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Moongazers & trailblazers

van Gulik, L.A.

MOONGAZERS & TRAILBLAZERS
Creative Dynamics in Low Country Wicca

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LEONARDUS ALBERTUS VAN GULIK

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Table of contents

List of publications used for core chapters

CHAPTER THREE …is a slightly adapted version of the international, peer-reviewed journal article:
Van Gulik, L. A. (2010). On the Pagan parallax: A sociocultural exploration of the tension between eclecticism and traditionalism as observed among Dutch Wiccans. *Pomegranate, 12*, 49-70. DOI: 10.1558/pome.v12i1.49

CHAPTER FOUR …is a slightly adapted version of the international, peer-reviewed book chapter:
Van Gulik, L. A. (2015). On the sticks and stones of the Greencraft temple in Flanders: Balancing global and local heritage in Wicca. In K. Rountree (Ed.), *Contemporary Pagan and native faith movements in Europe: Colonialist and nationalist impulses* (pp. 216-238). New York: Berghahn.

CHAPTER FIVE …is an adapted version of the international, peer-reviewed journal article:
Van Gulik, L. A. (2012). The scholar versus the Pagan on Greencraft tree walks: Attunement, imagination, and interpretation. *Traditiones, 41*, 47-63. DOI: 10.3986/Traditio2012410105

CHAPTER SIX …is a slightly adapted version of the international, peer-reviewed journal article:
Van Gulik, L. A. (2012). Cleanliness is next to godliness, but oaths are for horses: Antecedents and consequences of the institutionalization of secrecy in initiatory Wicca. *Pomegranate, 14*, 233-255. DOI: 10.1558/pome.v14i2.2

CHAPTER SEVEN …is an adapted and enlarged version of the international, peer-reviewed journal article:
Van Gulik, L. A. (2016). Coining a name, casting the self: Identity construction through name adoption by dutch and flemish Wiccans. *Nova Religio, 20*, 97-110. DOI: 10.1525/nr.2016.20.2.97

CHAPTER EIGHT …is a slightly enlarged version of the international, peer-reviewed journal submission:
Van Gulik, L. A. (Provisionally accepted). Domesticating the Imagination: Acquisition, exposition, and validation of Otherworldly experiences in Wicca. *Religion*.

List of illustrations

List of tables

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Publishing the core chapters in various international journals and one edited book, I often asked peers to critically assess my work and just as often relied on the comments of native speakers of English either before or after submitting my papers. And then there were the editors. Thus, thank you Emily Abbey, Henrik Bogdan, Chas Clifton, Christian Giudice, Ian Jamison, Scott Lowe, Nancy McEntire, Kathryn Rountree, David Stanley, Amy Whitehead, and Michael York. Of course, I should not forget the various members of the PhD Network Group.

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Preface

Whenever a student or a colleague asks me what kind of research I have been doing for the last few years, I always reply that I have devoted my time to find out how religious creativity works. Before they can interject that is perhaps too broad a topic to pursue, I always add that I singled out a specific group to observe the phenomenon; that I did fieldwork among Wiccans from the Netherlands and Flanders. Most scholars of religious studies are then satisfied. Colleagues from psychology, however, then would typically ask: "Wicca?" "Well, some call it 'modern witchcraft,' but I don't for various reasons," I'd respond. "Witchcraft?," students always react with some bewilderment, "is there really such a thing?," while my academic peers would then start inquiring how I got my data. To both, I would then triumphantly declare that to get my results, I have danced around bonfires stark naked, gazed at the Moon, sampled birch sap, and enjoyed more than a fair share of exquisite meads.

While all in jest, my remarks may still make some people concerned. Why on earth would someone write a dissertation in his own time in a discipline that has seen cut after cut the last few years on a subject that raises eyebrows in so many circles? Feeling that such a question only becomes rhetorical if its receiver accepts its premises, I will devote my preface to formulate an answer, exposing the preconceptions of the question and explaining the choices I made.

To start, I need to set one thing straight. Even if I am operating in the field of religious studies, I always refer to myself as a *cultural psychologist*. Such a characterization, however, does not imply religion to be just a passing fancy—in fact, it is closely related to my primary interest in human meaning-making. I concern myself with questions about how these efforts relate to the raw impressions of direct experience, coalesce into patterns of behaviour, provoke aesthetic appraisal, become shared entities, and eventually materialize into objective (i.e., physical) culture. Religion may be the pinnacle of any meaning-making attempt. Similarly, if meaning-making involves the construction of culture, creativity ought to be at the heart of the discipline of cultural psychology. A marked difference between my take on religion and that of a scholar of religious studies, then, is my emphasis on processes instead of contents.

Conversely, what sets my work apart from mainstream psychology is my focus on the interactions between the inner and outer worlds of a person, rather than merely attending to internal, cognitive, or neurological processes. This difference has profound methodological consequences. I strongly endorse qualitative means of data collection and analysis. I feel that the unrestrained embrace of quantitative—let alone experimental—methods in psychology, especially in 'softer' disciplines like social psychology, risks either spawning artificial variables or travestying real-world phenomena. Therefore, until dynamical systems modelling of behaviour and social interaction becomes standard fare, I will be wary of any hypothetico-deductive reasoning in psychology and only reluctantly engage with it. My critique should not be mistaken for a lack of methodological interest, though—much to the contrary. Qualitative research-

ers have the great responsibility to turn the messy business of life 'in the wild' into sensible narratives of how things work, without taking it apart too far and losing all sense of interaction, emergent properties, and the human measure.

All the considerations I just mentioned show how and in what manner I became involved in the study of religion. But why did I choose Wicca? There is more to this movement than fire-leaping and frolicking in the green patches of suburbia. Perhaps more than the dominant religions, it deals with the two great predicaments of postmodernity: the loss of traditions and the preoccupation with one's identity. Also, being so young a religion, neither Wiccan practice nor its imagery is as yet set in stone. This malleability indicates that religiosity is not merely brought about by some naturally evolved internal apparatus that skews perception and reconstructs experience, leading to a series of static expressions that represent a cognitive optimum. Indeed, the history of the movement convincingly demonstrates the importance of context-sensitive enquiries if we are ever to grasp the creative processes that surround and permeate religious practice. With an eye to religious studies, the case of Wicca, thus approached, helps in developing a functionalist and exploratory theory of religion without having to surrender the topic to other fields.

After having explained why I chose Wicca as my topic and religious studies as the academic environment to communicate about my research undertaking, I will now turn to what I consider to be a necessary evil: having to conduct my research and write my dissertation in my own time. Perhaps I should call it a self-chosen exile, because I do not want to be bitter. After all, I could have tried to get a temporary position as an internal PhD student. Yet I do think that when I had subjected myself to the academic status quo, I would never have gotten a chance to develop my individuality as a scholar. Long now have I felt that any meaningful contributions that I could make depend on my rather singular sensibilities—some would say eccentricities—that make me best suited to endeavours like the interpretative social sciences and theoretical psychology. I know this is not the proper time to pursue such purely intellectual interests, but I feel they deserve a place in academia.

