause was launched. Fuelled by the pro-government message preached by Richard Bancroft, many Puritans were arrested, and some were even examined before the Court in Star Chamber, dedicated to the questioning of traitors. Matters were not helped when extremist Puritans proclaimed that William Hacket was the new Messiah, and called for the deposing of the Queen. After Hacket's execution and the subsequent release of Puritans from prison, few had little strength left to pursue a radical, Puritan cause. One of the subsequent battlefields for this religious conflict materialised in the bodies of citizens.³ The 'Witch of Endor' provides a snapshot not only of early modern English perceptions and collective beliefs, but how these convictions ultimately trickled down to, and pervaded, the concerns of everyday people.

The picture is, essentially, my map. It serves as a guideline to my argument, a central point to which I periodically return throughout this paper. Theoretically, my use of the frontispiece shows how art can encapsulate the concerns of a

specific, historical moment, how we can continue to find meaning in art when viewed from a contemporary perspective, and how art can enrich our study of the past. My interest in 'The Witch of Endor' is threefold: the depiction of a 'witch' in early modern England; the broader themes which I believe are being conveyed through the picture; and, more coincidentally, Glanvill's association with the University of Oxford.⁴ The year 1682 brings me to early modern England, where seventy-nine years prior, a passionate Puritan named Thomas Darling 'was sentenced to lose his ears for having libelled the Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford, John Howson, a vehement opponent of Puritanism.'⁵ If we travel back another seven years to 17 February, we can observe not only the first signs of Darling's possession – one that would ultimately persist for five months – but the curse that allegedly caused it. These 'magical' words were uttered by Alice Gooderidge, the 'witch of Stapenhill'.⁶ The figures in Glanvill's frontispiece, then, serve as the keyholes through which I will view, from an analytical psychological perspective, the possession of Thomas Darling.⁷

Psychohistory has been dominated by Freudian scholarship.⁸ Accordingly, the many devastating critiques levelled at psychohistory have been based on a Freudian interpretation of primary sources.⁹ Since depth psychological approaches can begin from a different conceptual model of the psyche – especially in the case of Freud and Jung – the type of psychohistory each tells will vary. Insofar as 'Jungian psychohistory' remains largely unexplored, my interpretation of this microhistorical instance is a 'test case', considering whether or not the application of Jungian psychology to microhistory yields any insights that would add to our overall understanding of possession.¹⁰ That is not to say that Jungian psychohistory is immune to general critiques of psychohistory. It is even possible that a critical assessment of a Jungian approach may be more devastating. Yet, the possibility remains that the telling of *a different* psychohistory may ameliorate the concerns of those historians who deem psychohistory to be 'pseudo history' at best. This Jungian interpretation neither seeks to confirm the veracity of Darling's possession nor to diagnose it as an earlier manifestation of a psychotic breakdown. On the contrary, claims against the authenticity of Darling's possession were in print as early as 1599.¹¹ Regardless of whether Darling was truly possessed or merely

dissimulating for personal reasons, a Jungian interpretation can begin to assess why possession was chosen as the vehicle of expression.¹² As the branch of depth psychology that emphasises an analysis of the entire life, a Jungian elucidation does not focus on discovering ‘necessary’ childhood traumas, but contemplates Darling’s possible wishes for the future based on a reading of primary sources, and how these aspirations may have affected his use of possession.¹³ I argue that his ordeal may be understood as a *compensation* to his devout Puritan upbringing and that recurring themes of symbolic rebirth – evidenced by the constellation of the *dual mother archetype* – suggest that the torment, real or otherwise, was a manifestation of a process of psychological maturation Jung called *individuation*. I contrast this interpretation with an historical perspective on possession in early modern England. I argue that a Jungian interpretation does not contradict specific historical claims, but supplements them. Historians could argue that my method is anachronistic, that Jungian terminology is unnecessary, and that my contentions are proof yet again that psychohistory cannot move beyond psychobiography. Yet my application of classical Jungian thought to this microhistorical instance does not pretend to convey an irrefutable explanation of events. Rather, I see it as an invitation to historians and others to enter into dialogue, working together to determine whether *all* forms of psychohistory are doomed to fail the test of historical time.

The event

There are two versions of the incident leading to Darling’s possession, occurring on 17 February 1596 at Burton. First, shortly after his fits began, Darling informs his aunt that, as he passed an old woman wearing a grey gown with three warts upon her face in the woods, he accidentally passed wind. Taking offence, the witch says, ‘Gyp with a mischief, and fart with a bell. I will go to Heaven, and you will go to Hell.’¹⁴ The accused, Alice Gooderidge, like her mother, Elizabeth Wright, was suspected of being a witch. Gooderidge was arrested and confined to Derby Jail on 14 April.

On 2 May, Gooderidge was subjected to various tests that would reveal whether or not she was guilty of bewitchment. After the discovery of distinctive 'witch marks' on Gooderidge's body, she is compelled to relay her version of events. She confesses to cursing Thomas as she passed him in the woods, after he called her 'the witch of Stapenhill'.¹⁵ Her curse, however, was not meant for Darling, but for another boy who had previously broken her basket of eggs.¹⁶ Gooderidge then confesses to sending the devil to torment Darling in the form of a little red and white dog named Minny.

Darling was a passionate Puritan, a fact that is expressed throughout the account. During one fit, he accepts that the ordeal may take his life, and his only regret was his inability to become a preacher so that he may 'thunder out the threatenings of God's word against sin and all abominations, wherewith these days do abound'.¹⁷ It was only after a visit from the Puritan exorcist, John Darrell – who officially diagnosed the boy as being possessed – that Darling's two possessing devils, Glassap and Radalphus, were driven from his body through prayer and fasting.¹⁸ Though Darling was almost re-possessed a few days later – an onslaught that Darrell predicted¹⁹ – the boy was able to fend off Satan's attacks.²⁰ In 1600, however, the veracity of the possession was brought into question when Darrell was accused of fraudulently claiming to have dispossessed Darling as well as other demoniacs.²¹

Understanding and interpreting possession: an historical perspective

Philip C. Almond, in his collection of primary sources on possession in early modern England, provides a strong statement illuminating an historical understanding of this phenomenon.²² He writes:

The introduction proceeds from the assumption that the meaning of demonic possession and exorcism is to be found within the context of the social, political, and religious life of early modern England. More specifically, it argues that possession and deliverance is a cultural drama played out by all the participants within the confines of a cultural script known to all of them. And it

suggests that the experiences of demonic possession had by demoniacs, exorcists, and audiences are shaped and configured by their cultural setting.²³

For Almond, the sources show that the divine and demonic played a part in everyday life. Although cases of possession were rare enough to attract a crowd of observers, they occurred often enough to be regarded seriously amongst them.²⁴ Possession reflected social and ideological conflicts within the culture itself and served the purposes of those who mobilised them, including: participants, demoniacs, exorcists, judges, bishops, Catholics, Puritans and Anglicans.²⁵ They supply testaments to the reality of evil, witchcraft and the veracity of the cure, exorcism. Though Almond discusses many interesting ideas, I limit myself to those points relevant to the case of Darling.

Possession as politics of power

Scepticism concerning possession was reinforced by the belief, especially amongst Puritans, that the age of miracles had passed. The only true miracles were performed by Christ, his apostles, and his prophets. Accordingly, it was impossible to claim that a 'successful', contemporary exorcism had been performed. Instead, these claims held a strategic, political purpose. George More, a colleague of Darrell, aptly notes:

If the Church of England have this power to cast out Devils, then the church of Rome is a false Church. For there can be but one true Church, the principal mark of which, as they say, is to work miracles, and of them this is the greatest, namely to cast out devils.²⁶

For Almond, a key feature of the major source outlining Darling's ordeal is its need to voice 'Puritan concerns about Catholic claims that only their priests have the power to dispossess.'²⁷

The Puritan cure for possession was fasting and prayer. This was accompanied by readings from the Bible, which provoked intense outbursts from Darling. Almond interprets Jesse Bee's challenging of Satan through the recitation of biblical passages 'as a way of inspiring due and godly regard for the Bible among the spectators.'²⁸ Though Puritans – especially Darrell – denied the miraculous nature of exorcism, they still yearned to 'own' it, for in so doing they concurrently obtained God's approval of Puritanism. It should be further noted that the central source on Darling – based on the notes of Jesse Bee and edited and prefaced by John Denison²⁹ – was allegedly revised by Darrell before publication so that the account served as a testament to God's partiality for the Puritan cause³⁰.

Profiling the possessed

Almond concludes that the characteristics of possession differed little across both gender and age. On the whole, the behaviour of the possessed does not change much across denominations. He suggests that possession narratives were well-established and known throughout all levels of society. Children and adolescents, however, were more prone to possession than adults.³¹ Almond is not surprised by this, as 'children lived in a supernatural world populated by elves, ghosts, hobgoblins, bogey men and demons.'³² His reading of the sources further show that during this period, two-thirds of the possessed were female children or adolescents, and around one-fifth were boys or adolescent males.³³ Almond's intuition is that possession became for these children a source of rebellion against adult authority and a way of avoiding prayer. 'Possession was a means', he writes, 'by which moral imperatives could be violated, guilt mitigated if not removed, and parental authority avoided'³⁴ as well as '[providing] an excuse for outrageous behaviour [...]'.³⁵ 'Possessed' children were not condemned, but met with sympathy and concern.³⁶ Stated succinctly, this protest against authority turns familial dynamics upside down. Whereas parents were previously in power, possessed children not only demanded centre stage, but in many ways 'possessed' their parents.³⁷ The bodies of the possessed thus became the means through which adolescents could both communicate their powerlessness and, paradoxically, regain it. These bodies,

moreover, were not merely expressions of the demonic, but of the divine. The fortitude with which one resisted the demonic presence – thereby strengthening the faith of others – was seen as either being a reflection of, or proportionate to, one's ability to be an exemplar of faith and piety.³⁸

Though rebellion may be a generally valid claim for possession in early modern England, it does not entirely explain the case of Darling. He was an extremely pious young man, and except for one instance where he was compelled to tear a page out of the bible, it would be unhelpful to see his ordeal strictly in terms of a rebellion against authority.³⁹ That is, of course, if we are assuming that analysing his *conscious* actions is the only method available for understanding his state of mind. If one introduces the notion of the *unconscious*, Darling's possession can be interpreted as a rebellion, but a form of defiance with different characteristics and motives.

The presence of crowds and the possession narrative

Almond recognises the role of crowds in both creating the possession environment and in enacting its stock narratives. The group's expectations dictated the way in which the possessed reacted. As a consequence, crowds became emotionally involved, and in some cases, judged the authenticity of the possession.⁴⁰ Almond characterises these occasions as *numinous*, borrowing Rudolph Otto's term.⁴¹ What observers confronted face to face was the mysterious Other, which simultaneously fascinated and terrified them. This collective thrill, balanced by feelings of sympathy, made possession a popular, public event; a communal drama in which all participated. The central account attests to the regular presence of observers during Darling's fits.⁴² Demoniacs may have had, furthermore, a vested interest in 'prolonging' their possession, which explains why possessions were usually long, drawn-out affairs.

Almond believes that possession was a learned behaviour which was contagious.⁴³ In Darling's case, Darrell told the boy's friends what they should expect of him, all within earshot of Darling himself. Accordingly, he dutifully 'performed' that which was expected of him on the next day.⁴⁴ Samuel Harsnett

posits that possession and exorcism are 'a theatre of imposture.'⁴⁵ It was a carefully scripted performance, the exorcists being both its writers and directors. Though Arnold does not deny the theatricality of possession, he is unwilling to go so far as to equate possession with theatrical fraud. He writes:

But the image of theatricality is less persuasive if [...] the boundary between simulation and authenticity in the possessed is opaque. And there is no logical incoherence in an exorcist's accepting the authenticity of possession, recognising the strategic value of a successful exorcism for one's church, and furthering one's personal ambitions.⁴⁶

In other words, though an exorcist like Darrell can use possession to further his career, this does not rule out the possibility that what he diagnosed was genuine, rather than fraudulent. Almond concludes that it is more precise to call possession a reality play.⁴⁷ His historical perspective is invaluable and will be kept in mind as I explore the insights gained by adopting a Jungian lens to interpret Darling's plight.

A Jungian, Psychohistorical perspective

Possession by a complex

When speaking of 'possession' in the context of analytical psychology, the first theoretical tenet that comes to mind is Jung's theory of *complexes*, as he often discussed the possibility of being 'possessed by a complex'. Andrew Samuels defines Jung's notion of a complex as 'a collection of images and ideas, clustered round a core derived from one or more archetypes.'⁴⁸ When complexes are constellated, they are characterised by a highly charged affective tone, even if one is unaware of it. Complexes can inform and govern one's behaviour, to the point that they can 'behave like independent entities'.⁴⁹ Highlighting their potential, autonomous nature, Jung writes that, 'there is no difference in principle between a fragmentary personality and a complex [...] complexes are splinter psyches.'⁵⁰ Complexes also have a universal tendency

to be represented in dreams and other imaginal processes as personified entities.⁵¹ Jung thus likens them to demonic presences,⁵² contending that the process of splitting and the individual's subsequent identification with the complex is equivalent to what was known as possession in the Middle Ages.⁵³

Jung generally interprets cases of possession to be an overwhelming of the ego by autonomous complexes. The intensity of hysterical symptoms – being indicators of the compensatory perspective developing in the unconscious contrasting the conscious position – is proportionate to the relative autonomy of the complex. The greater the complex's autonomy – which is in turn determined by the strength of its affective quality – the more the individual will come across as being possessed. The belief that insane persons are possessed by demons thus holds some truth. According to Jung, what is being experienced in possession is the power exuded by the independence of the complex, which has the ability to assert its 'quasi-foreign will' upon the individual.⁵⁴

In his paper, 'The Psychological Foundation of Belief in Spirits', Jung notes the varying degrees of severity with which one can become possessed by a complex. The first kinds – initiated by traumatic events – are distressing, emotional, and personal experiences that leave 'lasting psychic wounds behind them.'⁵⁵ Although these negative instances could lead to the crushing of 'valuable qualities in an individual', their content remains personal in nature. The more psychologically damaging instances are those when a negative aspect of a bipolar archetype is activated. Complexes – though 'belonging' to the realm of the *personal unconscious* – still have an archetypal foundation. Each personal experience of father or the father complex, for example, will also contain an archetypal image of father, endowed with the typical patterns of interaction and relationship accumulated throughout human history.⁵⁶ A deleterious manifestation occurs, Jung writes, 'when something so devastating happens to the individual that his whole previous attitude to life breaks down.'⁵⁷ If a complex from the personal unconscious is dissociated, a sense of loss ensues, though psychological equilibrium can be regained when the complex is made conscious again. When a complex of the collective unconscious – i.e., the archetypal foundation of a complex – associates itself with the ego, it is felt as

strange and uncanny. This situation is potentially volatile, producing feelings of alienation. 'The irruption of these alien contents', Jung reflects, 'is characteristic of symptoms marking the onset of many mental illnesses.'⁵⁸ Monstrous thoughts seize the fragile ego, and 'the whole world seems changed, people have horrible, distorted faces and so on.'⁵⁹

In both forms of varying, complex-severity, it is assumed that their cause is some traumatic event. It could be fruitful to consider Donald Kalsched's notion of 'archetypal defences of the personal spirit', which would see Darling's possession – or, at the very least, its demonic aspects – as evidence of the psyche's self-care system in action. In order to preserve the life of the individual who has suffered an early trauma – in most cases linked with the family – the psyche intentionally fragments, splitting the unity of 'mind and body, spirit and instinct, thought and feeling.'⁶⁰ Yet as interesting as this sounds, the primary sources on Darling do not *explicitly* convey a traumatic, familial lack that would merit such an interpretation. In Darling's case, I have found indications of a missing father in the main account.⁶¹ There is mention of Darling's mother, his uncle, Robert Toone, Toone's wife and Darling's grandfather. The presence of these figures during Darling's possession is further confirmed by Harsnett.⁶² The only indication of the father's presence does not come from the main account, but from Harsnett:

Whereupon, being pressed [...] that having appointed the fast, and moved the parents of the boye, with the whole family, to prepare themselves to that holy exercise of fasting, and prayer [...].⁶³

The mentioning of 'parents' is still vague, one could argue, and does not explicitly point to the father. A traditional psychohistorical account, moreover, could say that this evidence is immaterial. The very fact that his father is either missing or uncounted for in Bee's account – arguably an important retelling of a crucial experience in his son's life – is most telling and would poignantly elucidate the importance of the masculine role-model, John Darrell, towards whom Darling showed much affection.⁶⁴ The absent father would constitute

such an early childhood trauma that would both coincide with, and merit, a 'complex-oriented' interpretation of Darling's possession, argued along the lines of Kalsched's notion of an internal defence of the personal spirit. The lack of a father presence would further reinforce the constellation of the *dual mother archetype*, which is crucial to the argument I will present below. It would then be important to discuss the psychology of the father and to ask important historical questions: what were early modern English conceptions of the father and the family? Would it be *inappropriately* anachronistic to measure early modern English conceptions of the father with contemporary psychological perspectives, such as Andrew Samuel's notion of *aggressive playback*?⁶⁵ Although it is tempting to follow a psychological interpretation of possession unfolding along these premises, it would ultimately be based on *coincidences* and conjectures, governed by the presupposition of a pre-existing trauma. Such an exploration would only confirm Stannard's argument that all psychohistories suffer from factual and logical flaws.⁶⁶ The psychohistorian's affinity for coincidences cannot be the basis of good history. *Connections*, and not coincidences, are the building blocks of history, and any historical reconstruction of the past must begin from the former.⁶⁷

In light of these comments, I cannot entertain the possibility of a past trauma – the missing father – as the catalyst to Darling's possession. Furthermore, I am reticent to interpret Darling's possession strictly in terms of Jungian complexes, for this would problematically pathologise the experience. Within the context of early modern Europe and especially within the cosmology of Puritan belief, the devil, and the netherworld he inhabited and controlled, was considered to be a part of one's everyday reality. Lyndal Roper, in her study of early modern Germany, writes that, 'the Devil was a character one might meet on any lonely pathway, who might whisper whom to kill, how to control others.'⁶⁸ What can be interpreted – from contemporary perspectives – as pathology was, in fact, either a divine or demonic intercession, and one cannot simply divorce oneself from a contextual comprehension of how early modern Europeans understood their experience. It would be instructive, then, to seek out an alternative yet equally elucidative analytical psychological concept through which this specific case of possession can be viewed; respected and not reduced. The Jungian notion of

archetypes is one such theoretical tool. Considering the information we have on Darling's possession and looking once again at our frontispiece, it seems that the figure of the witch and what she came to represent were pressing concerns for the population of early modern England. The 'witch', then, is our first keyhole into an analytical psychological exploration of the possession of Thomas Darling.