So I can justifiably speak about my 'intrinsic motivation,' even if I think such a self-description may infer a misguided sense of moral superiority. The normative label can also be misused to exempt oneself from all kinds of obligations ("I've done my best, but given these adverse circumstances...") or for self-pity. In a book I recently read, I found a reference to a verse in the *Bhagavad Gītā* (2:47) that goes: "You have a right to perform your prescribed duty, but you are not entitled to the fruits of action. Never consider yourself the cause of the results of your activities, and never be attached to not doing your duty" (Bhaktivedanta Swami, 1983, p. 134). This text was something to aspire to and helped me to attend to the work to be done rather than bemoaning the role of outsider I feel fate has cast for me.

But what are the 'fruits of action?' Are they a job? Tenure even? A monetary reward? Recognition as a 'newly minted PhD,' as the cliché goes? Or are they merely the proof of having become a self-reliant researcher? In this last case, the fruits are the action itself, and as such, I do have a right to them. And yes, by golly, I *have* en-

joyed the fieldwork and the writing—in the beginning more than at the end, I must admit. I have learnt so much about the various disciplines I touched in my work apart from my own field: sociology, anthropology, even some history. Also, I am grateful that my learning experience extended beyond the tasks of doing interviews, analysing data, and crafting compelling arguments. As an *external* PhD candidate—and this is not meant as a critique—I was left to my own devices. For one, I had to secure access to an academic library through my old university. There was no other option than to buy programmes like Endnote and ATLAS.ti for myself and master them on my own. I read many books about qualitative analysis and taught myself how to do it at an advanced level, because in the crucial first few years of my research project, I had no access to any courses in graduate school. My project also gave me ample opportunity to practice my skills at designing figures and doing the layout for the dissertation. All in all, the project was as much about doing research as it was about self-empowerment. Even with hindsight I say that I wouldn't have had it any other way, but, to be honest, for the future, I most certainly would.

Apart from having an impact on me as a researcher, being an academic outsider had consequences for the research project. Although I had initially planned to write a monography, after repeatedly failing to obtain a grant, I was forced to change my strategy. Without an institute paying me to do my research, I had to keep jobs on the side, which eventually came to devour most of my time. Also, I decided that I had to make an effort in getting enough exposure for my work, so I went to many European conferences to present my research: I went to those of the ISSRNC (Amsterdam, 2009), the Ritual Year Working Group (Tallinn, 2010; Ljubljana, 2011; Plovdiv, 2012), the SIEF (Lisbon, 2011), the EASR (Stockholm, 2012; Groningen, 2014), the Dialogical Self (The Hague, 2014), the IAHR (Erfurt, 2015), and participated in the Szeged conference on the ethnology of religion (Szeged, 2010). The department of Psychology of Culture and Religion at Radboud University (Nijmegen), where I worked as a lecturer until summer 2012, generously covered part of the costs for attending a few of these.

To further increase the impact of my work, I started to turn my presentations into articles, and eagerly accepted the invitations I got from my academic peers to produce an article (included in this dissertation as Chapter 6) and a chapter for an edited volume (here featured as Chapter 4). In addition, like I mentioned in the Acknowledgements, I was asked to speak or lecture at various universities, either invited by student associations or by colleagues. Needless to say, I am still very grateful and happy about the positive response to my work.

Together with my increasingly time-consuming day jobs, the writing of articles made it impossible to work on a separate dissertation simultaneously. Therefore, even though I have offered a substantial introduction to Wicca, included a broad overview of the notion of creativity, and constructed several overarching research questions the answers to which I offer in a general discussion, in essence, this thesis is a collection of adapted peer reviewed articles (and one chapter) rather than a monography. This is not a problem per se, as this format allowed me to keep my re-

search project focussed and required me to bring the most promising interpretations to fruition.

Still, cutting up a cohesive research project into smaller studies is not without its challenges. The argument developed in each report has to have merit in itself, apart from having to tie in with the overarching work. Given the limited room for these quasi-independent analyses, some aspects of the general research questions may get emphasized at the expense of others that are less persuasive, fashionable, or clear-cut to feature in shorter research reports. Moreover, the aims of the journals in which the separate studies have been published impact on the way research material is allowed to be presented and which of the many potential interpretations will eventually materialize. The limited scope of some academic journals may also hinder the development of an interdisciplinary narrative, introducing conservatism and middle-of-the road scholarship rather than merely safeguarding the objective quality and merit of submitted papers.

By maintaining an assertive stance, refusing to let either the side of the humanities or that of the social sciences dominate the other in my work, and creating a metanarrative (first presented in 1.5.2), I feel I managed to keep the danger at bay of my research project becoming disjointed, even if the reader should ultimately be the judge of that.

Let me conclude this preface by explaining how I integrated the various publications in the present collection. First, all the chapters have been adapted for inclusion in the thesis. In general, the changes are as follows:

(1) The abstracts were lightly edited to serve as links between the various chapters in addition to their original purpose of creating an overview of the study they belonged to.

(2) Where possible and applicable, I have removed paragraphs dealing with the methodology, since all the studies can be retraced to my fieldwork as a part of this thesis, apart from the study of the Parallax, that served as a pilot.

(3) Some articles have been augmented by extra material, as they do not have the limitations of length that the various journals where they appeared posed on them. Typically, these extras are longer interview quotes, additional footnotes, and some interpretative elaborations.

(4) In order to create coherency and a universal style, the wording has been adapted where possible. Thus, for instance, the term 'neo-Paganism' is used everywhere, where in some of the originals 'contemporary Paganism' was the term of choice.

Second, I updated, augmented, or created the various types of references in the dissertation:

(1) External references to the various articles that are included here have been replaced by internal ones. Logically, I retained any original citations of publications of mine that are not featured here.

(2) I have added forward references. These are featured in any chapter based on an older publication and point to (passages in) chapters adapted from more recent articles.

(3) I introduced a continuous numbering system for the 98 interview quotes. Throughout the thesis, references to 'q.' followed by a number point to illustrative quotes that I took from the interviews I conducted. Most of the references are placed near the location of the quotes, but some quotes are also referred back to later.

(4) In order to show where an interview quote originated from, at the end of each, I added a combination of two numbers, separated by a colon. The first is a serial number and refers to the particular interview of which it was a part. These numbers are listed in Table 1 (pp. 46-49), which also contains general information on all the interviews. The second number points to the location (or range) of the quote in the verbatim of the interview as registered in the database of the analytical tool I used (i.e., ATLAS.ti, see 2.4.4).

Léon van Gulik,
Cuijk, the Netherlands, April 2017

chapter one

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Situating the study

1.1.1 Abigail's labyrinth

In one of the leafy gardens of an upmarket neighbourhood in a small town in Flanders lies a circular labyrinth. The structure is situated in a wooded patch in the corner of the grounds, hidden from the prying eyes of the world outside the fence. Modelled after the one in Chartres Cathedral, the labyrinth consists of eleven circuits large enough to circumambulate. The arrangement consists of clinker bricks laid out back-to-back with patches of soil dividing each of the circuits. Its entrance, marked by a curvy line of bricks coming out of the circle, is oriented towards the east. The other points of the compass are prominently visible due to its 28 U-turns, which concurrently divide the circle into four quadrants (see Figure 1).