The dual mother archetype

I argue that a Jungian psychohistorical perspective, when considered alongside historical analyses, can elucidate our overall understanding of possession. A Jungian lens highlights the possible, psychological processes occurring at both the individual and collective levels. Following Almond's idea of possession as a form of teenage rebellion, I suggest that the explanation of parental defiance can only work in Darling's predicament if we recognise that the urge to rebel was unconscious rather than conscious. From what Bee's account reveals, the boy was a devout Puritan with no conscious inclination to rebel. The constellation of the dual mother archetype, furthermore, reinforces the possibility of unconscious rebellion, for it signals a necessary confrontation with the unconscious as a corrective to Darling's conscious state. The curse of Gooderidge – and her significance as a symbol of liminality and transformation – was the 'invitation' Darling needed to enter into his possession experience. The narratives of death and rebirth synonymous with the dual mother archetype further provided a framework that both contained and informed Darling's ordeal. Psychologically speaking, Darling's possession was his way of working through an inner transformation, manifested as both his yearning to become a preacher and his devotion to, and deification of, Darrell. Symbolically, the boy had to 'die' (the possession experience) in order to be 'reborn' (coming out of the possession) as a more 'complete' individual, one who could attain – and indeed, deserved to acquire – the same renown that his puritan exorcist enjoyed. Only after surviving such a Christ-like 'trial by fire' could Darling earn the right to represent the Puritan faith. Stated succinctly, possession was a way he could prove his worth.

The dual mother

Chapter Eight of Part Two of Jung's *Symbols of Transformation* deals specifically with the archetype of the dual mother. The chapter describes not only the significance of this archetype, but the corresponding narrative of the mythological hero's symbolic experience of death and rebirth. The connection between the two, Jung argues, is lucidly expressed both in the Amerindian myth of Hiawatha and Goethe's description of Faust's descent to the realm of the mothers.

Jung starts from the position that the prime object of unconscious desire is the mother.⁶⁹ The danger lies, however, in clinging to the mother for too long. Jung writes: 'When a person remains bound to the mother, the life he ought to have lived runs away in the form of conscious and unconscious fantasies [...].'⁷⁰ In this case, the man or hero develops a 'great longing for an understanding soul-mate' and subsequently wishes to be 'the seeker who survives the adventures which the conscious personality studiously avoids [...]', the one 'who, with a magnificent gesture, offers his breast to the slings and arrows of a hostile world, and displays the courage which is so sadly lacking to the conscious mind.'⁷¹ The unconscious image of the hero's longing for an understanding soul-mate points to an undeveloped conscious position. Over-dependence on the mother (both literal and symbolic) prevents the son from establishing lasting, meaningful relationships with other women. For Jung, breaking free of the paradoxically comforting and suffocating maternal grip is the hero's goal. Although his strength springs from being tied to this 'maternal source', the full potential of this power can only be realised when the link with the unconscious is severed. Only then, Jung writes, can the god be born within.⁷² Psychologically, the goal is to achieve a controlled descent into the unconscious – symbolically represented as the mother – without becoming over-identified with it. If unable to relinquish the ties with both the literal and symbolic mother, the protagonist will suffer an unconscious, symbolic incest, developing unrealistic portraits and illusory expectations of women.⁷³

The imagery employed by Jung serves as an analogy to explain the psychic situation. Mythic motifs are mobilised unconsciously when *libido* – which Jung describes as a general, psychic energy that is not necessarily sexual in nature⁷⁴ – regresses, thus ‘activat[ing] images which, since the remotest times, have expressed the non-human life of the gods [...]’.⁷⁵ If this regression is experienced by a young person who, at that stage, still lacks a sufficiently strong ego to contain these unconscious images, his life becomes a reflection of, and may be even overwhelmed by, a particular ‘divine archetypal drama’.⁷⁶

In Darling’s situation, the regression is shaped by both his personal and social contexts, mainly, that of Puritanism and the religious tension of Elizabethan England respectively. If the archetypal drama of which Jung speaks is applied to Darling, then his confrontation with the unconscious or his ‘descent to the mothers’ takes the form of a possession. ‘It happens all too easily’, Jung reasons, ‘that there is no returning from the realm of the Mothers.’⁷⁷ In order for one to find one’s way back, the conscious mind must discover a way to understand the unconscious contents with which one is engaged.⁷⁸ In terms of Darling’s ordeal, this took the form of active dialogues in his trance states with both the demonic and divine.

Similar to the description Jung gives of his patient, Miss Miller, when exploring the dual mother archetype, Darling’s possession can be interpreted as an unconscious battle for independence made manifest.⁷⁹ In order to achieve psychological maturation, to prove himself worthy of the title, ‘Puritan defender’ – both literal and symbolic – ties to the mother must be broken. The separation, moreover, ‘is proportionate to the strength of the bond uniting the son with the mother, and the stronger this broken bond was in the first place, the more dangerously does the “mother” approach him in the guise of the unconscious.’⁸⁰ Jung draws a comparison to the Amerindian myth of *Hiawatha* to amplify the motifs occurring in the constellation of the dual mother archetype. From the outset, Hiawatha’s father, Mudjekeewis, must slay a bear, which symbolises his feminine component. The first carrier of this feminine image is the mother.⁸¹ In order for the archetypal hero to continue his life’s journey, he must descend to

the depths of hell or, 'the belly of the whale,' both of which are equated to a maternal womb.⁸² This symbolic death is a necessary precursor to rebirth.

In his elaboration of the *Hiawatha* myth, Jung concentrates on Hiawatha's two mothers. The hero 'is not born like an ordinary mortal because his birth is a rebirth from the mother-wife. That is why the hero so often has two mothers.'⁸³ In many hero myths, the protagonist is exposed and then reared by foster-parents. In the case of Hiawatha, his birth mother, Wenonah, dies shortly after giving birth, and her place is taken by Nokomis, Hiawatha's grandmother. Nokomis functions as a symbolic mother rather than an actual, natural mother. The symbolic mother, then, facilitates the rebirth of the hero. The dual mother is accordingly tied to the motif of the *dual birth* (death/rebirth motif).⁸⁴ In undergoing a strange and mysterious second birth, the hero 'partakes of divinity', as is clearly evident in the biblical narrative of Christ.⁸⁵ 'Anyone who is reborn in this way', Jung elaborates, 'becomes a hero, a semi-divine being.'⁸⁶ In the case of Christ, his crucifixion was in fact a form of baptism, a rebirth 'through the second mother, symbolised by the tree of death.'⁸⁷

In light of Jung's analysis of the dual mother archetype, the onset of Darling's possession can be attributed to two different but interconnected psychological processes. First, the ordeal may have arisen as a *compensation* to both Darling's strong adherence to Puritanism and the overall tense, religious climate of Elizabethan England. In order to balance his staunch commitment, the pervading atmosphere of religious distrust and the necessity to prove denominational superiority, the unconscious position manifested itself as the personification of evil, the exact opposite of the conscious situation and climate. Second, following Almond's suggestion of youthful rebellion, the oncoming experience may have been a crucial point in Darling's psychological maturity and development; a necessary, 'ritual experience' that would announce Darling's coming of age to the Puritan community. The constellation of the dual mother archetype – where the respective maternal images were projected onto two suitable candidates – suggests an underlying, hero's narrative pointing to Darling's need for a symbolic rebirth transcending the shackles of religious persecution, i.e., being derogatorily branded a zealous, Puritan dissenter.

Darling's biological mother represents one half of the dual mother dynamic, symbolising the devouring mother preventing the son from breaking his bond with her, thus maintaining the status quo. The other half – the divine, supernatural and extraordinary symbolic mother – was personified as Alice Gooderidge, the accused witch. It was their meeting in the wood and Darling's belief that Gooderidge was indeed a witch that accelerated the conflict within him, giving him both the impetus and means to express it. Gooderidge's ability to hold the projection of that second, spiritual mother set in motion Darling's engagement with the unconscious; his heroic descent and the promised realisation of a desired destiny – a *legitimate* rebirth, both for himself and the afflicted cause of Puritanism. Possession was the vehicle expressing and incubating both an inner and outer transformation.

Darling as hero and champion of Christ

Almond notes that Darling, in retrospect, felt himself to be privileged, for in battling Satan he was comforted and supported by the Spirit of God.⁸⁸ Both the language of battle (used by Darling and Bee) and the employment of certain biblical narratives throughout Darling's possession suggest that the boy was imitating Christ, a theme which will be explored more fully below. In being confronted with an inexplicable situation, the utilisation of biblical narratives or, myths, give meaning to 'meaningless' suffering.

Almond rightfully points out that possession was an expression of the politics of power. Owning the power to exorcise attests to the dominance of one religious view over another. Through his possession, Darling became a Puritan champion; one's who's piety provides a model of exemplary behaviour for others. Darling as hero, then, is an *enantiodromia* opposing his lower position – a child of a dissenting and 'fallen' Puritan tradition – much like the possession itself is a complete reversal and denial of Puritan values.⁸⁹ Darling's future over-identification with the hero archetype – evidenced by his defamation of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Oxford – moreover, is evident here in this earlier instance.

In his dialogues with Satan, Darling believes himself to be the mouthpiece of God, showing an arrogance that may not have been acceptable under any other circumstances. I contend that in the midst of his active dialogues with a perceived Other, Darling both over-identifies with, and is gripped by, the hero archetype and the God or *Self* archetype, which will be discussed further below. The two are then projected in varying degrees onto Darrell, the Puritan exemplar of all that Darling wished to be. Although this heroic, Self image was integral to Darling's 'escape' from the grips of the unconscious (his persecuting demons), his inability to ultimately withdraw these projections from Darrell led to the nurturing of a fervently myopic and tyrannical streak – the very characteristics of the extreme Puritanism being persecuted in Elizabethan England. Although his possessing demons 'left' him, the theme of possession never did, as Darling zealously defended the Puritan faith against its enemies. In essence, he came to resemble his own worse nightmare – a personification of his perceived, possessing demons who were both belligerent and unyielding.

Dialogues with the Demonic and Divine

Returning to our frontispiece, the picture conveys the liminality of the realm Saul is entering, complicating simplistic distinctions between good and evil. At one end, the witch – representing the realm of sin and darkness – holds a candle, which I have interpreted symbolically as referring to the light of 'forbidden' knowledge. She is both Saul's guide into the netherworld and his only link back to reality. Her role, then, is not unlike the role of Hermes; a psychopomp and traveller between boundaries, a symbolic catalyst watching over a process of transformation.⁹⁰ At the other end is the ghost or vision of the prophet Samuel. Serving as God's mouthpiece during his lifetime, Samuel's divinity should be unquestionable. Since, however, he has been raised by a witch, his sanctity is compromised. It seems as if Samuel is bowing to a prostrating Saul, thus further blurring the lines between good, evil and the realm where the choice between the two is ultimately made. Both the image of Samuel and the situation depicted in the picture portray a theme of opposites in tension. A halo emanates from Saul, not Samuel. Is this suggesting that the human king is in some way more divine than the prophet's ghost? Or, is the realm of the 'divine',

represented by Samuel's presence, acknowledging humanity's part in an unfolding drama? Saul is caught in the middle. He straddles the ambivalent demarcations between all three realms, and the message relayed here is one of fluidity. The duplexity of the figure Samuel and the placement of Saul 'betwixt and between' representations of good and evil are the gateways into the next theme materialising in Darling's possession.

In early modern England, it was commonly believed that the Devil was only allowed to enter into a body with the divine permission of God. Almond explains that this was simply a consequence of the doctrine of the Sovereignty of God, an ambivalence at the heart of Christianity itself.⁹¹ In Darling's possession, as well as others, the impression is given that God and the Devil were locked in a struggle, which either side had the power to win. Since his ordeal was initiated by a witch and was not the result of a demonic invasion, (for which Darling would then be held responsible), he became a model of piety and morality.⁹² Almond points out that in cases where the demoniac is seen to be a victim, 'the categories of godliness and demonianism often overlapped, and the boundaries between possession by the devil and possession by a spirit of God blurred. Inspiration, both divine and demonic, could exist simultaneously in the one person.'⁹³ Almond's assertion is certainly true in the case of Darling, as evidenced by the debate surrounding the demonic and divine nature of his possession described by Harsnett in his 1599 text.⁹⁴

Though a dual possession places Darling in ambivalent territory, his stature was further enhanced by his staunch devotion to Puritanism. No observers, however, ever heard or saw the supernatural forces with which Darling communicated.⁹⁵ In his first dialogue with the possessing spirits, it is Darling who initiates the conversation. After he 'extracts' from the demons that it was their Mistress (Gooderidge) who sent them, they warn him of oncoming torments. He replies: 'Do your worst. My hope is in the living God, and he will deliver me out of your hands.'⁹⁶ Amidst a fit experienced on the next day, he says: 'Do you say I am your [the Devil's] son? I am none of yours. I am the poor servant of the Lord of hosts.'⁹⁷ Darling continues his dialogue with the controlling spirits in another exchange: 'Do you offer me a kingdom, if I will

worship you? I will none of your kingdom [sic], for it is but earthly. The Lord has reserved for me a kingdom in Heaven.'⁹⁸ Many of Darling's exchanges with the malevolent spirits resemble Matthew 4: 1-11, the narrative of Christ's temptation by the devil in the desert for forty days and nights. Verses eight to eleven of Matthew, chapter four reads:

Again, the devil then took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and their splendour; and he said to him, 'All these I will give you if you will fall down and worship me'. Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan, for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him"'. Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.⁹⁹

Christ's temptation in the desert provides a narrative within which Darling's possession can be framed, either by himself or Jesse Bee. In other fits, the similarities with Matthew are striking.¹⁰⁰

At other times, Darling believed he was conversing with the Almighty. After an intense series of attacks, the boy signals to bystanders, '[giving] testimony that the Spirit of God was mightily labouring against his infirmities.'¹⁰¹ Thus, the spirit of God was within him, battling Satan for the right to govern his soul. When lying on his back in a trance, he suddenly proclaims: 'I see the Heavens open. Hearken, I hear a heavenly noise.'¹⁰² On 19 May 1596, after suffering many grievous pains, Darling lays in a trance state until he 'sees' a vision of his 'brother' Job. Darling then glimpses an image of Christ. The account reads:

So lying a while he [Darling] said, 'Heaven opens, Heaven opens. I must go thither.' Then, clapping his hands for joy he said, 'I see Christ Jesus my Saviour. His face shines like the sun in its strength. I will go salute him.' *And indeed he did rise, going apace with such strength that his keepers could scarcely hold him.*¹⁰³

The vision of Christ has the same effect on Darling as does the sway of Satan. His display of supernatural strength is a sign of possession, though one could

argue that this is not a 'definitive' trait.¹⁰⁴ Other signs of divine possession, however, persist throughout the account. On a separate occasion, Darling was overwhelmed with visions of Hell, which were then followed by another vision of Christ.¹⁰⁵ With eyes closed, Darling announces: 'Christ Jesus my Saviour comes clothed in purple'. This is superseded by a fearful dialogue with the evil spirits and then a vision of Christ and his apostles.¹⁰⁶

Nearing the end of Darling's possession, he is thrown into a fit, but is instantly comforted by a vision of an angel.¹⁰⁷ Upon his return to school, Darling experiences fits once again as Satan attempts to repossess him, an event predicted by Darrell. After a dialogue with Satan similar to the ones he experienced before, Darling is overwhelmed by a vision of the Lamb of God: 'Behold, I see a Lamb, hark what the Lamb says. "You did fall and he caught you. Fear not, the Lord is your buckler and defender."' ¹⁰⁸ During this final possession, however, Darling states: 'Away, Satan, you cannot enter into me, except the Lord give you leave, and I trust he will not.'¹⁰⁹ This leads one to believe, as Almond notes, that the spirits were only allowed to enter through God's permission. This scenario resembles the 'divine wager' in the *Book of Job*, where Satan convinces God to sanction the torture of His faithful servant, Job.¹¹⁰ As these instances indicate, Darling is torn between these two forces, his body being both the battleground and prize. The underpinning narratives of Jesus' temptation in the desert and the story of Job's suffering are sources of strength for Darling, tales of perseverance, determination and, ultimately, triumph. Darrell, however, was convinced that even Darling's divinely inspired responses were uttered by Satan.¹¹¹ Jesse Bee believed that Darling was both possessed by malevolent spirits and, in his response to Satan, 'directed by the Spirit of God.'¹¹² Although Darling later confesses that his possession was fictitious, he retracts the admission shortly after.¹¹³ In Almond's opinion, Darling sincerely felt that the Spirit of God was within him during his trials.¹¹⁴ A cloud of uncertainty still shrouds the attainment of clarity. In such situations, a psychohistorical approach offers a tentative way forward.

The ambivalent nature of Darling's possession suggests that at the collective level, notions of good and evil were equally blurred. As one denomination

claimed to be interpreting the bible correctly, dissenters were scapegoated as evil, and vice versa. In Jungian terms, what we are encountering here is the projection of *shadow* at the collective level. This archetype represents ‘the thing a person has no wish to be’,¹¹⁵ namely ‘the “negative” side of the personality, the sum of all those unpleasant qualities we like to hide, together with the insufficiently developed functions and the contents of the personal unconscious.’¹¹⁶ All individuals and groups possess a shadow, and the less this aspect is acknowledged consciously, the darker it will be. If the shadow is continually repressed, it ‘is liable to burst forth suddenly in a moment of unawareness.’¹¹⁷ Jung also states, however, that shadow is not entirely negative, but constitutes anything that has yet to be realised by consciousness. This potentially includes, then, positive aspects of the personality.¹¹⁸

The Duplex Self

Darling’s divinely and demonically-inspired dialogues could be elucidated by Jung’s understanding of the duplexity of the *Self* – the central, guiding archetype in his model of the psyche. The Self denotes an individual’s highest potential, ‘and the unity of the personality as a whole.’¹¹⁹ Kalsched aptly summarises that, ‘[...] the Self is usually described as the ordering principle which unifies the various archetypal contents and balances opposites in the psyche during the analytic process, leading toward the “goal” of individuation [...].’¹²⁰

Samuels emphasises that this archetype is not benign, and that Jung likened it to a daemon, ‘a determining power without conscience.’¹²¹ Ethical decisions are left to each individual, and the capacity ‘of exercising such discrimination is the function of consciousness.’¹²² The Self often appears in dreams as a numinous symbol, thus pointing to the conclusion that this archetype is indistinguishable from the God-image. For Jung, the God-image possesses a dark side, comprised of instinctual drives and ‘extremely powerful energies (love and hate, creation and destruction).’¹²³ Nowhere does Jung make this clearer than in his *Answer to Job*. Here, he radically posits: that Yahweh, the God of the Old Testament, is amoral,¹²⁴ that God possesses a shadow,¹²⁵ and accordingly,

God needs to incarnate as man in order to become conscious of His limitations, thus furthering His own process of individuation.¹²⁶ For Jung, Yahweh exemplifies the primal, bipolar energies of the Self. Job and the rest of humanity are unfortunately caught in the midst of His self-realisation.

A mediation of these unresolved opposites is thus required, whereby 'God [...] is necessitated to [resolve] in human consciousness a contradiction that defied resolution with the divine life itself'.¹²⁷ Although Job is aware of God's evil side and has experienced His wrath firsthand, he never doubts His potential for good. Jung further writes:

He [Yahweh] is both a persecutor and a helper in one, and the one aspect is as real as the other. Yahweh is not split, but is an antinomy – a totality of inner opposites – and this is the indispensable condition for his tremendous dynamism.¹²⁸

Jung's views on the God archetype led to many conflicts, including a heated debate with Martin Buber and the loss of a friendship with Fr. Victor White.¹²⁹ My aim here is not to question or re-interpret the theology behind Darling's possession, but to point out how Jung's psychological theory illuminates Darling's ordeal, especially his divine and demonic dialogues. The psychological ambiguity and numinosity of the Godhead expressed by Jung further provides a reference point for understanding the early modern atmosphere of religious uncertainty, which was paradoxically characterised by a myopic conviction displayed by denominational hardliners. The dissension at the collective level expresses itself at the individual one, using the body as a manifestation of that very diffidence, insecurity and discontent. Obviously, the subjective nature of Darling's case should be emphasised, not under-estimated. As I have argued previously, he certainly had a personal agenda in mind, psychological or otherwise, whether he was conscious of it or not. From an analytical psychological perspective, the divine and demonic dialogues in which he engaged point to an encounter with the duplex Self, simultaneously possessing and guiding Darling along his path of individual self-fulfilment and realisation. What Darling experiences are both the Self's instinctual, baser

aspects, as well as its higher functioning as a teleological beacon towards individuation. Darling was gripped by the numinous Self archetype, his dialogues a way of arbitrating his way out of the unconscious.