The labyrinth was made by Kara and Lupus, a couple who hold a position as elders in a new religious movement called *Greencraft*, a branch of *Wicca* (sometimes referred to as 'modern Pagan witchcraft'), which in turn is a part of *neo-Paganism*, a constellation of postmodern nature religions. Kara and Lupus are avid labyrinth-builders. Although they used pavement stones on this occasion, normally the couple works with coloured aquarium gravel with which they can lay out temporary labyrinths in less than 30 minutes. These arrangements serve various ritual purposes.

The owner of the brick labyrinth, Abigail, a 69-year old voluntary funeral officiant and retired gym teacher, who is also a member of Greencraft, uses it for walking meditations. In an interview she explained to me how she goes about doing that and pointed out the temporal significance she attaches to each of the points of the compass (q. 01):

> 01 West, … for me, is … linked to the past. So [when I walk the labyrinth] I can go west and then realize what all the things from my life are, that have played a role and made me into who I am [now]. West also [represents] a connection to water and the fluidity of water and emotions and feelings … from my past that surface at the moment [I am in west]. And then I shall go to north and north to me represents the here and now, the current affairs. Also a bit rationality, but to a greater extent practical matters like how do I organize my life and what do I want to do? East is the road that lies open to me—my future, all the possibilities that are within me. And when I connect to south then the passion, the fire and also the child are in me; the child that sometimes still needs a bit of healing. But also the power to make things happen, the projects I am occupied with, the works I want to do, all that I want to accomplish (19: 419).

Abigail apparently uses her labyrinth as a projective tool; the structure invites her to revisit, re-evaluate and reimagine the chapters of her life. Also, by making her walk back and forth between past, present, and future, the labyrinth stimulates her to uncover the underlying relationships between these episodes. The repetitive pattern of navigation also helps to reach an altered state of consciousness, easing hoped-for imaginal encounters with the cosmological imagery of her religion. In her meditative

FIGURE 1: *Abigail's labyrinth*
Different to a maze, which features several routes—mostly with dead ends—a labyrinth only has one way, which, although winding, eventually leads to the exit at the centre.

time-travels, she may encounter deities, power animals, or tutelary spirits that flesh out her existential quandaries and evolving narratives.

1.1.2 Creativity and change

Although labyrinths have seen an array of ritual employments throughout history and across cultures, Abigail's religious engagement with hers has the distinct flavour of a postmodern practice. In contrast to some etymological considerations claiming that the word 'religion' derived from *religio*—reverence for the divine—her usage can best be described by understanding the term as *religare*—to bind fast or to bind anew (see, e.g., Hoyt, 1912; cf. Wulff, 1997, pp. 3-5). This latter, relational rendering of the term 'religion' reflects the motivation of contemporary believers who find their perennial spiritual thirst unquenched by the traditional religious institutions of this day; it is their attempt at reconciling the real with the ideal.

To be sure, people's specific needs have always required them to tailor their religious practices accordingly, but rather than merely trying to comprehend their lives as part of the 'grand scheme of things,' nowadays many practitioners employ religious myth and symbolism for self-expression and identity construction. Because of

this shifting of means and ends, 'binding anew' now requires religious adherents to keep generating new forms of ritual and motivates them to continually reimagine the divine order. They do so through things like ritual improvisation, by cultivating the imagination, and by seeking out religious experiences. There is, then, something inherently *creative* about the contemporary spirituality and its associated conduct.

However, it would be too strong a claim that new religious movements are rebuilding religion from the ground up. To what extent, for instance, does Abigail's usage differ from that of some Christians who envision a pocket-sized pilgrimage when they walk *their* labyrinths? What is more, Abigail is not alone in her particular use of labyrinths: just like the religious peers who built her labyrinth, she relies on the collective imagery and suggested practices of Greencraft. That group, in turn, is limited by the tradition that they are a part of and that tradition—Wicca—again relies on the practices of other religions. The associated actions of recombining existing material into something novel have all the earmarks of another kind of creativity.

Moreover, there are physical properties to consider. The labyrinth, because of its complex circuital pattern, is best suited for activities involving a slow pace, and due to it featuring four quarters, it best fits rituals with the same number of aspects or elements. Its size limits the number of people who can walk the labyrinth simultaneously, but its abstract layout warrants a great variety of actions to be performed with it. All in all, then, especially religions with a penchant for ritual are subject to the characteristics of the material world; all the tensions that necessarily exist between thinking and doing, belief and action, and imagination and performance, make these belief systems likely to change. Such dynamics constitute a third kind of creativity.

1.1.3 General aim

Phenomena like religious dynamics and change are worthwhile subjects for scholarly enquiry—all the more because thinking them through in terms of religious creativity has only just begun to have an impact on the field of religious studies. This observation also suggests that the practices of new religious movements—or at least contemporary reinterpretations of traditional faiths—ought to be given more attention. Precisely because of its emphasis on the individual *and* its complex entanglements with other religions *and* its ceremonial proclivities, Wicca represents a suitable showcase to illustrate the complexities of processes of religious creativity and change, the subject of this study. Incidentally, an enquiry into religion as a process and as having subjective—i.e., experiential—qualities would be very timely. The topic fits the approach of 'lived religion' that has been suggested in a foresight study of the Board of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences as an interdisciplinary and collaborative research program in the field of religious studies for the coming years (KNAW, 2015, pp. 99-101).

Aiming to understand the human factor in nascent religiosity requires the combination of contextual sensitivity with explanatory ambition. Such interdisciplinarity, however, is delicate, because it hangs in the balance between two potentially con-

flicting approaches. While the 'ethnographic' approach offers a detailed overview of particular cultural phenomena, it may stall at the descriptive level, incessantly accumulating uninterpreted facts and cataloguing cabinets of curiosities.[1] Conversely, 'cognitivist' approaches, while advancing to explanatory accounts of religiosity, have done so at the expense of detail and contextualized understandings.[2] A balanced, best-of-both-worlds interdisciplinary undertaking, then, needs to explicate the complementary elements of the moderate positions of both approaches.

Religious creativity, as well as religious change, involves continuous alternations between subjective and objective worlds, between representations and presentations, and between ideas and their expressions. To study these, we need to emphasize dynamics, rather than diversity, yet retain a functional universalism by drawing attention to the patterned regularities of the interactions between these internal and external worlds. Therefore, as a discipline about the finding, making, and dispersal of *meaning*, it is high time for cultural psychology[3] to claim its rightful place amongst the fields that make up the interdisciplinary undertaking of religious studies. To that end, in Section 1.4, I will examine and develop the notion of creativity as a psychological concept. There I will also suggest employing a systems model of creativity, in which the person, as well as the group, and the body of culture each have their place.

1.2 Wicca: History

Before outlining any theoretical perspective, however, I need to properly introduce the religion that provides the context for my enquiry: Wicca. I will do so in 1.2 and 1.3. In the present section, I will offer a definition and history of the movement; in 1.3 I will address its symbolism and ritual practice. Please note that numerous studies by others have already covered most of the material featured in 1.2, so my discussion is concise and merely descriptive. I will first relate Wicca to the broader movement of neo-Paganism in 1.2.1. The term 'Wicca' and the prehistory of the religion are the

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[1] At its most extreme, some studies— i.e., those endorsing a postmodern 'critical approach'—are not merely descriptive, but could be labelled 'descriptivist' for their imputations of 'positivism' in some of the 'opposing' social sciences, their wholesale rejection of 'reductionism,' and their overextended claims of the relativity of truth.

[2] The so-called *new cognitive science of religion* represents the very antithesis to the postmodern critical approach. In this 'cognitivist' approach, the phenomenon of religion is seen as the outcome of a universal cognitive architecture (see, e.g., Boyer, 2001; Pyysiäinen, 2001). The problem with this very position, however, lies in the exaggeration of the role of a specifically evolved fine-tuned mental apparatus to explain human behaviour. The cognitivist endorsement of symbolic representationalism has, in the contemporary cognitive sciences, long been surpassed by enactivism and ecological approaches. Researchers endorsing these latter positions claim that both human cognitive functioning and cultural phenomena are emergent—i.e., non-reductive—properties an ongoing interaction between person and environment (see, e.g., Clark, 1997; Reed, 1996a; Tomasello, 1999; and Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991).

[3] See, e.g., Cole (1996), for an in-depth discussion of cultural psychology.

subjects of 1.2.2. The two following subsections, in turn, both deal with the history of Wicca, starting with the rise of traditionalist Wicca (1.2.3), and then moving on to that of eclectic Wicca in 1.2.4. In the last subsection (1.2.5) I offer a brief overview of the development of Wicca in the Low Countries (here understood as the Netherlands and Flanders)—the geographical area of my study.

1.2.1 Wicca and neo-Paganism

Neo-Paganism is a composite of classically inspired and indigenous religious practices, mainly present in Europe, North America and Australia (Pearson, 2005).[4] Partly, it can be understood as a counter-movement to the Abrahamic religions, especially Christianity, as can be observed in many of the neo-Pagan narratives and practices (see, e.g., Adler, 2006, pp. 22-23; Lamond, 1987, pp. 23-38). The various strands of neo-Paganism share a fundamental attitude in their reverence for nature and inspire both religiosity and green activism. On the whole, neo-Pagans consider divinity to be immanent. However, they vary widely about its further character: some adherents consider themselves pantheistic, others polytheistic, or duotheistic. There is also no consensus about the relative importance or ontological status of the gods and goddesses (Van Gulik, 2011b). Only some adherents would classify themselves as general neo-Pagans; most consider themselves followers of one of the various distinct paths within the movement.

The largest religion by far in neo-Paganism is Wicca, which I will now briefly introduce before returning to it in the next subsections for a detailed discussion. Also referred to as 'The Craft' by its adherents, Wicca is a newly constructed religion with various folkloric, romantic and magico-religious elements (Hutton, 1999). Originally a mystery tradition that requires initiation, nowadays Wicca also encompasses the practices of non-initiated individuals inspired by the belief system. In the case of initiation one acquires the title of priest or priestess, and is accepted into a small ritual group called a coven, where they celebrate the eight sabbats (i.e., ancient European festivals of the ritual year) and thirteen esbats (i.e., full moons). Central to the ritual activity is the worship of the Goddess and her two alternating spouses who symbolize the waxing and waning life in the year cycle. Among the non-initiatory branches of

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[4] Throughout the thesis I use the capitalized term 'neo-Paganism' rather than the simpler 'Paganism' or 'contemporary Paganism.' Neo-Pagans base their practices on the ancient pagan practices of Europe (or perhaps even outside Europe). Psychologically and sociologically, however, neo-Paganism has little to do with what originally counted as pagan. Neo-Paganism is a deliberate and conscious choice to reinterpret, reconfigure, and move towards what are believed to be old customs and beliefs, rather than tacitly starting from the world view that comes with these. In addition, designating oneself or one's group as 'Pagan' sets the word apart from the derogatory term 'pagan' (with a small p) used to describe non-adherents of the dominant faith or simply non-believers. While capitalization in itself should be enough to distinguish between (classic) paganism and a postmodern group of religions self-designated as 'Paganism,' there have been earlier revivals, so a further distinction is required. Since 'contemporary' suggests continuity with these attempts, and 'neo-' stresses difference, I chose the last, especially with an eye to the rise of Wicca (cf. Strmiska, 2005, p. 2).

Wicca, the ritual activity is more diverse than in their initiatory counterparts, but in each instant based on the veneration of nature with a decidedly magical flavour.

Most other neo-Pagan religions can be classified by their ethnic inspiration, like Celtic *Druidry*, Germanic *Ásatrú*, and Slavic *Rodnovery*. Other neo-Pagan movements, however, whether they amount to a full-fledged religion or not, can also be categorized by their ritual style, their activism, their gender sensibilities, the extent faith truly plays a role, and their political inclinations.[5] These two ways of classification—we may call them source-based and practice-based—are not mutually exclusive, however. Many combinations exist: take for instance Goddess spirituality, which blends Wicca with feminism, or *Seidr*, a tradition that combines Ásatrú with Shamanic practice—there even is a Secular Order of Druids (SOD) that, through the use of the word 'secular,' stresses its contemporaneity.

Although one could entertain the idea that Wicca as the by far largest neo-Pagan path therefore is the most relevant section for the study of creativity in a religious context, there is more to such a choice.

First, Wicca was a trailblazer for other neo-Pagan movements. The rise of Wicca as an earth-centred religion opened up the awareness among a new generation of religious seekers that one could—once again—revive or create their own genuinely indigenous European religions. The development of a ritual corpus and rationale in Wicca paved the way to the reinvention, expansion, and reinterpretation of classical pagan beliefs and practices for the Western world after World War II. Over time, various strands emerged that increasingly developed their own organizations, meetings, and traditions. Thus, the concept 'neo-Paganism' changed from being roughly equivalent to that of 'Wicca' to the categorical term it is today (Hedenborg-White, 2014, p. 318).

The Wiccan impact on the neo-Pagan community as a whole can still be observed. Most obviously, we find its voice in the Pagan Federation, a UK-based umbrella organization that seeks to promote neo-Paganism. They have formulated three general articles of faith that most adherents accept as a fair representation of their beliefs and practices (Jennings, 2002, pp. 8-9), but that also reflect a definitive Wiccan signature.

1. Love for and Kinship with Nature. Reverence for the life force and its ever-renewing cycles of life and death.
2. A positive morality, in which the individual is responsible for the discovery and development of their true nature in harmony with the outer world and community. This is often expressed as "Do what you will, as long as it harms none."
3. Recognition of the Divine, which transcends gender, acknowledging both the female and male aspect of Deity (Pagan Federation, n.d.).

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[5] The complex relationship between politics and neo-Paganism is an interesting subject in its own right. Some groups are decidedly left-wing (e.g., some eclectic Wiccan groups), some tend toward nationalism (e.g., some Ásatrúic groups), while in others politics plays only a minor role. Overall, however, neo-Pagans are much more interested in politics than most New Age adherents.

Second, apart from its prominent role in the development of neo-Paganism, Wicca perhaps represents the most obvious case of the dissent between *traditionalists* and *eclectics*. The former try to restore and conserve an ancient practice, whereas the latter seek to construct something new, even by freely compiling fragments of old faiths and thus emphasize religious efficacy over historical accuracy.[6] Perhaps this tension is so prominent in Wicca, because although a composition of various sources, the religion has matured enough to have crystallized as a steady tradition in its own right, whereas on the other hand, it is young enough to still be open to change.