Darling's possession, however, should not be strictly viewed in subjective terms alone. The ordeal is also shaped by the concerns, struggles and mentalities of his immediate context. Darling's divine and demonic dialogues express a collective atmosphere of fluctuating uncertainty, structured within a familiar discourse: religion. His torment is simultaneously a personal possession as well as a public one – an individual image or representation of collective, religious upheaval. Control of the body and, by extension, the body politic, becomes a central concern. Possession provides the venue for the negotiating of meaning and, ultimately, partially determines the ownership of political power. The Self's numinousity helps explain the passionate fervour with which groups defended their religious allegiances, and may have also played a part in precipitating this very ardour. The process of persecuting one's religious neighbours – scapegoating them and rendering them Other – can be further elucidated by Jung's theory of shadow projection. By wanting to preserve their own religious views, groups inadvertently persecute others, all the while fighting for their own preservation against persecuting others. An irreconcilable cycle of psychic and physical violence ensues, and its only resolution may have been a plea for God's intercession. Possession may have been – along with the more overt political purposes it served – that tool or medium of divine communication.

Yet amidst these processes of personal and collective meaning making, we cannot forget the catalyst in both Darling's ordeal and the possession cases of many others in early modern England, the 'witch'. As she is pushed to the margins of society and shunned, she is a symbol of alterity. Her perceived 'power' to manipulate an alternate reality populated by both demonic and divine spirits further makes her a symbol of liminality.¹³⁰ She is, then, truly a representation of the religious upheaval and transformation occurring in early modern England. She embodies the scapegoated and abhorred elements of society, and is further caught 'betwixt and between', in the middle of a political, religious battle being played out at different levels of society. The subsequent

'sacrifice' of her life, read symbolically, becomes the catalyst to both individual change and collective, religious transformation.

Conclusion

Pieces of art, made for whatever purpose (be it to produce political effects, to forward religious principles or simply created for aesthetic enjoyment), can become mirrors reflecting the past. They may tell us something about the artist himself/herself, the context in which the piece was created, and may elucidate the concerns of specific sections of society. These images, however, are never perfect reflections of reality, and observers are constantly imagining different ways of accessing that very real – albeit incomplete – historical past.

The frontispiece to Glanvill's text is a simple picture. There is nothing particularly stunning about it. It portrays a biblical narrative, which in turn serves Glanvill's faith-driven purpose – to show the reality of both evil and witchcraft, and to call believers to fight against them. I have utilised this picture and the themes I believe to be represented in it as my gateway into an exploration of a case of possession in early modern England. The witch, the prophet Samuel and King Saul have been used as keyholes allowing me to access these very themes. I contend that the constellation of the dual mother archetype – activated by Darling's meeting of the accused witch, Alice Gooderidge – initiated Darling's engagement with the unconscious, one that was, accordingly, structured and informed by the mythical, hero narrative. His dialogues with both the demonic and divine are further elucidated by a consideration of Jung's theory of the duplex Self. Darling's arduous sojourn not only had personal ramifications, but socio-political ones as well. Possession becomes the vehicle not only for a psychological understanding of Darling's ordeal, but a window to a psychological comprehension of the compensatory dynamics activated by the religious upheaval of early modern England. The symbol of the witch, furthermore, becomes a key representation that epitomises the currents of transformation occurring during this period. Possession and witchcraft, then, *can* be understood as expressions of unconscious processes without falling into the psychohistorical trap of telling stories of intrinsic sickness and psychological

degeneration. It is crucial to assert, however, that a Jungian viewpoint cannot stand alone; it must co-operate with other approaches, each one mutually enriching the other in order to gain a fuller picture of possession and witchcraft in early modern England. Certainly, possession was a role that was taught, learned from earlier cases, and in turn, a behaviour that could be enacted and repeated. It is also undeniable that Darling borrowed from biblical narratives to inform, frame, and give meaning to his ordeals. What history has taught us about possession is invaluable, and these insights are the foundation of any discussion on the topic. A Jungian approach, if mobilised responsibly, provides additional tools that can be used to support historical perspectives without violating their fundamental arguments. By complexifying the historical record, we may gain greater clarity; by adopting a different lens, we may have found another piece to an historical puzzle that can, ultimately, never be completed.

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¹ 1 Samuel 28.13-15 as found in Wayne A Meeks (ed.), *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989).

² Donald Kalsched, *The Inner World of Trauma: Archetypal Defenses of the Personal Spirit* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996): 157.

³ Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004):

⁴ Glanvill obtained his BA from Exeter College, and his MA from Lincoln College.

⁵ Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 150.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ A 'keyhole approach' to global history is found in Timothy Brook's *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2008). More specifically, my method of analysis – mobilising art as a springboard to asking larger historical questions – is based on his utilisation of objects in Vermeer's paintings as a way of accessing the past. He presents a 'horizontal' view of history, weaving narratives of interconnections pointing to a rapidly expanding world.

⁸ See Petteri Pietikainen and Juhani Ihanus 'On the Origins of Psychoanalytic Psychohistory in *History of Psychology*, vol. 6, no. 2 (May 2003): 171-194; Jacques Szaluta, *Psychohistory: Theory and Practice* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001); William McKinley Runyan, 'From the Study of Lives and Psychohistory to Historicizing Psychology: A Conceptual Journey' in *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 31 (2003): 119-132; Bruce Mazlish, 'The Past and Future of

Psychohistory' in *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 31 (2003): 251-262; Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

Alan C. Elms, 'Sigmund Freud, Psychohistorian' in *The Annual of Psychoanalysis*, vol. 31 (2003): 65-78.

⁹ Arguably, the two most devastating critiques of psychohistory are David E. Stannard's *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) and Jacques Barzun, *Clio and the Doctors: Psycho-History, Quanto-History and History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974).

¹⁰ Those who have explored the connection between Jung and History, but who have not necessarily applied the Jungian lens to write history, include: Arnold Toynbee, 'The Value of C. G. Jung's Work for Historians' in *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 2 (May 1956): 193-94; Marvin Goldwert, 'Toynbee and Jung: The Historian and Analytical Psychology – A Brief Comment' in *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, vol. 28, (1983): 363-66; Ira Progoff, *Jung's Psychology and its Social Meaning* (New York: Dialogue House Library, 1953); Joseph L. Henderson, *Cultural Attitudes in Psychological Perspective* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1984) and *Shadow and Self: Selected Papers in Analytical Psychology* (Wilmette, Illinois: Chiron Publications, 1990); C. A. Meier, 'The Problems Arising From the Opposition of Introversion and Extraversion in the History of Civilization' in *The Psychology of C. G. Jung, Volume 3: Consciousness*, David N. Roscoe (trans), (Boston: Sigo Press, 1989): 77-93; J. J. Clarke, *In Search of Jung: Historical and Philosophical Enquiries* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992); Susan Rowland, *Jung as a Writer* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005); Ruth Meyer, *Clio's Circle: Entering the Imaginal World of Historians* (New Orleans, Louisiana: Spring Journal Books, 2007). Toynbee stands out as the only major historian who has utilised Jungian concepts to tell history. See his 'Higher Religions and Psychological Types' in *A Study of History: Volume VII* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press): 716-36. One Jungian, psychobiographical analysis (of Isabel de la Cruz) can be found in Ruth Anthony El Saffar's *Rapture Encaged: The Suppression of the Feminine in Western Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994). For a critical commentary on the significance of Jung's work for both history and the social dimension, see Renos K. Papadopoulos (ed.), 'Part Thirteen: History and the Social Dimension' in *Carl Gustav Jung: Critical Assessments, Volume IV: Implications and Inspirations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992): 5-91.

¹¹ Samuel Harsnett, *A discovery of the fraudulent practices of Iohn Darrel Bachelor of Artes, in his proceedings concerning the pretended possession and dispossession of William Somers at Nottingham: of Thomas Darling, the boy of Burton at Caldwell: and of Katherine Wright at Mansfield, & Whittington: and of his dealings with one Mary Couper at Nottingham, detecting in some sort the deceitfull trade in these latter dayes of casting out devils.* (London: Imprinted by [John Windet for] Iohn Wolfe, 1599).

¹² Ibid: 294-95.

¹³ C. G. Jung, 'Psychoanalysis and Neurosis' in Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler (eds), R. F. C. Hull (trans), *Collected Works, Volume 4: Freud and Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961): paras. 561-64. (Original published in 1916).

¹⁴ Jesse Bee, 'The most wonderful and true story of a certain Witch named Alice Gooderidge of Stapen Hill, who was arraigned and convicted at Derby at the Assizes there. As also a true report of the strange torments of Thomas Darling, a boy of thirteen years of age, that was possessed by the Devil, with his horrible fits and terrible Apparitions by him uttered at Burton on Trent in the County of Safford, and of his marvellous deliverance'. John Denison (ed.) (Printed at London for J. O., 1597), in Philip C. Almond (ed.), *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England: Contemporary Texts and their Cultural Contexts* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press): 159.

¹⁵ Ibid: 163.

¹⁶ Ibid: 162.

¹⁷ Ibid: 158.

¹⁸ Ibid: 183-84.

¹⁹ Ibid: 187.

²⁰ Ibid: 187-91.

²¹ Philip C. Almond, 'The Boy of Burton: The story of Thomas Darling', in Philip C. Almond (ed.), *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 150.

- ²² There are over one hundred cases of possessed persons from 1550 to 1700. See Almond, 'Introduction', in Philip C. Almond (ed.), *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 1.
- ²³ Philip C. Almond, 'Preface', in Philip C. Almond (ed.), *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: ix.
- ²⁴ Philip C. Almond, 'Introduction', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 2.
- ²⁵ Philip C. Almond, 'Preface', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: x.
- ²⁶ Philip C. Almond, 'Introduction', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 9.
- ²⁷ Philip C. Almond, 'The Boy of Burton: The Story of Thomas Darling', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 152.
- ²⁸ Philip C. Almond, 'Introduction', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 37.
- ²⁹ Philip C. Almond, 'The Boy of Burton: The Story of Thomas Darling', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 151.
- ³⁰ Samuel Harsnett, *A discovery of the fraudulent practises of Iohn Darrel Bachelor of Artes*: 269.
- ³¹ Philip C. Almond, 'Introduction', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 22.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid: 23.
- ³⁴ Ibid.
- ³⁵ Ibid: 24.
- ³⁶ Ibid.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ Ibid: 26.
- ³⁹ Jesse Bee, 'The most wonderful and true story of a certain Witch named Alice Gooderidge of Stapen Hill [...]', in Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 185.
- ⁴⁰ Philip C. Almond, 'Introduction', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 25.
- ⁴¹ Ibid. During possession, Almond continues, an individual encountered a 'mysterious other which [was] both terrifying and fascinating, awe-inspiring but captivating'.
- ⁴² Jesse Bee, 'The most wonderful and true story of a certain Witch named Alice Gooderidge of Stapen Hill [...]', in Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 166-68; 174-75; 177-79; 183-85; 188-89; 191.
- ⁴³ Philip C. Almond, 'Introduction', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 40.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid.
- ⁴⁵ Ibid: 41.
- ⁴⁶ Ibid.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid: 42.
- ⁴⁸ Andrew Samuels, Bani Shorter and Fred Plaut, *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis* (London and New York: Routledge): 34.
- ⁴⁹ C. G. Jung, 'Psychological Factors Determining Human Behaviour', in Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler (eds), R. F. C. Hull (trans), *Collected Works Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960): para. 253. (Original published in 1937).
- ⁵⁰ C. G. Jung, 'A Review of the Complex Theory', in *Collected Works Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*: para. 202. (Original first published in 1934).
- ⁵¹ C. G. Jung, 'Spirit and Life', in *Collected Works Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*: para. 628.
- ⁵² C. G. Jung, 'Analytical Psychology and "Weltanschauung"', in *Collected Works Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*: para. 712. (Original first published in 1928).
- ⁵³ C. G. Jung, 'A Review of the Complex Theory' in *Collected Works Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*: para. 204. (Original first published in 1934).
- ⁵⁴ C. G. Jung, 'On the Doctrine of Complexes', in *Collected Works Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*: para. 1352. (Original first published in 1913).

- ⁵⁵ C. G. Jung, 'The Psychological Foundation of Belief in Spirits', in *Collected Works Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*: para. 594.
- ⁵⁶ Andrew Samuels, *Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*: 34.
- ⁵⁷ C. G. Jung, 'The Psychological Foundation of Belief in Spirits', in *Collected Works Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*: para. 594.
- ⁵⁸ Ibid: paras. 587-91.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ Donald Kalsched, *The Inner World of Trauma*: 95.
- ⁶¹ Jesse Bee, 'The most wonderful and true story of a certain Witch named Alice Gooderidge of Stapen Hill [...]', in Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*. The theme of an absent father, coincidentally, was a central concern in what is considered the first psychohistorical work, Freud's *Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*. See Peter Gay (ed.), *The Freud Reader* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995): 443-81. (Original first published in 1910).
- ⁶² Samuel Harsnett, *A discovery of the fraudulent practises of Iohn Darrel Bachelor of Artes*: 267 (grandfather); 270 (uncle, Robert Toone); 271 (Toone's wife); 293 (mother).
- ⁶³ Ibid: 273.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid: 290.
- ⁶⁵ Andrew Samuels, *The Political Psyche* (London and New York: Routledge): 155, 159, 162, 174.
- ⁶⁶ David E. Stannard, 'Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory' (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980): 22.
- ⁶⁷ Professor Timothy Brook, personal communication, 26 May 2008. Jacques Barzun makes a similar point in his critique of psychohistory: 'Facts and truths differ from suggestion, speculation, interesting possibility. Without inquiry into the nature of a fact and of its perception by the mind, it is clear that an attested fact and a suggestive possibility belong to separate orders of belief. One is evidence, the other is atmosphere'. See Barzun, *Clio and the Doctors: Psycho-History, Quanto-History & History* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1974): 42.
- ⁶⁸ Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994): 1.
- ⁶⁹ C. G. Jung, 'Symbols of Transformation: An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia' in Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler (eds), R. F. C. Hull (trans), *Collected Works Volume 5: Symbols of Transformation, Second Edition* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX, 1956): para. 465. (Originally published in 1912).
- ⁷⁰ Ibid.
- ⁷¹ Ibid.
- ⁷² C. G. Jung, 'Symbols of Transformation': para. 522.
- ⁷³ Ibid: para. 553.
- ⁷⁴ C. G. Jung, 'The Theory of Psychoanalysis' in Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler (eds), R. F. C. Hull (trans), *Collected Works Volume 4: Freud and Psychoanalysis* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, Bollingen Series XX, 1961): para. 273. (Originally published in 1913).
- ⁷⁵ C. G. Jung, 'Symbols of Transformation': para. 466.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid: para. 468.
- ⁷⁸ Ibid.
- ⁷⁹ Ibid: para. 470.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid: para. 473.
- ⁸¹ Ibid: para. 484.
- ⁸² Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968): 36.
- ⁸³ C. G. Jung, 'Symbols of Transformation': para. 321.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid: para. 494.
- ⁸⁵ Ibid.
- ⁸⁶ Ibid.
- ⁸⁷ Ibid.

- ⁸⁸ Philip C. Almond, 'The Boy of Burton: The Story of Thomas Darling', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 154.
- ⁸⁹ Andrew Samuels defines *enantiodromia* as follows: "Running contrawise", a psychological "law" [...] meaning that sooner or later everything turns into its opposite [...] If an extreme, one-sided tendency dominates conscious life, in time an equally powerful counter-position is built up in the psyche. This first inhibits conscious performance and then, subsequently, breaks through ego inhibitions and conscious control'. See his *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*: 53.
- ⁹⁰ Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, John Buchanan-Brown (trans), (New York: Penguin Books, 1996): 499-501. On the topic of the woman necromancer at Endor, and her function as a symbol of liminality, see Ann Jeffers, "Nor by Dreams, nor by Urim, nor by Prophets": The Story of the Woman at the Pit in 1 Samuel 28', in Patrick Curry and Angela Voss (eds), *Seeing with Different Eyes: Essays in Astrology and Divination* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007): 137.
- ⁹¹ Philip C. Almond, 'Introduction', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 14.
- ⁹² Ibid: 17.
- ⁹³ Ibid: 18.
- ⁹⁴ Samuel Harsnett, *A discovery of the fraudulent practises of Iohn Darrel Bachelor of Artes [...]*: 280; 284; 289-90; 292.
- ⁹⁵ Jesse Bee, 'The most wonderful and true story of a certain Witch named Alice Gooderidge of Stapen Hill [...]', in Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 165.
- ⁹⁶ Ibid.
- ⁹⁷ Ibid.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹⁹ Matthew 4: 8-11, *The HarperCollins Study Bible: New Revised Standard Version*: 1864.
- ¹⁰⁰ Compare especially fits described on pages 166 and 167 of 'The most wonderful and true story of a certain Witch named Alice Gooderidge of Stapen Hill [...]' with Matthew 4.
- ¹⁰¹ Jesse Bee, 'The most wonderful and true story of a certain Witch named Alice Gooderidge of Stapen Hill [...]', in Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 178.
- ¹⁰² Ibid: 179.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid: 180, emphasis added.
- ¹⁰⁴ Philip C. Almond, 'Introduction', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 26-34.
- ¹⁰⁵ Jesse Bee, 'The most wonderful and true story of a certain Witch named Alice Gooderidge of Stapen Hill [...]' in Philip C. Almond, *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 180.
- ¹⁰⁶ Ibid: 180-81.
- ¹⁰⁷ Ibid: 184.
- ¹⁰⁸ Ibid: 188-89.
- ¹⁰⁹ Ibid: 189.
- ¹¹⁰ Job 1: 6-12, *The HarperCollins Study Bible*: 751-52.
- ¹¹¹ Philip C. Almond, 'The Boy of Burton: The Story of Thomas Darling', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 152. See also Samuel Harsnett, *The discovery of the fraudulent practises of Iohn Darrel Bachelor of Artes [...]*: 289; 292.
- ¹¹² Philip C. Almond, 'The Boy of Burton: The Story of Thomas Darling', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 154. Jesse Bee is later on record as saying that he felt Darling was purposely casting himself into fits when the devil did not force him to: '[...] the boy was very willing to fall into his fits, because thereby he might show the graces of God in himself'. See Samuel Harsnett, *The discovery of the fraudulent practises of Iohn Darrel Bachelor of Artes*: 287.
- ¹¹³ Samuel Harsnett, *The discovery of the fraudulent practises of Iohn Darrel Bachelor of Artes*: 295.
- ¹¹⁴ Philip C. Almond, 'The Boy of Burton: The Story of Thomas Darling', *Demonic Possession and Exorcism in Early Modern England*: 154.
- ¹¹⁵ C. G. Jung, 'Psychology of the Transference', in Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler (eds), R. F. C. Hull (trans), *Collected Works Volume 16: The Practice of*

Psychotherapy: Essays on the Psychology of the Transference and Other Subjects (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1954): para. 470. (Originally published in 1946).

¹¹⁶ C. G. Jung, 'The Psychology of the Unconscious' in Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler (eds), R. F. C. Hull (trans), *Collected Works Volume 7: Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1953): para. 103n5. (Originally published in 1917).