1.2.2 Etymology and prehistory

Wicca is hard to define because the meaning of the word has shifted enormously over the last 50 years (see, e.g., Doyle White, 2010, for an examination), and even nowadays there is hardly any consensus among practitioners about what the term conveys. The word 'Wicca' is etymologically related to the Middle English noun *wicche* ('sorcerer,'), illuminating the link to the modern word 'witch.' In German one finds the verb *wicheln* ('soothsaying'), similar to the Dutch *wikken* or *wichelen*. Whereas 'Wicca' is neutral enough, some practitioners prefer to style themselves as 'witches,' or define their faith as 'witchcraft,' not despite, but exactly because of the negative connotations of the term.[7]

The reason for this preference lies in the initial acceptance as a historical fact that the new religion had an unbroken line back to a pan-European pre-Christian fertility cult. This religion was forced underground during the witch trials of the late Middle Ages and the early modern period (see, e.g., Ruickbie, 2004). The Murray thesis, as this assumption became known—after Egyptologist Margaret Murray—was taken up by the father of Wicca, Gerald Gardner. He argued that because of the repeal of the witchcraft act in 1951, he now was able to let Wicca resurface.

Murray's work, however, was heavily criticized in the 1960s and 1970s, because of the lack of methodological rigour, the misrepresentation of source material, and being ill-informed about Europe's history in general. Wicca thus ended up not with a genuine history of itself, but with an etiological myth—one that had a tremendous impact on the movement. Sympathetic to Murray's approach, Gerald Gardner had claimed historical sources and folkloric material as hitherto unrecognized expressions of a persisting 'witch-cult,' and reconstructed these as the beliefs, practices, and

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[6] Chapter 3, *The Pagan Parallax*, features a study on the tension between traditionalists and eclectics; for the specifics on religious efficacy versus historical accuracy, please see 5.4.1.

[7] This peculiarity is further discussed in 3.4. I will not use the terms 'witch' or 'witchcraft' in connection to Wicca, because there is no true historical justification in referring to one's religion as 'witchcraft.' Regardless of its common etymology with the word 'Wicca', 'witchcraft,' and its translations in other languages, always refers to another person, who does evil through supernatural means. The self-designatory usage of 'witch' by Wiccans, then, is not so much a reclaiming of a misused term as some would suggest, but an appropriation of a term that is understood very differently by the vast majority of its users. In the rare case I have to refer to either 'witch' or 'witchcraft' because my informants use it, I will use scare quotes.

imagery of Wicca. This situation posed a problem for practitioners, who found them-selves either having to legitimize the peculiarities of the movement on the basis of a false history or come up with alternative means of self-justification.

Numerous elements from various European traditions were incorporated into Wicca. In his classic book on the history of Wicca, *The Triumph of the Moon*, British historian Ronald Hutton (1999), summed these up. I limit myself to the three most visible ones.

Wicca's first formative factor is English romanticism. Writers and poets venerated untamed nature. They dealt with the tense relationship between modernization (in-dustrialization and mechanization) and the uncultivated, unspoilt earth by regularly harking back to classic deities, such as the Greek god Pan—the personification of the wild. The motives of Wicca as a *nature religion* obviously derive from romanticism.

Second, we can observe the rise of secret societies from the second half of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth; not only those of the longer ex-isting Rosicrucians and Freemasons but also theosophy and the Order of the Golden Dawn. Of the last group, a one-time member, Aleister Crowley, was especially influ-ential. From Freemasonry, Wicca borrowed much of its structure, while it developed its occult and gnostic leanings from the more magic-inclined societies, as well as its focus on altered states of consciousness. These religious experiences, or 'encounters with the Otherworld' as practitioners would call them, truly make Wicca a *mystery tradition*.

Third, England has a history of so-called *cunning folk*, who were consulted by the peasant population since early modern times as a sort of psychics *avant-la-lettre*. These cunning folk consisted of natural healers, clairvoyants, soothsayers, and most notably counter-magicians. Like the tribal shamans they often lived on the frontier between civilization and the wilderness, and put their practical, but supposedly su-pernatural knowledge to use to benefit their superstitious clientele for a small fee. As far as Wicca can be considered a '*craft*,' the practical aspects of this tradition, as well as its focus on the individual, pay tribute to the cunning folk.

1.2.3 Genesis and definition

All that was needed was the right person and the right time to bring these and other elements successfully together to bring forth the religion of Wicca. This person was the Englishman Gerald Brosseau Gardner (1884-1964), a retired tea and rubber planter and customs officer who spent his working life in Ceylon, North Borneo, and Malaya. Although Wicca was arguably first developed in the second half of the 1940s (see Hutton, 1999, pp. 213-214), and emerged in the early 1950s, as I stated above, it only gained momentum in the expressivist counterculture of the 1960s (see 3.2 for an in-depth discussion).

At its core, *Gardnerian Wicca*, as the movement eventually came to be known to distinguish it from other, later branches of Wicca, is a fusion of a nature religion and

a mystery tradition that, as such, requires initiation. Gardnerian Wicca shares these two elements with another very influential form of the practice: *Alexandrian Wicca.* Coined after the first name of its founder, Alex Sanders (1926-1988), this branch of Wicca retained many of the Gardnerian elements, including initiation, coven work, and observance of the sabbats. In contrast, Alexandrian Wicca is much more ceremonial and introduced the systems of Enochian magic and the Hermetic Kabbalah to Wicca. Over the years differences between the groups are said to have diminished, but some Wiccans in my sample, as for instance Amor (q. 02), a Greencraft coven leader, suggested a fundamental difference in ritual attitude.

> 02   The Gardnerians wanted everything to be authentic to the extent that [for example] when one takes an athame (i.e., a black-handled ceremonial knife) that has been used in rituals, it would have been [full of bits of] ash and dirt. [Alex] Sanders was totally different, he wanted that athame to shine like a mirror … Coven members would be polishing candleholders for an hour before a ritual (10: 141).

During my fieldwork, I encountered another instance of this propensity for keeping 'energetic' or magical residues. In traditional Wicca, but some others strands as well, illusionistic circles are cast at the beginning of a ritual, and banished at the end. Magus, a Gardnerian-inspired solitary Wiccan and ceremonial magician, opted to close a ritual circle by turning *deosil* (i.e., clockwise). He held his cupped hand sideways while doing so, as if collecting the charged circle he had cast, rather than merely redrawing the circle *widdershins* (i.e., counterclockwise)—as some Wiccan groups do—to neutralize it. He suggested by using his 'more gentle' method, a bit of the essence of the ritual would be allowed to linger and add to the energy amassed over the many rituals he had held before. Although by no means common to Gardnerian practice, I feel this improvisatory act and the expression of accumulative experience better fits the Gardnerian than the Alexandrian habitus.

Together, the Gardnerian and Alexandrian branches are often referred to as British Traditional Wicca (BTW) or Traditional Craft Wicca (TCW). The denominations, as well as other groups that claim the label for themselves, share the perception of the importance of lineage. In such traditions, a person can only be initiated by someone of the opposite sex who has been initiated in the same tradition and holds the dignity of high priest or high priestess. This particular aspect, often in association with a vow of secrecy makes many traditionalist practitioners even frown on using the generic term 'Wicca' too leniently. They claim the mystery aspect of the religion ultimately defines it. However, as Graham Harvey (1997, p. 35) points out, while the mystery aspect revolves around the individual initiate, "there is no clear demarcation separating personal growth from celebrating Nature. Initiating and non-initiating traditions to some degree are interested in both."