¹¹⁷ C. G. Jung, 'Psychology and Religion' in Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham and Gerhard Adler (eds), R. F. C. Hull (trans), *Collected Works Volume 11: Psychology and Religion: West and East* (London: Routledge and & Kegan Paul, 1958): para. 131. (Originally published in 1937).

¹¹⁸ Ibid: para. 134.

¹¹⁹ Andrew Samuels, *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*: 135.

¹²⁰ Donald Kalsched, *The Inner World of Trauma*: 96.

¹²¹ Andrew Samuels, *A Critical Dictionary of Jungian Analysis*: 135.

¹²² Ibid: 136.

¹²³ Donald Kalsched, *The Inner World of Trauma*: 97.

¹²⁴ C. G. Jung, *Collected Works Volume 11: Psychology and Religion*: para. 574.

¹²⁵ Ibid: para. 567.

¹²⁶ Ibid: para. 568.

¹²⁷ John P. Dourley, 'The Religious Implications of Jung's Psychology' in *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, vol. 40, no. 2 (April 1995): 186.

¹²⁸ C. G. Jung, *Collected Works Volume 11: Psychology and Religion*: para. 567.

¹²⁹ For the debate between C. G. Jung and Martin Buber, see 'Religion and Modern Thinking' in Judith Buber Agassi (ed.), *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogues* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999): 34-59. See Ann Conrad Lammers, *In God's Shadow: The Collaboration of Victor White and C. G. Jung* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994) and Ann Conrad Lammers and Adrian Cunningham (eds), *The Jung-White Letters* (London: Routledge, 2007).

¹³⁰ Ann Jeffers, "'Nor by Dreams, nor by Urim, nor by Prophets": The Story of the Woman at the Pit in 1 Samuel 28': 133-37.

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Putting the Passion into cultural politics: utopian hopes for a new religious art in Germany, 1915-1920

Niccola Shearman

Abstract

Amongst the revolutionary currents of post-WW1 Germany, religious art made a brief but significant return to the mainstream. Identified in 1919 by the critic Gustav Hartlaub in *Kunst und Religion* as the result of a new '*mystisches Gefühlskommunismus*', the series of graphic works produced by the most prominent Expressionist artists are remarkable for their combination of a medieval mysticism with the brutal legacy of war and a utopian view of art and society. Various circumstances explain the proliferation of graphic cycles of religious imagery around this time – not least the economics of print production in a society hungry for salvation. It is the cause and effect of the new graphic force which is the subject of this paper. The hopes which Gustav Hartlaub invests in an avant-garde religious art are seen to reflect contemporary political concerns as well as formal arguments relating to representational and abstract art. This article identifies an attitude of undisguised innocence based on the return to origins, both of ideas and image-making, and asks if this necessarily short-lived position represented an essential step in the development of a modern graphic art.

Introduction

This essay concerns a body of religious art from the early Weimar Republic, and its positively evangelical champion, Gustav Hartlaub (1884-1963). In *Kunst und Religion (Art and Religion)* of 1919, he declared his idealistic colours by calling the issue of a modern religious art 'the final and most urgent question we can ask of the cultural conscience today'.¹ And this, when in Berlin, George Grosz and the Dada movement were busy proclaiming art to be dead – let alone God:

Why, there are even art-revolutionary painters who haven't freed themselves from painting God and the apostles; now, at the very time when it is their revolutionary duty to double their efforts at

propaganda in order to purify the world of supernatural forces,
God and his angels.²

Presenting his study as a search for the 'true myth' necessary to restore humanity, Hartlaub joins the utopian efforts of those trying to plug the gulf formed by the meaningless sacrifice of the Great War. Imitating the critical theory of nineteenth-century historian Alois Riegl, he compares the creative consequences of the recent ruptures in class structure to those of the violent tribal migrations during the period of late Antiquity.³ The result, he predicts, will be a new religious consciousness and, in art, nothing less than a 'new symbolic language'.

Written a year after an exhibition staged by Hartlaub in the Mannheim Kunsthalle, *Kunst und Religion* records the virtual epidemic of religious art produced in recent years -- including print portfolios on New Testament themes, the apocalyptic rages of Old Testament prophets, and editions of Expressionist poetry illustrated with visions of good and evil, love and war. The utopian fervour of these inter-war years is well documented, not least in the rash of dramatic, literary and critical publications employing religious metaphor in the service of politics and providing a new public arena for graphic art. Between 1915 and the early 1920s, several of the former Brücke artists produced portfolios – in luxury and popular editions – of woodcuts on themes from the life of Christ; Oskar Kokoschka's lithographic adventures continued in *The Passion* and the *Bach Kantata*; Lyonel Feininger produced the famous cathedral woodcut for the cover of the Bauhaus Manifesto of 1919, and Max Beckmann experienced a formal breakthrough in his discovery of graphic techniques. He, Max Pechstein and Paul Klee were amongst several artists who wrote in religious tones of a new social purpose, in a collection of 'Creative Credo's' published by Kasimir Edschmid in 1920.⁴ Others combined graphics with a subjective poetic outburst – as for example in Ludwig Meidner's apocalyptic visions in *Books of Psalms* (1919) and *Septemberschrei* (1920).

Gustav Hartlaub was not alone in documenting the revival of religious imagery in Expressionist art in general and in the woodcut in particular – a phenomenon

which critics such as Paul Fechter and Rosa Schapire associated specifically with the work of the Brücke artists.⁵ The poet and critic Theodor Däubler, a close associate of Hartlaub, was another fervent advocate of the spiritual energy supposedly brewing in the new graphics. Amongst modern historians of German graphic art, Reinhold Heller has worked in detail on religious imagery, characterising the period as a 'confusing, confused mixture of sentimental Christ-adulation, desperate yearning for peace and brotherhood, and naively utopian political radicalism.'⁶ As a prototypical product of these sentiments, we can place Hartlaub's thesis clearly within the same ecstatic tradition as that of the philosopher Ernst Bloch, whose youthful text of 1918, *Geist der Utopie* (*Spirit of Utopia*), evidently encouraged him in many of his own ideas.⁷ Moreover, both authors are irrefutably candidates for what John Gray today describes as the 'apocalyptic consciousness'. According to his book *Black Mass*, which links utopian political goals to an eschatological belief in the end of the world, the 'cognitive dissonance' of the Weimar Republic provided ripe ground for the fermentation of millenarian thought. In this context, a study of the religious art and its utopian promoters serves to deepen our understanding of a certain painful susceptibility to an apocalyptic mythology.⁸

This essay is intended as an introduction to the role of Hartlaub during this brief but intense era of the utopian spirit. While acknowledging that the attitude of George Grosz was eventually to prevail, it argues against an over-hasty dismissal of 'the mystical rapture of that stupid hocus-pocus'.⁹ Following the example of the Expressionist critic Hermann Bahr, who admitted to the 'mystagogical fog' surrounding much of the work in this period, it is worth reserving some patience for Hartlaub as he evaluates the creative potential lurking in the mists.¹⁰ Questioning the great expectations demonstrated in this and related critical works of the time, I have set out to assess the popularity of religious art in the light of a newly sharpened cultural consciousness. A search for features of the 'new symbolic language' highlights key formal elements which made these pictures an effective vehicle both for ideological meaning and for the launch of a supposed formal revolution.

Not only does Hartlaub's work provide an ideal opportunity to assess the merits of an emotionally-charged criticism typical of Expressionist writers; it demonstrates this tendency with firm emphasis on the graphic arts, and on the woodcut as the most emotive medium. The foundations for this enquiry have been laid by graphics specialists Reinhold Heller, Robin Reisenfeld and Ida Rigby, the latter having contributed in depth to the Robert Gore Rifkind collection of German Expressionist graphics in California.¹¹ Robin Reisenfeld has written extensively on the subject, including an essential survey of the revival of the woodcut in Germany, and important essays on American print collections.¹² Where this essay seeks new ground is in its evaluation of the influence of one contemporary critic on the ideological content of the modern woodcut. Addressing questions of materiality and style in the light of the Expressionist vision prevailing in 1919 – and in particular the emotional response to what is perceived as a certain 'raw' force in the carved line – it investigates, for example, the impact of such fundamental contrasts of black and white, solid block and 'transcendent' space, and asks if there is any legitimacy to the Expressionist idea of an elemental vitality inherent in the grain. Furthermore, it seems important to question the huge enthusiasm during this period for the revival of the 'Gothic spirit', and to consider this and other medieval associations promoted by the ideas of Wilhelm Worringer.¹³ In the course of this analysis I hope to show how Hartlaub's valuable period piece provides an enlightening example of the distillation of German art-historical theory through the heated cultural and social atmosphere of WW1.

As deputy director of the Mannheim Kunsthalle, Gustav Hartlaub had to tread a careful path between a conservative board of trustees and his own Expressionist programme when launching the Modern Religious Art exhibition in early 1918.¹⁴ When he later came to write what is subtitled 'an enquiry into the potential for a religious art', he had evidently had time to digest some of the criticism which the exhibition engendered. Specifically, he appears to be answering to an article by Hans Kauders published in *Das Kunstblatt* of 1918, and annotated by the editor Paul Westheim with words to the effect that the

new religious art risked being seen as a 'fatal game of fashion' and warning against plundering the Bible for images with which to create a 'new movement'.¹⁵

Before examining in detail Hartlaub's argument for the relevance of a new religious art, it helps to establish his attitude towards religion, and the manner in which this relates to contemporary social reforms. Firstly, in launching an attack on what he later termed the '*Ungeist*' of a materialist society, the critic is a clear successor to the Kandinsky strand of cultural thought, whereby the spiritual potential of art was to be harnessed to combat the materialism of the late-nineteenth century. At the same time, with his euphoric notion of a 'mystical Communism of the emotions' and an art for the people (see below), he places himself in the same camp as the revolutionary artists and social reformers at the heart of the new Weimar Republic. Combining these attitudes to promote an art which represents the spiritual experience of the individual, he emphasises the value of figurative imagery from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, interpreted not in a reactionary mode but in an Expressionist style which, he believes, has the power to revive the 'absolute' quality of ancient myth.

Two works in particular serve as an introduction to this ideal, their role at the heart of Hartlaub's argument centring on their representation of the Christ figure, on whom, 'all the anguish and all the passion of our time' is downloaded.¹⁶ Fig. 1, showing Ernst Barlach's woodcut of *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (1920), displays a characteristic medieval piety where Christ's anguished features are echoed in the rhythms of the surrounding scene. The close connection between such a pantheistic vision and the intrinsic rhythms of the woodcut medium are nowhere more apparent than in these examples of subjective religiosity. By contrast, the salutary dose of urban grit seen in Max Beckmann's painting of *Christ and the Adulterer* (1917), or his *Deposition* lithograph of 1918 made this artist an ideal representative of one who, while himself confessing to being 'the most unholy of people', set about portraying the metaphysical searching undertaken by a society in crisis. Hartlaub sets the tone for all of Beckmann's subsequent oeuvre when he describes his 'mighty

painter's fist' employing the religious motifs in a bid to 'realise the highest and the lowest of humanity in flesh and blood.'¹⁷



Fig. 1: Ernst Barlach, *Christ on the Mount of Olives*, 1920, woodcut, Courtesy of British Museum.

Keen to counter another criticism raised by Paul Westheim apropos the content of the original exhibition, Hartlaub qualifies his search for meaningful expression in declaring there to be no place for a long-outdated literary '*Bibelmalerei*' – a pejorative expression for the slavish reproduction of religious narratives. While stressing the fact that religious art is not dependent on a conventional faith, he equally criticises as inadequate any artist who appears simply to be going through the motions in response to the *Zeitgeist*. Analysing the work of a clutch of artists which include Josef Eberz and Albert Wach, he describes them as no doubt intoxicated by the 'cool incense wafting up from second-hand mysteries', but without any sense of a heart-felt need to experience these at first-hand. Similarly reviewed are all the 'would-be Kokoschkas', who, with their 'marionettes of the metaphysical', can only approach the true sense of spiritual expectation portrayed by one of the few modern artists who deserve to be called religious. As if to clear up any misunderstanding surrounding this typically vague quality, the reader is frequently reminded, in that familiar Expressionist

mantra, that only art which displays a genuine 'inner need' possesses adequate religious value.¹⁸

Fortunately, if the heady prose of Hartlaub's text often risks becoming all too misty, this is compensated for in his chosen examples. After the convincing cases of Barlach, Beckmann and Oskar Kokoschka, we come to Emil Nolde, whose art Hartlaub considers to have reached its most powerful and most original expression through an engagement with the Christian myth. The series of paintings which include Emil Nolde's *Last Supper* of 1912 illustrate, for Hartlaub, the thoroughly instinctual, human experience at the heart of the Christian story. Signalling the familiar 'peasant solidity' of his paintings and woodcuts, Hartlaub sees Nolde embracing myth as the fundamental stuff of humanity, to be approached in the same manner whether it is the core of European civilisation or of Polynesian society.¹⁹

In a further bid to define the religious nature of the most effective artistic production, the critic reassures modernists with the announcement that the favoured 'inner need' is not tied to conventional iconography, and certainly has little to do with official Church commissions, of which he can point to only a few. Referring to a '*Wille zum Geistigen*' (spiritual impulse) in Expressionist art, Hartlaub agrees with the critic Hans Kauders upon its inheritance from the art of Van Gogh, Cezanne and Edvard Munch, whose images reach out into the spiritual realm by the force of their 'whole essence and will'.²⁰ What engages both critics is the religious nature inherent in a view that sets out to question the visual evidence of the material world. Furthermore, it is in this capacity to distort the visible – in order to wrestle from it a higher reality – that Hartlaub and his contemporaries seek to ground a popular theory of modern mysticism, defined as the expression of a soul striving to reconnect with God: 'It is not that which flows from God, but that which strives to flow back into him that is worthy of the name religion.'²¹

Before religion

The obvious question to be asked of Hartlaub's treatise at this point is whether such pursuit of myth and mysticism is no more than a neurotic escape from reality, as Freud would later suggest in *The Future of an Illusion* (1927), where he considers religion as a repressive function, serving as 'the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity'; something to be grown out of as society progresses out of a state of infantile irrationality.²² Or is it, in its promotion of a more open, individual spiritual engagement, closer to a modern attitude that exists 'after religion'? In effect, the advocated stance is an opposite one – concerning the revival of what Hartlaub terms a 'pre-religious' attitude, with its roots in the earliest image-making, long before Christian dogma had petrified the whole business of spiritual expression. Maintaining that art in essence created religion, Hartlaub envisages early humans articulating in pictures a shared sense of connectedness to a spiritual realm; this original artistic response being the 'seed' from which came the 'fruit' of myth, and thence, in time, religion.²³

The pre-religious idea forms the backbone of Hartlaub's thesis. It accounts in his view for an ancient immediacy in the midst of a modern expression, and prepares the ground for the new symbolic language that he identifies there. Using an analogy that opens straight onto the origins of creativity, he describes the 'umbilical' function of Expressionist art:

In every bodily or material manifestation the Expressionist senses its relation to a hidden world beyond ours, the creative imagination which preceded its physical presence: in this way he 'sees' the umbilical cord which connects it to its pre-physical state; its metaphysical correlative.²⁴

The pre-religious idea was not Hartlaub's invention, having already been employed by the critic Hans Kauders in 1918 to emphasise the regenerative potential of Expressionist art, and in particular the manner in which modern forms appear to tap into an ancient seam of expression. In similar tones,

Kauders identifies the 'naked action' which marks these artists out as modern prophets of a new world view, like John the Baptist preparing the ground for the true saviour.²⁵ Acknowledging the idea's debt to Eastern religious tradition, Hartlaub points to the pre-religious core of Hinduism and Buddhism, in which life is lived in preparation for the ultimate Brahman phase.

In defining the formal qualities of a pre-religious art, Hartlaub emphasises its necessarily unrealistic appearance; art's priority, for Hartlaub, being to fit a model from the spiritual realm to the objects of the physical world, which themselves are primarily 'signs' for the former. Acknowledging the theories of German art-historian Wilhelm Worringer, Hartlaub traces the origins of religious art back to the 'crystalline' forms of Egyptian and Babylonian art.²⁶ In so doing, he considers the characteristics of early religious archetypes, where symmetrical stylisation and an adherence to surface planes were pursued for their closeness to the 'mineral' forms of the cosmos.²⁷ From such 'pre-individual' archetypes there developed the religious icons passed down into Christian tradition, and these – far from being schematic abstractions of an ideal – were the result of 'original sightings within the metaphysical sphere, which primitive man felt he could experience, even touch'.²⁸ Now reappearing in the raw woodcuts of such artists as Emil Nolde, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, and other former Brücke members, the pre-religious energy surfaces in a potent mix of spiritual mystique and earthy physicality (see figs. 2 and 3). While, on the one hand, there is no doubting the solidity and visual impact of such modern icons, it is admittedly easier to recognise in them Hartlaub's 'umbilical' function than it is to envisage their relation to the mineral qualities of the cosmos. On the other hand, the symmetrical simplification of forms and abstract rhythms might indeed recall the 'pre-individual' grooves carved into Babylonian stone.

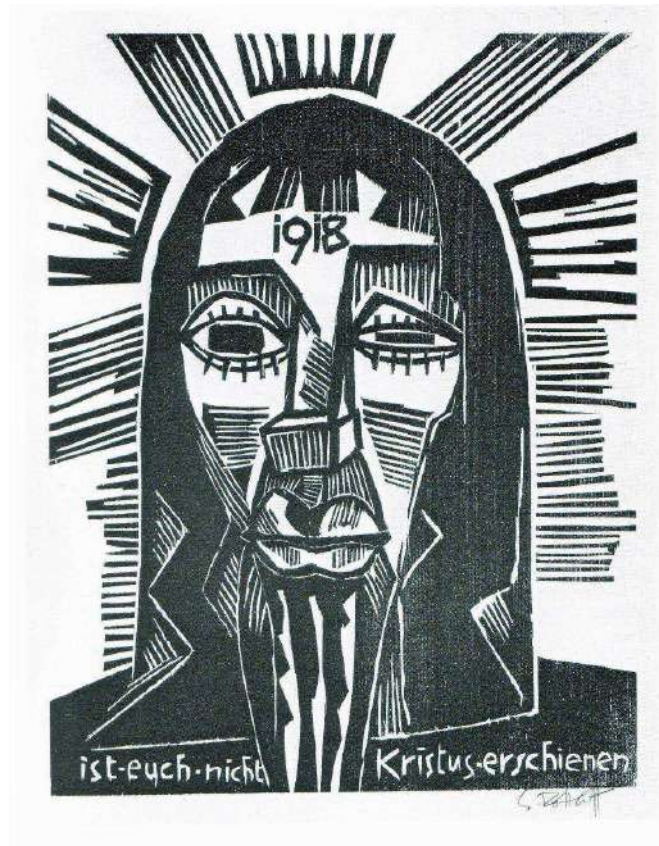


Fig. 2: Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, *Head of Christ*, 1918, woodcut. Courtesy of Brücke Museum, Berlin.



Fig. 3: Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, 1918,, woodcut, Courtesy of Brücke Museum, Berlin

Despite Hartlaub's investment of faith in such modern 'icons' as Schmidt-Rottluff's powerful *Head of Christ* from a portfolio of nine woodcuts (fig. 2) – with the date branded into the forehead in place of the crown of thorns – there is no suggestion that they were intended as devotional objects. Better to consider their adapted function; not only in their displacement from gilded mosaic or glowing panel-painting to the black-and-white reproductions on paper, but in their shift of attitude from dogma to doubt. In this image, the doubt is reinforced by the ambiguous text, '1918 ist euch nicht Christus erschienen'. If read straightforwardly with the date beginning the phrase, the effect is of a negative – and, in the context of the 'apocalyptic consciousness', quite devastating – statement: 'In 1918 Christ did not appear to you'. However, taking the bottom text alone without the date, the instinct is to add on a question mark and read it as an enquiry implying faith in the resurrection: 'did not Christ appear to you?' In their discussion of this work, Reinhold Heller and Erin Hogan point to an ambiguity, and to the revival of the icon in the contemporary format of the campaigning poster, confronting the viewer with all the dashed hopes of the Expressionist generation.²⁹ As if to reinforce hope, any suggestions of a brutalised consciousness are alleviated by the mood of the further eight prints in the portfolio – of which no less than three feature scenes where the risen Christ appeared to the disciples (see fig. 3).

Lacking the usual symbols of authority or supernatural power in the form of haloes or precious materials, the modern icon becomes instantly more human – flawed, questioning. Added to this, the woodcut medium, as an inexpensive method with reproduction at its core, assists in reviving religious thought in the private sphere – in theory, a considerably more egalitarian sphere than was the case for nineteenth-century prints. Whether the accessibility increased its worth as the 'pre-religious' stimulus which Hartlaub envisaged is debatable, but it is interesting to consider in this context the Byzantine attitude which promoted the reproduction of certain miraculous icons, in the belief that the spiritual powers of the original would be passed on through its copies. Such a notion would present an intriguing reversal of Walter Benjamin's view of the loss of an 'aura' in the process of mass production.³⁰

The relation between the post-WW1 pre-religious concept and the pre-war enthusiasm for African and Oceanic cultures is unmistakable. Referring to the mask-like qualities in the work of Schmidt-Rottluff, in particular those found in four *Heads of the Evangelists* in beaten brass of 1912, Hartlaub employs a familiar prefix typical of this fascination for the so-called 'primitive'. His references to the '*Urtiefen*' (primal depths) of these works and to their '*Urwelthaftigkeit*' (sense of a primeval world), all combine an air of the exotic with an origin in the depths of the soul. Regarding this new adaptation of the formal qualities of the ritual mask to the New Testament narrative as an important transitional step in the revival of religious art, Hartlaub declares it far more appropriate to the original basis of the Christian myth than any 'Hellenistic' ideal. His description of this transitional stage as the 'opening of the eye' is, one suspects, directly inspired by Christ's expression in the Schmidt-Rottluff woodcut discussed above.³¹

A 'true myth'?

The emphasis on the pre-religious attitude in modern art also comes intriguingly close to the concept of the *archetype* expounded by Hartlaub's contemporary, the psychologist CG Jung; in particular, to his theory of a collective unconscious allowing for the recourse to ancient mythical structures in a mind under stress.³² Arguing in this case against Freud's equation of mythical symbols with erotic instincts, Hartlaub states that 'myth, in its original form, is memory' of a pre-individual, pre-sexual oneness with the cosmos and the creator; termed an 'anamnesis in pictures'. Seeing the artistic imagination as having special access to this original condition, he explains how this response is particularly acute at times of turmoil, when a powerful experience or image, long absorbed into the subconscious, can emerge rejuvenated and adapted to its current purpose.³³ By this process, the trauma of the war would have caused the seismic eruption of the pre-religious consciousness, bringing an instinctual visual memory to the interpretation of modern struggles.

Repeatedly presented in Hartlaub's argument, not as a deliberate construction, but as an involuntary visual substructure, there is in the works which Hartlaub admires ample evidence of the supposedly therapeutic effect of the archaic mythical tendency – another aspect substantiated by Jung's research. For example, Oskar Kokoschka's various lithographic series, produced at a time of emotional stress before and during WWI, depict an invented mythical world ripe with expressive opportunities for a modern mind, and society, in crisis. As if illustrating the very moment at which the archaic consciousness erupts, the lithographic cycle of the *Bach Kantata*, published in 1916, adapts the Baroque Hymn to depict the conflict between an anguished youth in the figure of Hope, and the dominating female Fear (being a double portrait of the artist and his estranged lover Alma Mahler), against a forbidding backdrop of cosmic chaos (fig. 4). In an intriguing affirmation of the regenerative powers of myth, the work closes with an autobiographical *Pietà* (fig. 5) followed by a self-portrait of Kokoschka at work again. Interestingly, despite being for Hartlaub perhaps the supreme representative of the religious artist, Kokoschka is one of the few of this period never to have experimented with the woodcut. According to one of his first biographers, 'it was too slow a technique for his eruptive temperament'.³⁴



Fig. 4: Oskar Kokoschka, 'The woman leads the man', from *Bach Kantata*, 1914 (pub. 1916), chalk lithograph. Courtesy of Verlag und Galerie Welz, Salzburg.



Fig. 5: Oskar Kokoschka, 'It is enough', from *Bach Kantata*, 1914, chalk lithograph. Courtesy of Verlag und Galerie Welz, Salzburg.

'In the Beginning was the woodcut'

Looking back on the period from 1947, Hartlaub ascribes a powerful immediacy to the woodcut medium; the often merciless gashes 'carved with the surety of a sleepwalker'.³⁵ Exploited with enthusiasm by the first generations of Expressionists, the planar woodcut represented a revival of the medieval process, whereby the artist would carve an image directly into the plank and with the grain, as opposed to the tonal engraving technique which produced a more 'painterly' effect.³⁶ The medium gained again in popularity when the post-WW1 economic crisis made the graphic work a more attractive medium than the expensive oil painting. Attractive not least for its mass-production potential, it also became the ideal material both for religious subject matter and political activism. Publications employing the woodcut in 1919 included the Bauhaus Manifesto, socialist art journals such as *Die Aktion* and Max Pechstein's manifesto '*An Alle Künstler*' (*To All Artists*), combining word and image from the Novembergruppe council of artists.

Such widespread popularity leads us to ask questions about the qualities of the woodcut – material and symbolic – which made it so suitable to what might be

called the 'big picture'. An immediate factor must be the uncompromising visual challenge presented by the bold contrasts and heavy surfaces already seen in the Brücke works. With their combined drama of utopian ideas and formal innovation, these works could be interpreted as the graphic manifestation of the apocalyptic consciousness, with all the pathos of a battle between good and evil, light and dark. And contemporary criticism embraced both the formal qualities and the emotional in its common concern with the metaphysical origins of the creative process. In the catalogue for his exhibition of the Expressionist woodcut in 1918, Hans Goltz celebrated the creation of a 'living surface', where planar forms – originally performing the lesser function of white background to the contours of the engraving method – could now play an equal role in the composition of a printed image.³⁷ In the same year, Paul Westheim dedicated an entire edition of his journal *Das Kunstblatt* to the woodcut, employing in his editorial the same combination of visceral experience and religious overtones as Hartlaub. Greeting the new wave of woodcuts as evidence of 'the will to a monumental image-making', he also argued eloquently for the material significance of the medium; speaking of the violence inherent in a line 'torn in the wood by a sharp iron', Westheim imagines a revelation awaiting the artist on encountering the wooden block: a material containing within itself 'an independent artistic life'.³⁸ Ernst Bloch too is inspired by the negative-positive interplay of the graphic surface, and its capacity to hide or reveal inner depths – what he terms 'the vanishing obverse'. Bloch is another admirer of the ancient materiality of this medium, picturing the earliest image-makers whittling away, led instinctually by the natural grain of the wood. Although romantic beyond defence, the relevance of his view lies in his notion of a 'magical impulse' inherent in these artefacts, which lives as much in the material as in the craft of the maker.³⁹

Surveying the works of the period, there are plenty of opportunities to read the vigorous cuts as an attempt to reveal something hidden – and if not actually to harm, then certainly to make tangible the pain of the recent war. In the case of Max Beckmann, for example, we might regard his *Self-Portrait* of 1920 as a bold attempt to apply the chisel to his own countenance. Beckmann's art was effectively transformed by a new engagement with the graphic line, and he

alludes to the process in his 'Creative Credo' of 1920, writing of his new style as a determination to 'grasp the unutterable things of this world' by trying to 'capture the terrible, thrilling monster of life's vitality and to confine it, beat it down and strangle it with crystal-clear, razor-sharp lines and planes'.⁴⁰ Whether carved or printed, the increasing force of the line is a prime feature of the early Weimar period, and has been described as a weapon loaded with the rage of a disillusioned generation.⁴¹ Max Pechstein, who produced a series of 12 coloured woodcuts of the Lord's Prayer (fig. 6), evidently felt the pain: 'Crayon and Pen pierce sharply into the brain, they stab into every corner, furiously they press into the whiteness. Black laughs like the devil on paper, grins in bizarre lines, comforts in velvety planes, excites and caresses.'⁴²



Fig. 6: Max Pechstein, 'Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will be Done' from *The Lords Prayer*, 1921, hand-coloured woodcut (shown here in b/w). Courtesy of Leicester Arts and Museum Service, Leicester.

A modern mysticism

George Grosz's impatient dismissal of the 'hocus pocus' elements of the new religious art is aimed at the efforts of Expressionist commentators to advertise

its 'mystical' nature. Before succumbing to the same impatience with what might seem at worst fashion and at best fantasy, it is worth considering some of Gustav Hartlaub's references to mysticism, and how his position met with a widespread contemporary preoccupation with all types of alternatives to orthodox Christian theology. Despite his euphoric language, Hartlaub was as wary of what he saw as a 'watered-down' liberalism of the Protestant Church as he was of the more esoteric beliefs of the Theosophist school – while of course borrowing many of his own ideas from Rudolf Steiner and his followers.⁴³ His earlier article of 1917, entitled 'Die Kunst und die neue Gnosis', is an exercise in articulating a perceived connection between contemporary art practice and mystical – or Gnostic – experience, which concludes that it is the revolution in 'seeing as an act of the inner soul' that brings the Expressionist artist into collision with religious experience.⁴⁴ Even the briefest investigation of the history of Gnosticism (Gnosis = Knowing), reveals how central is the idea of the soul's relation to God, and equally that the word has been used since medieval times as an umbrella term for heretical alternatives suggesting a darker side to orthodox religion: precisely the general purpose to suit Hartlaub and his contemporaries.

It is important to understand Hartlaub's concept of a 'mystical' art as an attitude that reaches well beyond the first millennium, namely to the 'pre-religious' era which he identifies throughout his text as the source of all religious imagery. Nonetheless, the medieval influences to the new interest in mysticism – in particular in the rediscovery at the turn of the century of mystical poets such as Mechthild von Magdeburg, Hildegard von Bingen, or the seventeenth-century theologian Jakob von Böhme – cannot be ignored. In a move inspired by the influential pre-WW1 writings of Wilhelm Worringer, artists of Hartlaub's day looked increasingly to the medieval period for an iconographic and stylistic model for the new religious art. In *Formprobleme der Gotik*, Worringer mirrors recent German aesthetic theory in seeking a 'genealogy' for what he identifies as a northern and specifically non-classical tradition. First published in book form in 1911, it extends his theory of the division between 'Abstraction' and 'Empathy' and presents the Gothic style as an inspiration for a new expression of abstract vitality.⁴⁵ The idea was quick to catch on, as is evident from the

repeated references to the 'Gothic soul' in Paul Fechter's book of 1914, in which he displays the characteristic nationalism that for a while was an integral part of the tendency.⁴⁶ The keen interest in mysticism shared by Hartlaub and his contemporaries must stem in large part from Worringer's assessment of 'the psychology of mysticism', which points to the Gothic period as that in which 'emotional rapture becomes the measure of religious experience'.⁴⁷

Modern representatives of this attitude include the distinctly medieval Ernst Barlach, whose art often concerns isolated figures in monkish contemplation or engaged in a metaphorical battle with the elements, and whom Hartlaub sees as 'carrying their burden ever towards the stars'.⁴⁸ Equally, he imagines Erich Heckel to have lived during the 'ascetically lyrical climate' of medieval Siena, and to have brought that attitude up to date in his particular brand of the 'eccentric grotesque', as exemplified in the *Good Samaritan* triptych of 1915 (fig. 7). Hartlaub's favourite is Heckel's *Ostend Madonna*, being a woodcut version of an improvised mural, originally painted on an expanse of tent canvas for a sailors' Christmas party in the Belgian port in 1915 (fig. 8).⁴⁹ In both of these artists the 'mystical' attitude lies in the subjective reprocessing of the objects of the external world: a process which endows these objects – frequently but not always pertaining to the familiar iconography of religious art – with a new 'absolute' quality. The message is one that succeeds in fitting the old idea of an artist as visionary seer to Hartlaub's concept of art as the forerunner to a new religious consciousness. Unafraid to claim something of a clairvoyant role for the modern artist, with access to the same 'priestly' visions of the ancients, he also acknowledges that contemporary society has difficulty in accepting this part of the creative process, ascribing such visions to the pathological realm rather than to the metaphysical.



Fig. 7: Erich Heckel, Scene from the *Good Samaritan triptych*, 1915, hand-coloured woodcut. Courtesy of Estate of Erich Heckel, D-78343 Hemmenhofen.



Fig. 8: Erich Heckel, *The Ostend Madonna*, 1916, woodcut, Courtesy of Estate of Erich Heckel, D-78343 Hemmenhofen.

For Gustav Hartlaub and his generation, the stars provided the ultimate symbol of the mystical stance, appearing not only in the work of the more ecstatic artists and poets, but even shining in the sky 'above George Grosz's cursed alleyways.'⁵⁰ A reconciliation with the cosmos is at the heart of the Gnostic idea as interpreted in this critical work, and to achieve this, modern man must follow the advice of Jakob von Böhme and seek 'astrological rebirth.'⁵¹ Franz Marc's 1912 woodcut illustration of the poem 'Reconciliation' by Else Lasker-Schüler presents a characteristically magical image of this holistic ideal. As an example of an ecstatic pre-war Expressionism vision, it is instructive to consider Marc's image in contrast to Oskar Kokoschka's later nightmarish visions, where the battle between sun and moon becomes a threatening leitmotif. In the spirit of the times, Hartlaub and other Mannheim contemporaries launched their own society in 1918, entitled *die Sternwarte*, or 'Observatory'.⁵²

Responding to the plentiful enthusiasm for the Gothic era expressed in the work of his contemporaries, Gustav Hartlaub presents his own interpretation of the stylistic evolution of that early period, describing a release of tension as the blocks and planes of ancient art began to mutate into living forms that struggled to release themselves fully into the spiritual space.⁵³ Interpreting the Gothic spirit as an 'openness' to belief, artists and critics were inspired by its artistic manifestation of the medieval notions of a true communion between man, God, and nature. Again under the direct influence of Worringer, who wrote of 'The ceaseless melody of the northern line', Hartlaub also points to the 'restless and uncanny line' of Gothic forms. In the same vein, the more ecstatic critics regarded the line as a close relation of the soul – even, in Ernst Bloch's words, 'the very spirit of resurrection'.⁵⁴ Such enthusiasm is perhaps not hard to understand when contemplating the meditative line and abstract rhythms in the two works by Barlach illustrated here – appearing as the scrolls of medieval wood carving, as Jugendstil organics, and becoming brittle in places as a sign of the intense emotion that threatens the harmony of the image. The almost unreadable poetics of Ernst Bloch nevertheless contain valuable insights into the highly subjective attitude to religion shared by his utopian contemporaries, especially in this romantic embrace of the Gothic spirit. However, alarm bells

begin to ring when he speaks of it as ‘the artistic suggestion of living space’ (*Lebensraum*, in the original), and paints his own graphic image of the meeting of ancient Egyptian and Nordic forms, when ‘the forest wanders into the desert.’⁵⁵

The plethora of Gothic references in relation to the Expressionist period – both amongst contemporary theorists and in later critical histories – is the subject of an important publication by Magdalena Bushart.⁵⁶ In her pursuit of a concrete foundation to familiar but vague assertions of an ‘affinity’ between the two periods, Bushart first grounds her research in the work of Wilhelm Worringer and proceeds to examine his considerable influence on the Expressionist generation, investigating themes such as the re-emergence of religious imagery, abstract style tendencies, workshop practices and folk influences. Significantly, she acknowledges the role of Gustav Hartlaub in identifying both the metaphysical and medieval tendencies in Expressionist art.⁵⁷ A central focus of her work is the concerted effort made by critics of the immediate pre-war period to fabricate a national heritage for what was initially an unpopular modern style, and the repercussions which this tendency was to have for the post-WW1 generation of Expressionists.⁵⁸

A new objectivity

Anticipating his own later developments, Hartlaub lists objectivity, or ‘*Gegenständlichkeit*’, as one of the key components of the new symbolic language. After a consistent defence of the contemporary relevance of a figurative religious art, an appendix is dedicated to the arguments against the pure abstraction of artists such as Kandinsky, claiming that the fine arts should not presume to make the leap into the abstract realm of music.⁵⁹ In this respect Hartlaub’s aims coincide with those of Max Beckmann, who was always keen to distance himself from the Expressionism of the Blaue Reiter brand. Writing of his hope that art can achieve a ‘transcendental objectivity, out of a deep love for nature and mankind’, he combines the more nebulous metaphysical aims of his generation with a characteristic firm hold on reality.⁶⁰

In a further attempt to place his thesis within the framework of political developments, Hartlaub invents the potent new term of a '*Mystisches Gefühlskommunismus*'. Translating perhaps as 'a mystical communism of the emotions', the term seems ideally conceived to appeal to an audience enthusiastic for social reform yet sceptical of revolutionary communism – in addition, that is, to its evident usefulness in packaging Expressionist art for the general populace.⁶¹ Embodied above all in the scenes of New Testament charity and humility, such as Heckel's *Good Samaritan* triptych or *The Prodigal Son* of 1918 by Christian Rohlf's (fig. 9), it is an ideal that employed the accessible mode of the parable in a modern form. Regarding the piety embodied in the well-known woodcut *Memorial Sheet for Karl Liebknecht* of 1919 by Käthe Kollwitz, or indeed Conrad Felixmüller's ascension-like image of Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg (see fig. 10), one realises how genuine were the emotions invested in the socialist ideal, and how it was only a short step to full-blown religiosity.



Fig. 9: Christian Rohlf's, *The Prodigal Son*, 1916, Woodcut. Courtesy of Brücke Museum, Berlin.



Fig. 10: Conrad Felixmüller, *People over the World*, 1919, lithograph, Courtesy of Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

The communion of Expressionist art and utopian religiosity crystallises in a 1919 publication entitled *der Begeisterte Weg* (*The Inspired Way*), where an allegorical tale of revolution and resurrection is illustrated with woodcuts by Constantin von Mitschke-Collande which combine the Passion and scenes from Revelations with propaganda-poster images of political activism. This work does not feature in Hartlaub's survey, but its overtly political nature makes it an unlikely candidate for the true religious art which he sought. For in an afterword to his text he expresses doubts about the limits of an exclusively political art, and, in a further striking use of religious metaphor, he even predicts that activism will be the 'Judas' to Expressionism.⁶²

With all the ecstatic talk of mysticism and primeval woodcarving, one can see why later critics considered Expressionism to need a 'health warning'.⁶³ However, while Gustav Hartlaub was plainly guilty of a common tendency to idealise the power of art in the service of society, nonetheless his thesis should not be dismissed as mere fundamentalist rhetoric. It is at heart an Expressionist art history, following an established model that traces key manifestations of the tendency from ancient Egyptian roots through German Gothic to the modern period. Hartlaub's particularly eloquent version of the history breaks new ground in its response to a contemporary desire for a return to origins: to the origin of religious ideas; of style; and of creativity itself. And the emotive language and utopian ideas it contains reveal an innocence spawned by the post-WW1 rift between perception and reality (David Gray's 'cognitive dissonance') which made artists and critics as susceptible to religious belief as they were to socialist utopias. In most cases – Hartlaub's included – it was to be a short-lived innocence, but one without which it is hard to imagine the new graphic art having the impact that it did.