Therefore, I use 'Wicca' throughout this thesis in the broadest sense. I include non-initiatory traditions that make use of the same stock of symbols and practices. And I include both solitarians (i.e., Wiccans who work alone), and those who practice

in covens. Although some would argue that there is no way to properly delineate where Wicca ends and other traditions start, I would suggest the various strands of Wicca can best be understood as having family resemblances. Rather than aiming for an impossible neat division, I feel that combining is more helpful from a functionalist perspective (see 2.1.1) than the hair splitters would want it. I am not aiming for a definitive take on Wicca but like to see how this broad tradition has emerged and is practiced by its followers, to glean their motives, and to understand them from their sociocultural context. I am looking for developmental trends, rather than essentialist characterizations.

1.2.4 Diversification and detraditionalization

Paradoxically, as an association of elitist initiatory traditions with an observance of secrecy, Traditional Craft Wicca was instrumental in diversifying the movement. Would-be initiates, frustrated at not being (duly) admitted, soon started developing Wicca-strands of their own. These alternatives elaborated on the etiological myth or created their own, and found new expressions of adherence.

Other traditions also emerged, because of the growing seniority among first generation Wiccans. High priests and high priestesses saw their impact on the Wiccan field increase: they started publishing books and sometimes even created their own spiritual paths. The initially small number of Wiccans began to grow steadily when some groups emerged that had dropped the requirement of initiation. Often moving away from the mystery aspect of traditional Wicca, these groups have provided for the growing interest in the membership of a modern nature religion, and also contributed to the rise of the solitary Wiccan.

Nowadays, Wicca, as I understand the movement, has come to embrace a wide variety of groups. Apart from the Gardnerian and Alexandrian initiatory traditions, there is Cochrane's Craft, created—or, as he would claim, *inherited*—by the Englishman Robert Cochrane. This tradition saw its continuation in the 1734 Tradition of the American Joseph Wilson (Finnin, 1990). Combining Anglo-Saxon paganism with Wicca, in turn, Gardnerian high priest Raymond Buckland devised a non-initiatory tradition he dubbed Seax Wicca (Buckland, 2005). Also based in the US is Feri Wicca, sometimes described as American Traditional Witchcraft, an initiatory tradition based on the oral teachings of Victor and Cora Anderson (Adler, 2006, pp. 122-123). Perhaps the most important emerging offshoots, however, are those of the feminist Wiccans: the Dianics and the Reclaiming tradition. The first, founded by Zsuzsanna Budapest, is an eclectic amalgamate of Traditional Craft Wicca, folk magic, and feminism (Barrett, 2007, p. 2). The Reclaiming tradition, in turn, is based on Dianic Wicca and the Feri tradition and constitutes a non-hierarchical activist movement (Starhawk, 1999).

To distinguish these groups from Traditional Craft Wicca, they might all be classified as eclectic Wicca. This label, however, is not without its problems. First, all Wicca is eclectic to begin with (Hutton, 1999, pp. 398-399), even if traditionalists eschew

the word. For them, it conjures up images of happy-go-lucky dabblers creating a hotchpotch of undeveloped, misunderstood, and incompatible ideas, thrown together at face value. In other words: eclecticism is a bit of a dirty word.[8] Second, some of the groups that would come under the label 'eclectic' see themselves as even *beyond* traditional, and refer to themselves as 'hereditary.' Lacking any serious evidence, the idea of hereditary witchcraft, however, might be understood as a reaction to the claims of Gerald Gardner. Just like him, hereditary Wiccans try to legitimize their practice historically, but without having to resort to the Murray thesis.

Still, 'eclectic Wicca' is the best option to denote non-traditional denominations. First, contemporary groups of this class are often very conscious about their appropriation of material from other traditions. They often legitimize themselves on the basis of efficacy or a just cause, rather than exclusively relying on an alleged historical record. Among these groups, 'eclecticism' is shorthand for open-mindedness, flexibility, and relevance. Second, the word 'eclecticism' better fits the profile of solitary practitioners, whose ranks have swollen over the years. Third, admittedly similar to the vision of the traditionalists, to Wiccans for whom adherence is a pastime rather than a calling, the term 'eclecticism' might refer to their right of choice to combine those aspects of Wicca and neo-Paganism, that best serve their whims and interests. With regard to religious creativity, eclecticism, then, extends across the full range of grand novelties that renew the domain, to short-lived or stillborn idiosyncrasies.

An independent development that has had an enormous impact on both the spreading and diversification of Wicca is the Internet. On the one hand, its rise was a blessing to Wicca, because it made contact between like-minded people easier. The usefulness of the Internet is evident from the enthusiasm with which the movement embraced the new technology. On the other hand, the Internet also contributed to the hyping of Wicca in the first few years of the new millennium. Due to the success of TV series like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed*—not to mention the Harry Potter franchise—occultism entered the adolescent pop culture. A new phenomenon emerged: the teen 'witch.' These girls, some of them only 12-14 years old, started to overrun online Wiccan discussion boards, often searching for information on things like "how to do a love spell," "how to become a real witch," and other such frivolities. Partly because of rigidly upholding secrecy, partly because of the complexity of their ritual corpus and symbolism, the initiatory traditions had difficulties coping with this development. The Internet became flooded with the simplified variants of rituals, cookbook approaches to magic, and personal convictions passed off as traditional Wiccan fare.

The interests of the general public have shifted long since, and Wicca has been left to its own devices. It is hard to predict how the movement will develop in the years to come. Perhaps traditionalist Wicca will wane because the required level of commitment in many of these groups exceeds the time people have in this busy age. Also,

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[8] This issue is treated in-depth in 3.3.3.

due to the fragmentation and diversification of Wicca, newcomers nowadays have more to choose between, when compared to twenty or thirty years ago. Eclectic branches seem to have the best cards to deal with these issues and have the additional advantage that their flexible nature makes them better at adapting to the changing spiritual needs of their creed.

Apart from shifts in ideology and practice, however, Wicca has also changed as a result of its spreading across the world. Because of my focus on Dutch and Flemish Wicca, I will limit myself to discussing developments in these two linguistically, geographically, and socially connected areas.

1.2.5 Wicca in the Low Countries

Even though traditional Wicca greatly increased in size in the UK during the 1960s, and was exported to the United States in the same period, it took another decade for the first Dutch contacts to establish. A handful of Dutch spiritual seekers visited England to discover Wicca, about which they did not know more than what they learnt from the odd article in the popular media. Once in England, the openness of Alex Sanders and his former high priestess and life partner Maxine Sanders (who kept his name after their divorce) greatly helped in bringing about connections between the initiated English Wiccans and the interested Dutch seekers.

Alex and Maxine Sanders' constant publicity-seeking and their willingness to quickly initiate many new Wiccans, helped the movement to burgeon during the seventies. The pioneering Dutch seekers also became initiated in that period. When they subsequently returned to the Netherlands, they kept in touch with Alex Sanders who offered more lessons and gave further instructions to help develop their rituals. The first Dutch Wiccans, however, were not at all inclined to start practising their newly acquired skills in a group. One Wiccan, Frans W., argued that working in a coven would be too impractical because of the distances between the few members he would attract. In turn, two others, named Catherine and Henk, were so secretive about their activity, based on their belief that Wicca could count on little sympathy in the Netherlands, that they allowed no others to access the mysteries (Boris & Bran, 2005, pp. 27-28).

Only with the initiation of yet another couple, Kobus van Dooren and Elsy Kloeg, would the Alexandrian tradition get off the ground in the Netherlands. Although they were initiated in the Netherlands, they went to the UK to obtain the second and third grades, enabling them to start their own coven (Boris & Bran, 2005, pp. 34-36; De Zutter, 1997, pp. 220-222). Like Sanders, Kloeg would knowingly seek out the press. She became the face of Dutch Wicca in the 1980s through her cooperation with the popular psychic magazine *Paravisie*.[9] The impact of her openness is great: in the nineties still only Kloeg and the Alexandrian tradition are mentioned under the entry

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[9] Niels Brummelman (personal communication, 26 April 2016), the head editor, estimates the magazine had a circulation of around 50,000 copies in that period.

'witchcraft (contemporary)' in the *Paravisie Encyclopedie* (De Ruiter, 1993, pp. 95-97). On the other hand, this one-sidedness also shows the amateurism of many media that wrote about Wicca, which is underscored by the fact that Sanders' name is consistently misspelled as 'Sands.'

The early 1980s also saw the first active Gardnerians in the Netherlands. Although the couple Morgana and Merlin Sythove had had contact with people from the Alexandrian offshoot in the Netherlands, they eventually went their own way. In England, they made contact with a Gardnerian coven where they were to be initiated later. After their return in 1979, they established the first Gardnerian coven of the Netherlands: Silver Circle. With many covens hiving off, Silver Circle became a "true fully-fledged separate line of the Gardnerian tradition … [internationally] referred to as the Andred/Silver Circle line" (Harveston, 2014). All Dutch Gardnerian initiates are part of this lineage.[10]

Over time Silver Circle also became—later exclusively so—an organization showcasing Dutch Wicca in general—and Dutch Gardnerian Wicca in particular—which it is to this day.[11] Open to insiders as well as outsiders, Silver Circle offers a website, had an online discussion board, publishes pocket books, is closely associated with the online-only magazine *Wiccan Rede*, and hosts workshops and social events. Until recently Silver Circle was run by its two founders, Merlin and Morgana Sythove, but three years after Merlin's death in January 2012 the organization was re-established as a foundation.

While Silver Circle was developing their lineage of Gardnerian Wicca in the Netherlands, among the Alexandrians gradually a new branch emerged, which came into its own in the early 1990s: Greencraft (Boris & Bran, 2005, p. 47; De Zutter, 1997, pp. 104-105).[12] The movement was founded by Hera and Arghuicha, who had both been active as Alexandrian Wiccans in the Netherlands for some time. Strictly speaking, Greencraft is an Alexandrian tradition, in that without doing away with the core Alexandrian system, they have come to incorporate an enormous amount of new material in their Celtic brand of Wicca (De Zutter, 1997, pp. 80-81).[13] Over the years, Greencraft has become more and more influential in Flanders, but also its presence in the Netherlands has recently been growing. At the moment Greencraft consists of 20 covens, of which 13 hail from Belgium, five are from the Netherlands, and two are

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[10] Silver Circle therefore acted as one of the two mainstays in my research (see 2.3.1).

[11] That is not to say that Silver Circle was alone in presenting Wicca to the masses. Eclectic strands of Wicca were also popularized by authors like Claudia van der Sluis (2001) and Susan Smit (2001), although their work is not taken seriously by Wiccan insiders.

[12] The religious aspects of the Greencraft tradition are more fully discussed in Chapter 4, *Sticks and Stones*, and in Subsection 5.2.1.

[13] Note, however, that some non-Greencraft Wiccans in my sample do not accept Greencraft as Alexandrian, but rather refer to it in terms like Alexandrian-*based* (for a brief internet discussion, see Lark, 2011). Claims either way are hard to substantiate for a lack of a central leadership in Wicca, but Greencrafters have a point with their lineage reaching back to Alex Sanders.

located in Spain. The number of active Greencrafters has fluctuated around 140-150 the last few years (Lupus, personal communication, 17 March 2015).

To support contact between autonomously operating covens, and between Greencraft and the rest of the world, the leading members of Greencraft founded Greencraft Creations in 2005. The foundation organizes activities and provides information to both insiders and outsiders. However, since most active covens in Belgium either belong to Greencraft, have ties with them, or were formerly associated with them, the foundation de facto functions as the hub of all traditional Wicca in Belgium,[14] even marginalizing the local branch of the Pagan Federation International. This dominance can also explain why Gardnerian Wicca never got a foothold in Belgium.

1.3 Wicca: Symbolism and ritual

Complementary to Section 1.2, which described the history of Wicca, in the present, more explanatory one deals with the most important Wiccan beliefs and practices. These will be revisited in the core chapters of the thesis. In 1.3.1 I will draw a distinction between ethical and existential orientations to make sense of the dual nature of Wicca as both a nature religion and a mystery tradition. The notion of deity, already touched upon in the preceding subsection, will be further explored in 1.3.2, with particular attention to the relationship between deity and the self. Wiccan ritual is briefly discussed in 1.3.3 (on the sabbats) and 1.3.4 (on various other rituals).

1.3.1 The ethical and existential orientation

Deity is a very flexible concept in Wicca. There is no consensus about the ontological status of the divine order. Some Wiccans claim their Gods to be literally existing entities, others see them as impersonal powers, still others as mere symbols, and some even as slumbering intrapsychic potential. Regardless of such pluralism, virtually all Wiccans see the natural world as a manifestation of the creative tension between a male and female principle, who are worshipped as the God and Goddess.[15] Wiccans, then, base their practice on the notion of immanent divinity, which corresponds with pantheism or panentheism.

Apart from these—and often passed over in the literature on the subject—the Wiccan outlook also encompasses elements of panpsychism. One key informant even quoted Spinoza's (1677/1951, P.III, Pro. XIII, schol.) *Omnia, quamvis diversis gradibus, animata tamen sunt* (Everything is animate to some specific degree) with

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[14] Therefore, Greencraft became the second mainstay for my research (see 2.3.1).

[15] Strictly speaking, some Wiccans do accept that the God and Goddess are expressions of an ultimate impersonal divine principle, referred to as (the) Drygthen (for a short discussion see, e.g., Magliocco, 2004, p. 28).

regard to that belief. Related to this panpsychism, but ultimately incompatible with it, is the idea of *anima mundi*—the world soul (see, e.g., Vassányi, 2011, pp. 187-196).

In Wicca assumptions of panpsychism and immanent divinity give rise to both ethical (other-centred) and existential (self-centred) orientations. Daisy, an eclectic Wiccan with inclinations towards shamanism and ceremonial magic, who would go on to have a stint with Gardnerian Wicca, put it thus (q .03):

03 The most important [thing] in my religion is the idea that everything around you is animate, in fact, the basic shamanic idea of stones, flowers, plants—everything is alive. And that's how I feel it: it's a contact that I feel with the things that surround me. To me, everything is [a part of a] web, connected with each other. Action, reaction, things I do have an impact on—well, strands further on in the web. That really is the core of my faith, where Wicca with its seasonal festivals best fits, because it [constitutes] what I see outside, in nature. [On the other hand] at some point you tune in [to it], and find [things], like "Oh yeah, it's the time of year for that particular festival, and I will find the same dynamics in my own life." You'll be more careful with projects you start in the spring. The April showers will pass over them. The last of the frosty cold will pass over them. I am finding that kind of dynamic more and more in my life, the longer I am occupied with [Wicca] (27: 164).