With the focus on religion, Hartlaub seeks to reassess the legacy of Nietzsche's existentialist message for the post-WW1 generation. In identifying the role of the Expressionist artist in the revival of religious ideas, he remains faithful to what he acknowledges is Zarathustra's 'call to the great creative power of the individual', while allowing for the return of a transcendent vision beyond the here and now.⁶⁴ In the words of a character from Thomas Mann's *Dr Faustus*, a novel which looks back over the intellectual ideas of this generation, Hartlaub's work can perhaps be regarded as an exercise in putting a little of the 'cult' back into modern culture. And this was not necessarily a sinister impulse: at the time it was less a creation of false saviours of illusionary ideals than a sincere attempt to reinvest in mythical structures. In this respect, the proliferation of graphic works on religious themes can be viewed as part of a legitimate bid to contain a collective psychosis and to galvanise creative energy in the service of a social purpose – the very essence of Hartlaub's '*mystisches Gefühlskommunismus*'. Whether we read *Kunst und Religion* as an emotionally-charged marketing campaign or a swansong of a generation for whom ideas were everything, the impassioned prose illustrates how intense was the desire

to harness the creative power of faith; any faith. In precisely this spirit of undirected idealism, Hartlaub urges the reader to hold on to Dostoevsky's assertion: 'I will believe', thereby providing fertile ground for satirists such as the playwright Franz Werfel.⁶⁵ In her chapter on religion, Magdalena Bushart quotes the witty lines from Werfel's 1920 play, *Spiegelmensch*, which list the plentiful beliefs on offer on the 'spiritual menu'.⁶⁶

Looking back from 1933 on these 'Modern Men in Search of a Soul', CG Jung describes the intellectuals and artists of the time 'trying on a number of religious convictions as if they were Sunday attire, only to lay them aside again like worn-out clothes'.⁶⁷ And of course, we see Hartlaub apparently following this exact path as he casts religion aside in order to promote the rise of *Neue Sachlichkeit* from 1923, having reluctantly come round to the view of George Grosz in his preference for 'the objectivity and clarity of an engineer's drawing'.⁶⁸ Behaving as the prophet of a new religion one moment and a new sobriety the next might seem like a game of fashion if it weren't for the fact that there is one vital link between Hartlaub's two positions. This is his insistence throughout the early text on objectivity and social relevance, even in the midst of mystical raptures and a vulnerable utopian fervour. As he observed the cementing of a new cynical realism in the artists he admired – Beckmann being a prime example – we can see him remaining true to an overriding interest in the formal developments of the avant-garde, and tempering his ideological motives accordingly. In this context, his passion for the pre-religious idea should be interpreted as much as a genuine enquiry into the creative origins of a modern expression as a contribution to the metaphysical meanderings of the era. And while it is important to remain critical of the black-and-white dramas of a millenarian consciousness, we have to credit Hartlaub's ability to recognise in them the lasting potential of a modern graphic art.

Reviewing his utopian phase from a sober distance, Hartlaub acknowledges the fundamentally '*unsachlich*' nature of such theories.⁶⁹ However, his subsequent works prove how deep-rooted was the private idealism that continued to exist alongside the pragmatic realism; while occupied with the *Neue Sachlichkeit* movement he continued to write about metaphysics and unexplained

phenomena, publishing a collection of essays with the title of *Kunst und Magie* in 1923, and in 1947 was to return to his favourite topic in *Graphik des Expressionismus*. Above all however, it is the utopian philosopher Ernst Bloch who, in his persistent optimism, epitomises the spirit of Hartlaub's early text, with its emphasis on the power of myth and the dawning of a new age. In his book *Weimar Germany*, Eric Weitz cites Bloch's reflection from 1931; that while, 'he might be the last dreamer of an old world, . . . he is also the first of a new one.'⁷⁰

¹ 'Bei der gegenwärtigen geistigen Lage ... wird also die Frage nach der Möglichkeit einer wahrhaft religiösen Kunst zur letzten dringendsten Frage an das Kulturgewissen überhaupt'. Gustav Hartlaub, *Kunst und Religion; ein Versuch über die Möglichkeit neuer religiösen Kunst* (Leipzig, 1919): 45. (This work is henceforth referred to as GH, 1919).

² George Grosz, 'On my recent Pictures'(1921), in Victor H. Miesel (ed.), *Voices of German Expressionism* (London, 2003): 185-8.

³ In his *Spätromische Kunstindustrie* (Vienna, 1901), Alois Riegl established his notion of 'Kunstwollen' (artistic impulse) in relation to a period previously perceived to have 'no style'. He credited the new energy in the art of the late Roman period to the turmoil caused by the tribal migrations and Barbarian invasions from the north. In a similar vein, Hartlaub sees an energy in Expressionist art stirred up by the 'avalanche' effect of the revolutionary social upheaval in the immediate aftermath of WWI. GH, 1919: 6.

⁴ Kasimir Edschmid (ed.), *Schöpferische Konfessionen*, vol. xiii, *Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit* (Berlin, 1920). Texts by these artists are reproduced in Miesel, 2003.

⁵ In the first full study of Expressionism, Paul Fechter revealed a particular enthusiasm for the works of Max Pechstein. Paul Fechter, *Der Expressionismus* (Munich, 1914). Rosa Schapire, a Hamburg art historian and important patron of the Brücke group, wrote an influential review of the post-war woodcuts of Karl Schmidt-Rottluff in which she observed how 'The most secret mysteries of the soul reveal themselves in black and white, in lines and planes with the stirring power of the confessions of the mystics when full of their God, they bear him witness'. See Rosa Schapire, 'Schmidt-Rottluff's Religious Woodcuts', in Rose-Carol Washton Long (ed.), *German Expressionism – Documents from the End of the Wilhelmine Empire to the Rise of National Socialism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993): 149-51.

⁶ Reinhold Heller (ed.), *Stark Impressions: Graphic Production in Germany, 1918-1933* (exh. cat) (Evanston Illinois, 1993): 110.

⁷ Ernst Bloch, *Geist der Utopie* (Munich and Leipzig, 1918); translated as *The Spirit of Utopia* by Anthony A. Nassar (Stanford, California, 2000).

⁸ 'Millenarian beliefs are symptoms of a type of cognitive dissonance in which normal links between perception and reality have broken down.' John Gray, *Black Mass: Apocalyptic Religion and the Death of Utopia* (London 2007): 8.

⁹ George Grosz in Miesel, 2003: 186.

¹⁰ Hermann Bahr, *Expressionismus* (Munich, 1916), cited in Washton Long, 1993: 89.

¹¹ See Ida K. Rigby, 'The Revival of Printmaking in Germany', in Stephanie Barron (ed.), *German Expressionist Prints and Drawings*; the Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Studies (Los Angeles and Munich, 1989). The same author is also the chief commentator on graphic arts and their political import in Rose-Carol Washton Long, 1993.

¹² Of particular interest here is Reisenfeld's PhD thesis, which explains the development of the modern woodcut, tracing influences from early German art and the Japanese tradition through the Jugendstil to the intense productivity of the Brücke group in pre-WWI Dresden: Robin Reisenfeld, *Cultural Identity and Artistic Practice: the revival of the German woodcut* (PhD thesis, U Chicago, 1993). In her catalogue to the significant collection of modern German graphic art at the University of Chicago, Reisenfeld provides further discussion of the subject,

with an emphasis on the burgeoning popularity of portfolio collecting and the new legitimacy afforded the print cycle, as well as the increasing significance of mass-reproduction and ideological influences. See Robin Reisenfeld, *The German Print Portfolio 1890-1930: Serials for a Private Sphere* (exh. cat.) (Chicago and London, 1993).

¹³ Wilhelm Worringer, *Formprobleme der Gotik* (Munich, 1912), translated by Herbert Read as *Form in Gothic* (London 1927). The edition cited here is from 1957. See further discussion of this work in text and notes, below.

¹⁴ The exhibition and its place in Hartlaub's career is documented in detail in Karoline Hille, *Spuren der Moderne: Die Mannheimer Kunsthalle von 1918 bis 1933* (Berlin, 1994): 38-42.

¹⁵ '... als gar nicht genug abgerückt werden kann von der fatalen Modespielerei, die gegenwärtig mit dem Begriff einer "neuen" religiösen Kunst getrieben wird'. Paul Westheim in Hans Kauders, 'Das Religiöse in der Kunst der Gegenwart', *Das Kunstblatt*, 1918: 180.

¹⁶ 'Die ganze Zerquältheit, die ganze Passion des Menschen in unserer Zeit wird auf den Christus abgeladen.', GH, 1919: 94.

¹⁷ GH, 1919: 83-5.

¹⁸ The central part of Hartlaub's discourse consists of a detailed appraisal of the Mannheim exhibition of 1918, many examples of which do not live up to the name of 'true religious art'. The quotations in this paragraph are taken from this section, in particular pp. 76 – 82. The stress on 'innerlicher Not' (inner need) is repeated throughout the text.

¹⁹ GH, 1919: 85-9.

²⁰ Hans Kauders in *Das Kunstblatt*, 1918: 181.

²¹ GH, 1919: 3.

²² Freud's analogy of society's need for religion to the necessity of obsessional neuroses in child development strikes a chord with the utopian attitude of Hartlaub's circle; in particular, his observation that religion 'comprises a system of wishful illusions together with a disavowal of reality, such as we find in an isolated form nowhere else but in amentia, in a state of blissful hallucinatory confusion'. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion (Die Zukunft einer Illusion)*, 1927), in James Strachey (ed.), *The Standard Edition*, vol. XXI (Vintage paperback, London 2001): 42-3.

²³ GH, 1919: 4.

²⁴ 'In aller sinnlichen Erscheinung ahnt der Expressionist ihre Beziehung auf ein verborgenes Jenseits, die schöpferische Imagination, die ihrem fleischlichen Dasein vorausging; er 'sieht' gleichsam der Nabelschnur, die sie immer noch mit ihrem vorkörperlichen Zustand, ihrem übersinnlichen Korrelat, verbindet', GH, 1919: 32.

²⁵ Kauders in *Das Kunstblatt*, 1918: 180-3.

²⁶ Although Hartlaub makes only passing reference to Worringer here, it is clear from his terminology throughout this passage that his own ideas on the heritage of Expressionist art owe much to the influential author's division of artistic styles into the two categories of 'Abstraction' and 'Empathy', initially established in his 1908 treatise. See Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraktion und Einfühlung* (Munich, 1908), translated by Michael Bullock as *Abstraction and Empathy* (London and New York, 1953).

²⁷ 'Die so zustandegekommene Gestaltung in ihren typischen Eigenschaften des 'kristallinen', der Flächen- und Blockgebundenheit, der symmetrischen Stilisierung usw. ist die gegebene Form, welche sich gleichsam als Wirkung, Abdruck jenes Geistigen in das Sichtbare darstellt.' And he goes on to compare the idealistic 'real life' forms of Grecian art to the reverse Egyptian model, whereby an image must in effect be 'killed'; ie., reduced to the static and cubic forms expressive of a pre-existing 'mineral' lifelessness, or 'images of the rigid origins of the cosmos'. See GH, 1919: 33. Ernst Bloch is also affected by the mineral idea, calling these ancient models 'the art of a granite and astral faith'. Bloch, 2000: 21.

²⁸ 'Bei den einzelnen ikonischen Typen der hieratischen Kunst ... handelt es sich um ursprüngliche Schauungen innerhalb jener auf die Sinnenwelt herabwirkenden übersinnlichen Sphäre selbst, der die primitive Mensch mit dem Gefühl zu erleben, gleichsam zu tasten glaubt'. GH, 1919: 34.

²⁹ Erin Hogan and Reinhold Heller, 'The New Religion, the New Humanity' in R. Heller (ed.), *Stark Impressions*, 1993: 116-7.

³⁰ Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the age of mechanical reproduction', trans. Harry Zorn in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations* (London, 1999); original essay published as 'Das

Kunstwerk im Zeitalter der mechanischen Reproduktion' in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, V, 1, 1936.

³¹ GH, 1919: 89.

³² See 'Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious' in Anthony Storr (ed.), *The Essential Jung* (London, 1995): 36-61.

³³ 'Mythos in seiner Urform ist Erinnerung, "Anamnese" in Bildern', GH, 1919: 4. In an earlier article he explains the 'primitive' appearance of modern art in these same terms, namely as an involuntary impulse triggered by 'the loosening of long-suppressed layers of an ancient consciousness'. See 'Die Kunst und die neue Gnosis', *Das Kunstblatt*, 1917: 173.

³⁴ J P Hodin, *Kokoschka, Word and Vision*, (London: British Museum, 1967): 8.

³⁵ Gustav Hartlaub, *Die Graphik des Expressionismus* (Stuttgart, 1947): 11.

³⁶ For a detailed history of these developments see Reisenfeld, 1993.

³⁷ Hans Goltz, *Der Expressionistische Holzschnitt* (exh. cat.) (Munich, 1918).

³⁸ 'Diese treibende Kraft durfte nichts anderes sein als der Wille zur monumentalen Bildgestaltung, der zu gleicher Zeit ein ganzes junges Künstlergeschlecht ungestüm erfasst hat', Paul Westheim, 'Holzschnitt und Monumentalkunst' in *Das Kunstblatt*, 1918: 33-51.

³⁹ See Ernst Bloch, 2000: 32-3.

⁴⁰ Max Beckmann, 'Creative Credo' (1920), in Miesel, 2003: 107-9.

⁴¹ Eberhard Roters, 'Line as Weapon', in *Prints and Drawings of the Weimar Republic* (exh. cat.) (Stuttgart, 1987).

⁴² Max Pechstein, 'Creative Credo' (1920), in Miesel, 2003: 180-1.

⁴³ While undoubtedly benefiting from the theosophists' enlightening dissemination of the Buddhist tradition, Hartlaub describes Steiner as a prophet of those who 'seek to gain valuable things on the cheap'. He is prepared to credit the philosopher with the necessary pre-religious roots, but warns that his teaching hovers on the edge of 'Charlatanerie'. More convincing for Hartlaub are the ideas of Erich Hammacher, Martin Buber, and the Russian philosopher W. Ssolowjef. See the appendix on contemporary thought: GH, 1919: 104-8.

⁴⁴ GH, 'die Kunst und die neue Gnosis', in *Das Kunstblatt*, 1917: 166-79.

⁴⁵ Hartlaub's thoughts on the emancipation of the Gothic spirit prove to be a close interpretation of Worringer's idea of the dualist worldview, which, during the Gothic period, 'resolves itself into a confused mania of ecstasy, a convulsive yearning to be merged into a super-sensuous rapture, into a pathos, the specific essence of which is a lack of all measure'. Worringer, 1957: 70-9.

⁴⁶ He writes, for instance, of 'The ancient need of the German people for metaphysics ...' having survived the enlightenment unscathed. Interestingly, we also see in Fechter's idea of Expressionism as 'a destiny', in which 'the stream is more valuable than the individual wave', the seeds of Hartlaub's theory of a 'mystical communism' pervading the new religious art. Paul Fechter, 1914, cited in Rose-Carol Washton Long, 1993: pp. 81-4.

⁴⁷ Chapter xxi of *Form in Gothic* explores the new personal perspective of religious experience during the Gothic period. See Worringer, 1957: 173-7.

⁴⁸ He imagines the 'torpid peasants' with their earthly burden: '... die wissen doch, dass sie ihren Leib wie einen schweren Sack beständig Sternenwerts tragen müssen'. GH, 1919: 101.

⁴⁹ The 'Exzentrisch-Groteske', is for Hartlaub an expression of the way in which the 'terrible confusion of our times presents itself to those who strive for a mystical inwardness'. See GH, 1919: 91.

⁵⁰ GH, 1919: 101.

⁵¹ The German is a 'siderisches Geburt'. See *ibid.*

⁵² See Karoline Hille, 1993: 58-61.

⁵³ 'Später in der Gotik strebt die belebter gewordene Form vollends sich in den Geist-Raum aufzulösen, will nicht von ihm begrenzt, sondern von ihm entkörper, zugespitzt, durchlocht werden'. GH, 1919: 37.

⁵⁴ Expanding on the same idea of Hartlaub's about the development from Egyptian 'block' forms to the Gothic line, Bloch remarks that 'The Gothic, in contrast, comprehended life, is the spirit of the resurrection...'. And in a further qualification that mirrors Worringer's attitude, he continues: 'Not the brightly and evenly articulated Greek line, but the essentially adventurous, farsighted, functional Gothic line alone is complete life ...'. Ernst Bloch, 2000: 24.

⁵⁵ Ernst Bloch, 2000: 24-5.

⁵⁶ Magdalena Bushart, *Der Geist der Gotik und die Expressionistische Kunst – Kunstgeschichte und Kunsttheorie 1911-1925*, Munich 1990.

⁵⁷ Highlighting Hartlaub's discussion of the religious elements of 'passion' and 'ecstasy' in his exhibited works, Bushart remarks how these two terms became 'paradigms for the attempt to create an image of the metaphysical' ('*sie wurden zu Paradigmen für den Versuch, Übersinnliches im Bild zu gestalten*'). Bushart, 1990: 164.

⁵⁸ The author identifies the occasion of the 1912 Sonderbund Exhibition in Cologne as the moment at which this nationalist impulse came to the fore. Paradoxically, she writes, it was the international nature of the artworks on display which prompted a recommendation from the author of the Exhibition catalogue, that a comparison with the works of the early Cologne school on show in the city's Walraf-Richartz-Museum would persuade the modern visitor how great were the connections between " 'the newest style of painting and this flowering of medieval art' ". Richard Reiche, cited in Bushart, 1990: 101.

⁵⁹ See the appendix, '*zum Gegenstandsproblem*', GH, 1919: 109-12.

⁶⁰ Max Beckmann, 'Creative Credo', 1920, in Miesel, 2003.

⁶¹ GH, 1919: 4.

⁶² GH, 1919: Excurs 1.

⁶³ For a discussion of the critical reaction to Expressionist utopianism, see David Elliott, 'Expressionism: a health warning' in *Expressionism Reassessed*, Shulamith Behr & David Fanning (eds), (Manchester 1993): 40-9.

⁶⁴ '... der Aufruf der grossen schöpferischen Ichpersönlichkeit'; capturing thus the central role of the self in Expressionism's debt to Nietzsche. GH, 1919: 15.

⁶⁵ 'Ich werde glauben', being Hartlaub's assessment of the essential religiosity of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. See GH, 1919: 104.

⁶⁶ "Also lautet spat bis früh / Unser seelisches Menü": Franz Werfel, *Spiegelmensch* (Munich, 1920), cited in Bushart, 1990: 135.

⁶⁷ C G Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (1933), from an extract in Jarolsav Pelikan (ed.), *The World Treasury of Modern Religious Thought* (London, 1990).

⁶⁸ George Grosz in Miesel, 2003, p. 187. Karoline Hille gives a convincing account of Hartlaub's acknowledgement of the necessity for a new realism, in spite of his regret at the demise of the spiritual cause. See in particular Hille, 1993: 18.

⁶⁹ Discussing in 1931 his earlier involvement in the 'Sternwarte' group: cited in *ibid*, 1993: 60.

⁷⁰ Eric D. Weitz, *Weimar Germany – Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, 2007): 251.

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The Return of Religion and Other Myths: The Art of Iconoclasm

Basis voor Actuele Kunst, Utrecht, 30 November 2008 – 1 March 2009

God is back from the dead. At least, 'He' is back as a popular subject in contemporary art, according to *The Return of Religion and Other Myths*. This multifaceted program began as an attempt to understand the current assumed relationship between the apparent renewal of interest in religion and contemporary art. *The Return of Religion and Other Myths* culminated in an exhibition, *The Art of Iconoclasm*, and a successful series of lectures entitled *On Post-Secularism*.

During the Renaissance, art often served as a tool for religion, a means of propaganda for the Catholic Church. With the dawn of the Enlightenment era and the increasing success of scientific thought, however, religion lost its dominating place in Western culture and has never really found its way back to the heights of popularity or infamy that it once enjoyed. This curious history with its abrupt, post-Renaissance end is referenced by the exhibition's prints of the religious and politically-inspired funerary *Monument of Pope Julius II* and its sculpture of *Moses* by Michelangelo Buonarroti. Complementing these prints are partially disembodied plaster-cast copies of classical figures like that of the crouching Venus, crumbling reminders of the past.

The displacement of religion in post-Renaissance thought seems to be in the midst of a massive correction, though. The world-shaking events that took place on 9/11 seem to harbour most of the responsibility for the sudden influx of interest in religion (particularly that of the fundamentalist nature) in not only the political sphere, but in contemporary media as well. Religion has, Basis voor Actuele Kunst (BAK) claims, 'returned on the scene as a politicized media phenomenon creating controversies around righteous beliefs and their images.'¹ However, the ironic heart of this exhibition is that controversial art is actually born out of such spirits of iconoclasm.

Natascha Sadr Haghighian's installation, *Empire of the Senseless Part I*, proves that the writing is on the wall as it explores these notions of contemporary iconoclasm. As you enter a dark corridor and make your way toward the far end, the space gradually lights up thanks to motion sensors, only to fade back into blackness the further down the corridor you walk. The brief appearance of the lights causes a fluorescent block of text scrawled across the far wall to appear in the dark, revealing a quote from Kathy Acker's novel, *Empire of the Senseless*, part of which reads: 'We should use force to fight representations which are idols, idolized images...all the representations which exist for purposes other than enjoyment'. The quote finishes with a strange, yet tantalising line, now barely readable as the letters have faded back into their dark surroundings: "Decomposing flesh moves me the most," the young whore said. "Give me hell." The viewer's involvement with this piece, via the act of reading, is almost incriminating. Rather than accepting the written words as a 'sacred truth', the act of reading serves as more of a struggle, with the viewer attempting to understand the strange, condemning words as they slowly emerge out of the nightmarishly dark depths of the corridor just before they are reclaimed by the surrounding blackness.

Perhaps the most impressive and – dare it be said – playful aspect of the *Iconoclasm* exhibition was the *Greenwich Degree Zero* project, a mixed media installation by Rod Dickinson and Tom McCarthy. This vast reading room display takes anarchy to new extremes by concocting an alternate ending for a historically-failed terrorist attack against the Royal Observatory in Greenwich on 15 February 1894. Only, in Dickinson and McCarthy's 'corrected' history, the terrorist – a police informer – actually succeeded in his bombing of the Observatory. The fantastical exhibition is supported by doctored documents – newspaper clippings, letters, police reports – detailing the events of the bombing and is accompanied by a suggestive, early-cinema-style film. As you watch flames consume the Observatory, with the stacks of smoke climbing high into the sky, the modern viewer cannot help but muse over the almost-familiar scene, obviously reminding us of the smoking images of the Twin Towers on 9/11.

Also harkening back to the events of September 2001 is an enlarged microfilm of the front page of the *New York Times* from the morning of the 11th, courtesy of Gert Jan Kocken. Needless to say, the events of that morning rendered the contents of the cover irrelevant, but it is curious to note that the cover bears an article on the high-jacking of a plane thirty years prior by a 'black power revolutionary'. Also featured on the cover is an article called 'Violence in the East', which provides the socio-political background to the bombings that would occur the very morning of its publication. It is almost as though the microfilm can be seen as the ultimate critique of our inability to learn from the past, to learn to not let history repeat itself.

Another contemporary media-based piece was Willem Oorebeek's *The Last Emperor of Wall Street*, a wool wall tapestry done after a newspaper-clipping portrait of Alan Greenspan, former chief of the US Federal Reserve. It is almost as if the image is meant to 'put a face' on the impersonal global economy, thus personalising the image and almost deifying the man in the portrait even as he is lost in the surrounding swirl of text, confusing word and image into a singular woven pattern.

Issues of economy and capitalism, as seen in the Greenspan portrait, are continued in Haim Steinbach's commodity art piece, *Untitled (Malevich Tea Set, Hallmark Ghosts)*; it is an installation of dainty porcelain ghosts, childish keepsakes from Hallmark. More evidently, though, Marx's *Capital* is explicitly quoted on Carl Andre's cover of *Art-Rite*, 1976/77. The following quotation, 'The life process of society, which is based on the process of material production, does not strip off its mystical veil until it is treated as production by freely assembled men and women, and is consciously regulated by them in accordance with a settled plan' is hand-written on the cover in block capital letters on a square-grid without any punctuation. This piece harkens back to Haghighian's *Empire of the Senseless* installation. Deciphering the cover is tedious as one's eyes must adjust to the harsh sight of the stark, block letters. The act of reading once again invests and involves the reader as he or she realises that the 'mystical veil' Marx refers to is that of religion.

The Art of Iconoclasm encapsulates the present tension between the controversial position of religion in contemporary media and politics. From its re-imagining of a failed act of terrorism to its almost deific image of the global economy's most recognisable figure, the exhibition provides a thoughtful retrospective of how recent events have culminated in new ways of thinking about religion and the stripping away of its 'mystical veil'.

Jenna Actaboski
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A Critical Reader entitled *The Return of Religion and Other Myths: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art* will be published in 2009. This reader, the third in BAK's series, will present newly commissioned and anthologized texts by artists, theorists, writers, and social scientists whose contributions consider the key topics that emerge in the exhibition *The Art of Iconoclasm* and the discourse series *On Post-Secularism*.

¹Sven Lütticken, 'The Art of Iconoclasm', in *The Return of Religion and Other Myths Handbook*. (Utrecht: BAK, 2008): 28.

Gerhard Richter Portraits

National Portrait Gallery, London, 26 February – 31 May, 2009

In thinking about and reviewing the recent exhibition of Gerhard Richter's paintings – his *portraits*, a term that this review will engage with – at the National Portrait Gallery in London, it seems an interesting prospect to begin with the final work displayed in the show. The work in question is a mirror, hung on the wall next to his paintings, which was specifically made by the artist for this exhibition. On the basis of the catalogue's numerical ordering, it is intended as the final artwork in the exhibition, although its presence is apparent – insofar as the mirror is placed at the end of the main corridor, and that most of the exhibition rooms run alongside that corridor – once one has passed through the first room of paintings. To that extent, and insofar as the mirrored surface is physically very different from the paintings that are the exhibition's subject matter, it is tempting to take the mirror as a commentary of some kind upon the theme of this exhibition. What does the mirror show (or tell) us? Well, the first answer would be: the mirror seemingly *shows us*. Nothing could be simpler, really; mirror and portraiture as logically entwined with each other. Portraiture is a form of mirroring, continuous with the external form of the self.

Some sense or metaphor of mirroring, of reflection, has a very long history in western culture that should perhaps prevent us from taking Richter's mirror as merely a mirror. And within an exhibition of portraiture, we might see the mirror situated here as a somewhat contrived conclusion to the exhibition unless it is understood within this history and logic of mirroring. I cannot explore this history here, but it does seem worthwhile to return to a choice passage from Plato's *Republic*, for that passage links art and mirroring together. The wider argument of Plato's critique of art is well known: art is a mere copy of reality, which in itself is a copy of a higher world of 'forms' or 'ideas' that is best approached through the medium of philosophical discourse. In order to clarify his point, Plato has Socrates make a striking metaphor:

Socrates: . . . [imagine a] craftsman [that] is able to make, not only all kinds of furniture, but all plants that grow from the earth, all animals (including myself), the earth itself, the heavens, the gods, all the things in the heavens and in Hades beneath the surface.

Glaucou: *He'd be amazingly clever!*

. . .

Socrates: It isn't hard: You could do it quickly and in lots of places, especially if you were willing to carry a mirror with you, for that's the quickest way of all. With it you can quickly make the sun, the things in the heavens, the earth, yourself, the other animals, manufactured items, plants, everything else mentioned just now.

Glaucou: Yes, I could make them appear, but I couldn't make the things themselves, as they truly are.

Socrates: Well put! You've extracted the point that's crucial to the argument. I suppose that the painter too belongs to this class of makers, doesn't he?

Glaucou: Of course.¹

Art is reduced to mirroring, not in its mode of production (reflecting objects and making objects are very different processes) but in its logical structure. Art is essentially, for Plato and much of the tradition that follows in his wake, a form of *mimesis*, imitation, or copying. And yet there is a split within this history of mirrors. For if for Plato art-as-imitation, or art-as-mirroring, comes to represent art's failure as philosophy, than for much of the history of philosophy, mirroring, self-reflexivity, or reflection would come to function as the ground and highest endeavour for philosophical and intellectual thought.

Richter's mirror seems to participate in this history and makes a further suggestion: in being both a kind of reflection upon this history and commentary upon the exhibition, it calls attention to the photographic qualities of the paintings. To be sure, these qualities are more or less obvious to anyone that sees this portion of Richter's heterogeneous oeuvre (although it's worth noting that when the paintings are experienced at first hand they appear significantly more painterly than when found reproduced in books or journals; it's as if

photographic reproduction enhances or even completes Richter's stated intention of making photographs through the means of painting), but what is recalled to attention is the relationship between photography and mirroring. When the Daguerreotype was introduced to the public, it was common to explain the principle of this new invention by relating it to mirrors. As Jules Janin wrote in 1839: 'imagine that the mirror has retained the imprint of every object it reflects, then you will have a more complete idea of the Daguerreotype'.² Janin's metaphor was reproduced – mirrored, perhaps – in much of the critical discourse surrounding photography as if photography brought to a natural conclusion the notion of mirroring operative throughout history.

It might be suggested, then, that this exhibition stages a correlation between the terms 'portraiture', 'photography' and 'mirroring' – and that this staging perhaps intends to show these three terms as necessarily rather than merely contingently correlated; and, ultimately, this correlation is the basis of this particular facet of Richter's diverse oeuvre. But how far are we to buy this?

The route from the National Portrait Gallery's ticket desk to the exhibition entrance implicitly suggests – in hindsight – that we are going to have problems fully accepting this correlation as being definitive of Richter. As we make our way to the exhibition entrance, the walls are lined with contemporary portraits of figures – celebrities, even – that we might recognise from television or other media sources. In a sense, these portraits, comprised of photographs and paintings, offer something like an object lesson in what counts as portraiture in today's world. The fact that the sitters are reasonably well-known through the intervention of media society perhaps argues for a mutual interrelation between portraiture and modern celebrity status which might be taken as an argument or definition for contemporary portraiture: the sitters are recognisable because well-known, they have been painted because they are well-known, and the act of painting them confirms them as celebrities or as being well-known. Portraiture is not – perhaps cannot be – anonymous, it seems; and this possibly holds true even when the depicted sitter is not recognised as a specific figure. It is enough, perhaps, to say the act of portraiture relies upon its sitter having already some kind of value or merit which is then intended to be captured in

and then confirmed by the portrait itself. Arguably, it's in this respect that portraiture fundamentally differs, on the one hand, from the countless scores of human figures that we find in art, and, on the other, from the even more countless images of friends and family in domestic photography.

Seeing the route from ticket desk to entrance as a discussion of what constitutes portraiture is helpful for imagining the stakes in an exhibition of Richter's works as portraits. It forces the question of whether and by what justice we can take certain painted images by Richter as portraits; and if we cannot, then why not? At the risk of putting the claim too strongly, my own response to this question is that whatever these images are, they are largely *not* portraits. These works exist, to be sure, in a visual and conceptual adjacency to portraiture, but this adjacency has the character of a determinate negation which effectively goes some distance to securing the works' self-identity as non-portraits. Portraiture is the critical counterpoint to – rather than definition of or oppositional artistic practice to – these works by Richter. All this, however, would require some analysis of the works themselves to try and bring out their non-portraiture qualities.

Take, for example, an early Richter painting displayed in the first room, done in grey, black, and white colours, which depicts a man in dark trousers and white shirt. His sleeves are rolled-up and he is handing out fliers or leaflets. It isn't altogether easy to determine who this man is. He resembles an office worker of some sort, wearing the typical office attire worn by billions the world over – but from what decade? Post-war, certainly, but 1950s or 1960s? Nothing on the leaflets gives us a clue as to the identity of the man; those leaflets held in both hands – in readiness to be given to passer-bys – are blank, completely devoid of text; we cannot know if they are leaflets made for protest or for promotion. The street and road in the background situates him within urban space, but does nothing to precisely specify the location. Importantly, the image is deliberately blurred in such a way that makes the limbs and clothes appear somewhat blocky. The man's head almost oscillates between mimetic resemblance and near abstraction; his eyes a dark painted line; his chin and the area between nose and neck seems oddly shaped, almost receding into the

neck. Perhaps instinctively, we know or feel that this painting is based upon a photograph, but the painting almost refuses to become a photograph insofar as its blurring and abstractions attest to the materiality of paint rather than to the replication of camera shake.³ And, finally, who is this man? He is as anonymous as the leaflets he is holding out for people to take (although nobody is to be seen); it's hard to guess his age. Is he performing his job or taking part in a voluntary activity? Again, there are no clues offered by Richter that help us resolve these pictorial enigmas.



Fig. 1: Gerhard Richter, *Oswald*, 1964, oil on canvas, 130 x 110cm.
Hamburger Kunsthalle. Image courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London

It isn't so much the case that this painting fails or refuses to be a portrait because the image conveys an inadequate amount of information. Rather, it fails or refuses to do so because the depicted individual figure here lacks a certain particularity that would engineer the transition from being a picture of a man to becoming an actual portrait of somebody specific. The painted figure isn't completely anonymous, however; the painting is called *Oswald* and was completed in 1964 (Fig. 1). Depicted is Lee Harvey Oswald, the notorious

assassin of President Kennedy, handing out leaflets supporting Castro's Marxist revolution in Cuba. The image, although manifesting Richter's distinct style, is not drawn from the artist's imagination. Rather, it's based upon a 1963 photograph published in a newspaper. Unlike the newspaper photograph, which sought to 'prove' the accused assassin's communist allegiances and thereby 'confirm' Oswald as JFK's likely murderer, Richter's picture actually produces an absence of information, making the picture ambiguous not only in terms of who it represents but also why it represents that person. In learning that the painting depicts Oswald, moreover, the viewer is left unsure how to react to the image offered. Perhaps, it might be said with good reason that the original photograph deliberately served in the media as a 'portrait' of Oswald; it's the portrait status of the original photograph that Richter's painting seems determined to displace. The most notorious American assassin of the early 1960s becomes a figure that is utterly impersonal.



Fig. 2: Gerhard Richter, *Frau mit Schirm*, 1964, oil on canvas, 160 x 95cm.
Daros Collection, Switzerland. Image courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

Nonetheless, *Oswald*, through its title, does provide a minimal informational ground that facilitates the viewer's identification of this painted figure as Lee Harvey Oswald. Also supporting this information is the fact that the photograph Richter bases his painting upon is fairly well known. In 1964, the year Richter painted this picture, there was a good chance that many viewers would have recognised the depicted figure even without the aid of a title. Another oil painting of 1964, *Frau mit Schirm* (Woman with Umbrella) (Fig. 2), replicates the same format as *Oswald* by using a vertical white band that runs down the left-hand side of the painting. To the right of that stripe is a picture of a woman, holding an umbrella in her left hand, set against a dark background.⁴ With her right hand she covers her mouth, hiding a yawn, or a smile, or a grimace – we don't know what she is hiding. Her face – which we can only see part of – isn't strongly defined by Richter's brush and turns away from the viewer; it isn't easy to recognise who is depicted here. The name of the painting merely describes what the picture depicts: a woman with an umbrella. She could be almost anybody. In fact, the anonymous woman is Jacqueline Kennedy, wife of the assassinated president, and she is shown here just hours after her husband's death. The hand she holds to her mouth covers not a yawn or smile, but is an expression of grief or revulsion. Not only is Richter's picture vastly different to the numerous photographic portraits of the First Lady that present her looking elegant, enjoying time with the children, or accompanying her husband, but it is also a striking counterpoint to the silkscreen prints made by Andy Warhol that depict her mourning. Indeed, little else asserts the considerable distance (and proximity) separating (and joining) the artistic practices of Richter and Warhol than the difference between their respective images of Jacqueline Kennedy. It's revealing that in Warhol's work Jacqueline is referred to as 'Jackie', whereas Richter's painting simply denotes her as a 'woman'. The minimal informational ground present in *Oswald* has narrowed in *Frau mit Schirm*: The title reveals nothing, and while the original photograph of Oswald is one that is famous and, in a sense, one that everybody wants to see insofar as it 'identifies' Oswald and 'confirms' his motivations for wishing to kill the American President, the original photograph of Jacqueline deeply upset is one that perhaps the public doesn't want to see insofar as it brings a stark end to the perception of Jacqueline as

glamorous First Lady; the photograph goes against the media identity fashioned for her, while Oswald's photograph intentionally fashions his media identity.

I have focused upon these two paintings because, insofar as they present two figures that are famous, their refusal to be portraits is especially revealing of the difficulty the rest of the exhibition will have in its mission to be an exhibition of portraits painted by Richter. These two paintings replicate the gap between celebrity and anonymity, but also create a transition from the former to the latter. The next room, 'Devotional Pictures', offers a different kind of refusal of portraiture. Taken from snapshots of Richter's family and friends, these paintings, due to their personal or family-orientated nature, begin and end at the level of anonymity. Simply rather than artfully composed (the original photographs weren't taken by Richter), these pictures feel like they are of people instead of people *in particular*. Adding names – Horst, Marianne, Renate – to the faces featured in these paintings barely makes them less anonymous to the viewer. The blurring, here more photographic than painterly, reduces and veils identifiable facial and bodily details. Once again, there's little that can be gleaned from these paintings; the distinctiveness of an individual personality that conventional portraits often try to evoke seems significantly to be absent in these works. It isn't so much because these figures are anonymous or unknown to the viewer that the paintings don't quite function as portraits; instead, it seems to me that these works don't function as portraits because the original photos weren't intended to do so, and Richter's blurring, as seen in *Renate und Marianne* (1964) or *Horst mit Hund* (*Horst with Dog*; 1965), pushes this non-portraiture quality further by virtually effacing the figures depicted. Arguably, the original photographs are better comprehended as documenting moments of family life rather than as trying to create portraits of family members. To be sure, family photography in some measure derives from the history and conventions of portraiture, but it is not identical with that history or those conventions. In a sense, Richter's paintings continually locate and test an important distance between portraiture and other forms of depicting (whether artistically or not) the human figure.



Fig. 3: Gerhard Richter, *Betty*, 1988, oil on canvas, 102.2 x 72.4 cm. Saint Louis Art Museum, Funds given by Mr. and Mrs. R. Crosby Kemper Jr. through the Crosby Kemper Foundations, The Arthur and Helen Baer Charitable Foundation, Mr. and Mrs. Van-Lear Black III, Anabeth Calkins and John Weil, Mr. and Mrs. Gary Wolff, the Honourable and Mrs. Thomas F. Eagleton; Museum Purchase, Dr. and Mrs. Harold J. Joseph, and Mrs. Edward Mallinckrodt, by exchange. Image courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

The non-portraiture stakes of Richter's oeuvre are most perspicuous in an oil painting of his daughter that has long fascinated and haunted me: namely, *Betty* (1988) (Fig. 3). What the picture shows is a young girl – the artist's daughter – whose head is turned away from the beholder and looks into a dark monochromatic void. Her face is completely invisible; there will be no meeting of gazes (*IG*, from 1993, shows Richter's second wife, Isa Gentzken, and is also notable for turning away from the beholder). The contours of the girl's head and torso are, in contradistinction to the images I have previously mentioned, photographically sharp; the slight blur or fuzziness it does have reproduces the camera lens's natural depth of field and doesn't serve to distort the image. To

my mind, her turned-away face calls attention to the distinct *absence of a mirror*. Turned-away heads in portraits are not unusual in art history, but more often than not, the turning away of the head, which might appear as a refusal of portraiture, is often recuperated by the placement of a mirror in the painting in order to reflect – and make unconcealed – the depicted figure's face. Along these lines we might particularly think of *The Rokeby Venus* (c. 1647-1651) by Velázquez in the National Gallery in London, or, in a somewhat different way, *Las Meninas* (Prado, Madrid; 1656) by the same artist. But we might also think – admittedly these examples are quite different to each other – *The Arnolfini Portrait* (National Gallery, London; 1434) by Jan van Eyck; Claude Cahun's and Marcel Moore's photograph, *Untitled (Cahun and Mirror Image)*, from 1928; *Portrait in a Mirror* (1937) by Raoul Ubac; Manet's 1882 *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*; *Picture for Women* (1979) by Jeff Wall. The list obviously can be extended, but in its limited current form it hopefully does enough to suggest a correspondence between portraiture and mirroring, perhaps even an argument that portraiture is essentially a form of mirroring. If that is the case, then we might see the presence of mirrors in these works as performing a self-reflexive function, indicating to or simply reminding the beholder that portraiture mirrors a subjectivity which, on a Lacanian psychoanalytic account, is itself derived from a prior instance of mirroring – the famous 'Mirror Stage' of infant development.

I am suggesting, then, that the palpable absence of a mirror in *Betty* thematises Richter's intention of not producing portraits. But the painting does something else that betokens its status as a non-portrait. Interestingly, '*Betty*' names not only a 1988 painting but also an earlier painting of 1977 depicting the artist's daughter. The 1977 painting, horizontally orientated, contrasts strikingly with the 1988 painting as the sitter's pale and almost luminous face gazes upwards from the pictorial surface. Horizontal and vertical orientation, head turned-away and head facing us – the two paintings taken together read as offering more than one view of a single person, perhaps even as offering a more complete, multi-perspectival, basis for a portrait. But what is especially noteworthy of the 1988 *Betty* is that the girl depicted is seemingly no older than her earlier representation. With eleven years separating the two paintings, there is little or even no discernable temporal difference between the two depictions. In terms

of 'portraiture' this is curious insofar as generally the sitter's visage and personality is caught at a particular moment in their lives. Like Albrecht Dürer's epoch-marking 1500 *Self-Portrait*, most portraits claim a distinct temporal-historical moment – this is what so-and-so looked like *at that time* – with the veracity of that moment being 'guaranteed' by having the artist seated before his subject and trying to catch *that sitter* and *that time*; photography potentially completes portraiture, it might be said, by finally legitimising the desired 'here and now' once promised by portraiture.⁵ The 1988 *Betty* is based upon a photograph of his daughter taken in 1977. But the confluence of 1977/1988 is deeply interesting for another reason. For the 1988 *Betty* is exactly contemporary with a controversial 1988 series of paintings depicting the Baader-Meinhoff group – controversial because part of the series portrays members of that group dead after their apparent suicide whilst in prison; that series is collectively entitled *Oktober 18, 1977*. Is it much too much to say that *Betty*, through its temporal displacement of 1977 and 1988, is also a displacement of *Oktober 19, 1977*? That the void she looks into deliberately echoes the dark background spaces that occupy several of the Baader-Meinhoff paintings? Are we to apprehend Betty's turned-away face, looking into the dark void, as a kind of inversion of one image in particular in the *18 Oktober, 1977* series, namely *Jugendbildnis (Youth Portrait)*, which depicts a young woman looking out toward the beholder, her face emerging from a dark enveloping void? If any of these questions form an argument, then we might conclude that *Betty* not only disrupts its portraiture status by breaking from the traditional conventions of portraiture but also by existing in a displaced relationship with another time (1977) and other people (the Baader-Meinhof group). As the *Oktober 18, 1977* series is not physically present in this exhibition, it is difficult to make any connection between that series and *Betty* much more than speculative. But it does seem to me that we can argue, to say the least, that Betty turns away not so much from the beholder's *presence* as from the beholder's *present*. There is a complex fusion of (temporal) horizons here in which two historical moments meet each other and merge – and yet also fail or refuse to meet each other and therefore do not merge. 'Here-and-now-ness' breaks up into different 'heres' and numerous 'nows'.

But all this is not to claim that there are no portraits in this exhibition. One room in particular answers well to the concept of portraiture. The room in question is titled 'Private Images', and comprises of portraits of figures from the German art world. We have here a painting of Alfred Schmela, an art dealer responsible for Richter's first one-man show in Düsseldorf in September 1964; of Arnold Bode, the influential curator of the first four *Documenta* shows; and of Willy Schniewind, an early collector of Richter's work. Each of these three paintings are from 1964. Alongside these collectors and dealers, there are also paintings of artist colleagues of Richter: Brigid Polk (1971), Paul Wunderlich (1967), and Gilbert and George (1975). In marked contrast to many of the other paintings in this show, the titles of these works point without mediation to their original referents, thereby removing much of the ambiguity apparent throughout Richter's oeuvre. These works are significantly different from the paintings exhibited; their portrait-status is never in doubt, and, because of this, these paintings cast doubt on our ability to designate the works contained in the other room as portraits. Oddly enough, however, the works in this room are for me the weakest in the show. Their lack of ambiguity almost transforms them into mere virtuoso displays of photo-painting.

Can we read any of this back onto the mirror that began this review? The paintings I have discussed maintain a distance or mediation that disrupts the identity between sitter (or referent – clearly, few of Richter's subjects can be considered 'sitters') and portrait. Lacking obvious cues that help to identify a given figure as a particular sitter/referent, distance also opens between figure and beholder which thus renders difficult any dialogical transaction between the two. And thirdly, yet another mediating distance is produced between photography and painting; Richter's intention to make photographs through paintings (or, more simply, non-photographic objects) simultaneously displaces both photography and painting. Each painting, insofar as it reproduces a pre-existing photograph, might be said to internalise the mirror analogically ascribed to the Daguerreotype without directly announcing it. Displacement is the cornerstone of Richter's oeuvre, and it can be argued that his *Mirror* is best understood not as a surface reflecting the beholder, thereby producing automatic portraits, but as an agent of displacement. The mirror's power is not

duplication but production – hence Plato’s fear of the mimetic qualities of the mirror, for the mirror installs or produces something new or different rather than merely reflect a pregiven configuration. Mimesis is less an imitation of something than a marking of the distance between semblance and reality, copy and model.

Along these lines, the obvious presence of the final work, the mirror, and especially the fact that it’s perceivable from near the start of the exhibition, begins to make sense. I asked earlier what the mirror shows, and responded that the mirror shows us. Indeed it does; but it does so by showing us at a remove or *distance* from the mirror. Looking at our reflection, we barely note the distance between ourselves and the mirrored surface. More importantly, however, we barely note that this distance is, in truth, *doubled*; the distance between ourselves and our mirrored image is itself mirrored upon the flat reflective surface. Seen close to, this doubled distance is perhaps not recognised as of immediate consequence; seen from further away – from the end of the gallery corridor – the distance between ourselves and our reflection becomes significantly greater. Here is, arguably, an instructive parable on the distinction between conventional portraiture and these artworks by Richter. In portraiture, the distance is simply between sitter and artist, which replicates itself as the distance between the surface of the canvas and depicted subject. Through the intervention of the camera and mirror, or the camera as mirror, Richter doubles the distance proper to the artistic enterprise of portraiture, thereby fundamentally distancing his artworks from this enterprise. And in doing so, the Albertian window often paradigmatic of representational painting hardens into the reflective opaque surface of the mirror. What do we see in the mirror? Us, but evidently twice as far away. Our reflections operate less as markers of selfhood than as distanced abstractions.

In this review I have questioned the extent to which the National Portrait Gallery can reasonably consider itself to be displaying an exhibition of portraits painted by Richter. Although I have sharply disagreed with this endeavour, such disagreement does not mean that I believe this is a bad exhibition. Seeing these numerous paintings brought together is a marvellous sight; the works

hung here do have a stylistic and conceptual coherence that effortlessly brings them together, and Richter has consistently produced work that makes him one of the finest painters living today. In many respects, while I don't think this is the best space for these paintings – somehow the lighting in the gallery doesn't feel quite appropriate to the works, and the rooms, separated by false walls, that make up the exhibition have a somewhat dingy feel to them – this is ultimately an exhibition of very high quality paintings. Perhaps in the final analysis these paintings can be comprehended as portraits, although of a peculiar type; but such comprehension requires a greater depth of curatorial and critical insight than is proffered here.⁶ The most fundamental error this exhibition makes to my mind is to treat far too simply a practice that becomes, in Richter's hands, significantly complex. But for all that it remains a thought-provoking exhibition of exceptional work, and the time I have taken in this essay to engage with it hopefully mirrors that.

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**Gerhard Richter: Portraits and Appearances, by Paul Moorhouse,
(London, National Portrait Gallery) 176pp, col. £22.50**

¹ Plato, *The Republic* in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Group, 1997): 596c – 596e. There are two important critical texts on this passage. The first is Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, trans. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1991): 171 – 187. And the second, partly a commentary on Plato and Heidegger's own commentary on Plato is Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, 'Typography' in *Typography: Mimesis, Philosophy, Politics*, ed. Christopher Fynsk, introduction by Jacques Derrida (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1989): 43 – 138.

² Jules Janin, quoted from Heinz Buddenmeier, *Panorama, Diorama, Photographie* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1970): 207. In this context also see Richard Rudisill, *Mirror Image* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1971); and Craig Owens, 'Photography en Abyme' in *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power, and Culture*, ed. Scott Tilman et al (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1992): 16 – 30.

³ This will not always be the case in Richter's painting. He soon develops a form of blurring that is distinctly photographic in its visual form even if the blurring is not actually to be found in the

original photograph-model but, instead, only emerges through the process of painting. *Onkel Rudi* is an example of a Richter canvas that exhibits a peculiarly *photographic* rather than *painterly* blur which is not to be found in the original photograph.

⁴ As Iris Balija commented to me, the white vertical stripe might suggest the vertical stripes that occur when a film is not wound properly into the camera, and so the edge of the previous or next image encroaches upon photograph. This suggestion ties in with Richter's intention of making photographs. Another suggestion she makes, which also seems to me productive and I am grateful for it, is that the blank left hand margin might also pertain to the space around newspaper photographs reserved for text. The blankness of this space, originally meant for textual information, testifies once again to the way Richter denies the beholder vital information that will help identify the represented figure as somebody in particular.

⁵ As Walter Benjamin famously argued: 'the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now, with which reality (so to speak) seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it'. From 'Little History of Photography' in *Selected Writings, Volume 2: 1927 – 1934*, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al, trans. by Rodney Livingstone et al (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 1999): 510.

⁶ For a treatment that engages the relationship between Richter's enterprise and portraiture in its complexity, see Stephen Melville, 'Betty's Turn' in *Res* 53/54, Spring/Autumn 2008: 31 – 46.

Carolee Schneemann: Painting, What It Became

P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York, 21 February – 28 March, 2009

Carolee Schneemann is perhaps best known as the artist who choreographed the Dionysian flesh-fest *Meat Joy*, who read words from an *Interior Scroll* as she unfurled it from her own vagina, and who stood unclothed at the front of a lecture theatre demanding to know whether “a naked woman can be an art historian?”, yet the artistic formation of this doyenne of proto-feminist body art is less often examined. It was refreshing and not a little intriguing, therefore, to encounter Schneemann’s early work, some dating from her student days in the late 1950s, at this exhibition at P.P.O.W. Gallery. Although its focus was on those early works, ‘Painting, What It Became,’ curated by Moira Reilly, the Founding Curator of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, deftly negotiated the issue of artistic development, including works made very recently. Aiming to situate Schneemann’s shifting oeuvre in terms of an interrogation of the medium of painting, the exhibition presented an aspect of her work that is too often missing from writing on Schneemann, who still describes herself as a painter.

The first works in the exhibition, created while Schneemann was studying for her MFA at the University of Illinois, and during her first years in New York from 1962, articulated a preoccupation with what she has termed the ‘structural tension’ of her painting at that time.¹ The mechanics of her experiments with extending painting into three dimensions were clearly evident. The process of ‘becoming’ to which the exhibition’s title referred charted a move from the flat, two-dimensional realm of painting, towards assembled and kinetic sculpture and the integration of Schneemann’s own body into her works. It was a trajectory that initially took her away from the expressionistic brushwork in figurative paintings like *Three Figures After Pontormo* (1957), *Summer I (Honey Suckle)* (1959) and her series of nude *Personae* portraits (1957), here represented by a reclining nude portrait of her lover James Tenney and cat Kitch, and towards the collage and assemblage techniques of *Quarry Transposed* (1960), a work more akin to Rauschenberg’s combines in its

incorporation of glass, wood and photographs into the surface of the canvas. Schneemann's desire to break out of the frame of the canvas was inspired in part by the radical theatrical model of Antonin Artaud, whose book *The Theater and Its Double* she encountered in 1960, and which she has linked both to a shift in materials (from traditional oil paint to the detritus of the everyday), as well as to the introduction of an element of dynamism into her works, through which she increasingly sought to elicit a physical response in the viewer. Schneemann also recounts the tale of a tree that fell on her house in Illinois, tearing a hole in the wall and enabling her cat to walk out of the kitchen window into the world beyond. It is an account that has taken on something of a mythological status in the narrative of Schneemann's art, one that has a tendency to over-simplify a remarkable period in her early development, but that epitomises this need to break in order to create.



Carolee Schneemann, *Quarry Transposed (Central Park in the Dark, 1960, mixed media.*
Courtesy the artist and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York NY

There is a sense in which these early experiments sought to break conventions not merely for their own sake, but also for what they represented. What emerged most strongly from the works on display was a young female artist struggling not only with the weight of a largely male artistic canon, but also with the stature of her immediate predecessors and peers, painters who were, and in many cases remain, more familiar names. In works that seemed to experiment with several styles in rapid succession, we witnessed her working through the expressive brushstrokes and large figure works of Willem de Kooning (in *Personae: JT and Three Kitch's*, 1957), the box constructions of Joseph Cornell (in *Gift Science*, 1965), the combines of Robert Rauschenberg (*Quarry Transposed*, 1960, and *Sir Henry Francis Taylor*, 1961), as well as a strong Surrealist legacy evident in such works as the rotating sculpture *Fur Wheel* (1962).



Carolee Schneemann, *Sir Henry Francis Taylor*, 1961, mixed media.
Courtesy the artist and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York NY



Carolee Schneemann, *Gift Science*, 1965, mixed media.
Courtesy the artist and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York NY

There was a real sense of anxiety in this attempt to find her own artistic voice. Schneemann later stated, in specifically gendered terms that recall the rhetorical question that Linda Nochlin had posed in 1979, that:

I had to understand why there were no women artists in my inherited history. I had to crack the shell to invert turn over smash open. Why language and all speaking existed in only one gender – male – and all that was female was by inclusion, prescription, allowance.²

This 'inheritance' was explicitly present in the very early paintings on display. *Three Figures After Pontormo* (1957; fig), for example, is based on a red chalk drawing by the Florentine Mannerist artist, depicting a *Standing Male Nude Seen from the Back and Two Seated Nudes* (1517-21). The bold contours with

which Schneemann delineates the central figure in her painting, and the contraposto to which that figure is subjected, indicate an awareness of the conventions of picture-making, and a close study of the source work. But Schneemann's expressionistic brushstrokes enmesh the figures in a gestural ground that nearly obliterates the two others, situating the work within the notoriously hegemonic sphere of American Abstract Expressionism.



Carolee Schneemann, *Three Figures After Pontormo*, 1957, oil on canvas, 46.5 x 31.5 cm.
Courtesy the artist and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York NY

The real centrepiece of the exhibition was *Four Fur Cutting Boards*, an assemblage work (or 'kinetic painting construction' as Schneemann terms it) made of hinged wooden boards, with paint, fabric, flashing light bulbs and moving objects – broken mirror shards, skeletal umbrellas that rotate, framed pictures – adhered to its surfaces, front and back. It looks very much like a portable stage-set, but also like a twisted and broken domestic space. The work

featured as the setting for the photographic performance series *Eye Body (Thirty Six Transformative Actions)*, some parts of which were hung next to it. More performance photographs from the 1970s, including the infamous *Interior Scroll*, were on display simultaneously in an exhibition at Carolina Nitsch Project Room nearby, in conjunction with this exhibition at P.P.O.W. In the context of the earlier works on display, the later, and better known, works that were included in both spaces made more sense, re-envisioned in terms of their relationship to, or interrogation of, the medium of painting: kinetic paintings, filmic paintings, and performative paintings, in which her own body becomes canvas, paint and brush. But Schneemann also finds the painterly gesture in light, in movement and in sound: the beam of the film projector, the brush of flesh against flesh, the nuzzling kisses of her cat's *Infinity Kisses*. What we encountered at P.P.O.W. were proposals towards an expanded field of painting, paintings that were constituted of objects, of video, of performance, existing in time as well as in space.



Carolee Schneemann, *Four Fur Cutting Boards* (also titled *Big Boards*), kinetic painting construction.

Courtesy the artist and P.P.O.W. Gallery, New York NY

The exhibition exuded a sense of palpable biography, not least because the works that it included so vividly charted Schneemann's artistic development, and contained images and objects that make direct allusion to her life: the presence of Tenney and Kitch, or the fur-cutting boards scavenged from her New York digs. But this sense of the personal also arises from the fact that most of these works are still in the artist's own collection. This latter point is a rather sore one, since, despite significant critical attention and her inclusion in major museum exhibitions, those very institutions that are keen to frame her work seem reluctant to acquire it for their collections. This is a shame, since the physical state of many of the works on display in this exhibition is precarious, and one fears that, in time and without a concerted effort to conserve them, they may disappear, leaving us much the poorer as a result.

***Carolee Schneemann: Painting, What It Became*, essay by Maura Reilly, (New York, P.P.O.W.) 11pp, col. \$15**

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¹ Carolee Schneemann, in conversation with the author, June 27, 2008.

² Carolee Schneemann, 'Ages of the Avant-Garde,' *Performing Arts Journal*, vol. 16, No. 1, Bodies of Work, January 1994, p. 20.