When we look at panpsychism through the lens of Wicca, we see the cosmological order articulated in numerous layers—rocks, plants, animals, humans and supernatural beings. Sympathetic to the anthroposophical idea of the group-soul,[16] many Wiccans assume that contact with the divine realm can be established through interacting with a particular living creature or intermediaries, such as nature spirits. This outlook inspires an *ethical orientation*. Since all is intrinsically linked, Wiccans argue for the importance of maintaining a fairness of exchange between themselves and the cosmos.[17] Such reciprocity is not limited to interactions with animals or plants. We may find narratives of reciprocity in discussions about providing spiritual services for profit, paying the right amount for ritual tools, and defraying the costs of working magic that is believed to be imposed by the cosmos. Being kind to nature means being good to oneself, and vice versa.

In addition—inspired by Jungian thought—many Wiccans understand each layer of the cosmological order to have its own psyche, consisting of the *personal* consciousness of each of its members, their personal *un*consciousness, and their shared *collective* unconsciousness. In this belief system, the Gods are often seen as the archetypes that populate the collective unconsciousness of the human layer. We may couple this understanding to the magical assumption of *spiritual recapitulation*: the notion that higher-order beings are built-up from, and therefore contain, the essences of all lower-order beings.

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[16] See, e.g., Steiner (1907; 1909) for the original use.

[17] An example of such fairness of exchange is the practice around the creation of a ritual wand as provided in 4.4.

The combination of beliefs in a collective unconsciousness and spiritual recapitulation explains the need for Wiccans to also adopt an *existential orientation*. Rather than merely learning to read the book of nature and maintaining an even relationship with the world, nowadays Wiccans are also moved to understand, accept and advance their identities through exploring the spiritual significance of all the elements in the different cosmological layers and their myriad interrelations. In other words: understanding nature means understanding oneself, and vice versa.[18]

1.3.2 The faces of deity

As a consequence of its existential orientation, Wicca is replete with anthropocentric imagery and symbolism. Deities from different pantheons each provide Wiccans with sublimated representations of distinct human activities, traits, abilities, and all the meaningful in nature and the cosmos. Power animals, in turn, encountered in meditation to provide help, affirm the dignity of Wiccans by lending weight to their personal struggles. And then there are trees and semi-precious stones and fairy-folk and ancestors and even angels—each to make contact with or to relate to; to be healed, challenged, or comforted by; and, ultimately, *to understand oneself through.*

The deities also provide façades to the great God and Goddess, embellishing them with the *couleur locale* a specific group desires, or meeting the idiosyncratic needs of a single person. One of my key informants, Janet Farrar, an internationally renowned Wiccan high priestess and author, noted about this (q. 04):

> 04 Everybody's God and everybody's Goddess is different. I mean, in our group we have a priestess of Diana, we have a priestess of Odin, we have a priestess of Hecate, we have a priestess of Brigid, we have a priestess of Bóinn (an Irish river goddess), we have a priestess of Freya. When we work, when we're working as a unit, we just use the term Lord and Lady. But when we're working individually and on our own, we work with our own personal deity. So that means that when they come together as a group, their Lord and their Lady are totally different from my Lord and my Lady (34: 31-70).

Important here is the widely held belief that the specific deities are all aspects of the one Great God and Goddess. With regard to the Goddess, we find references to this in the Deena Metzger-penned *Goddess Chant* in which the names Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, and Inanna are repeated over and over again. Many Wiccans even see the Virgin Mary as a chastised representation of the Great Goddess.

Apart from possible connections between specific guises of the God and Goddess and specific human activities, traits, abilities, and so forth, they can also be projected onto the spokes in the wheel of life. For the God, these are the two phases of the year cycle. The Great God is sometimes represented by two brothers—the Oak King and

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[18] Existential orientation is related to the notion of 'expressive individualism' which is discussed in 3.2. The coupling between religious symbolism and personal identity is the subject of Chapter 7: *Coining Names, Casting Selves.*

the Holly King—who are caught in a perpetual struggle for dominance. During the equinoxes, they lock horns. These fights represent the changes between growth and decay in the year cycle and correspond with the two seasons that the Celts marked.

In contrast to the two aspects of the God, the Goddess has three: Maiden, Mother, and Crone. Together, these are referred to as the triple Goddess to indicate that the Great Goddess is a single entity, even if each of her aspects might be represented by different Goddesses. The depiction of the Goddess in three distinct moments in the life of a woman is relevant for the developmental tasks and challenges that belong to women in each life phase. In *The Witches' Goddess*, a prominent emic source, we find a helpful example that expresses the developmental aspects of each of the manifestations.

> What is the nature of the three aspects that make up the Triple Goddess?
>
> First, the Maid. … She is the adventurous young flame that blows the dust off stale knowledge and gives it new perspectives … She is unselfconsciousness in a mini-skirt—the cosmic pin-up, innocently skyclad (naked) or unapologetically dressed up to the nines as her mysterious fancy takes her. … She is danger if abused; she is joy itself if respected. …
>
> Second the Mother. She is Ripeness; she moulds life within the womb, gives birth to it, nourishes it, teaches it and slaps its bottom when necessary. She is mentally, spiritually, emotionally and physically full-blooded and powerful. … Against any that threatens what she loves, she may seem merciless. … [It is] overall balance that which determine her actions; ephemeral standards of morality or equity, believed eternal by those who hold them, mean nothing to her. …
>
> And lastly, the Crone. She is Wisdom, the Jewelled Hag. She has seen it all; she has compassion for it all, but a compassion undistorted by illusion or sentimentality. Her wisdom is much wider than intellectual knowledge, though it includes intellect and does not despise it. … Like the other two, she is Love, but hers is a calm understanding love, complementing the heady love of the Maid and the incandescent love of the Mother (Farrar & Farrar, 1987, pp. 35-36).

Typically, this passage can be read as a description of each of the aspects of the Goddess, but equally well as a *prescription* for any woman, seeking to style a spiritual self after.[19]

The guises of the Goddess and God I discussed in the above are often depicted in a representational style, reminiscent of graphic novel art (see, e.g., q. 76, in 8.2). However, in a ritual the God and Goddess are often represented in their most abstract form: as a pair of antlers and a sea shell, respectively. This minimalist symbolism goes well with the shift in emphasis: rather than *fashioning* deity, here *enacting* deity is important. An episode in Wiccan ritual called 'drawing down the Moon' is a striking example of this enactment. In it, the Moon, the celestial body associated with the Great Goddess, is 'drawn down' by pointing an athame at it and slowly moving the tip towards the head of the high priestess, who then becomes the vehicle of the Goddess

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[19] The link between deity and the person is further worked out in Chapter 7: *Coining Names, Casting Selves*.

for the duration of the ritual.[20] Aria, the leader of Eburon, the Greencraft coven where I did much of my participatory observation, described her experience of this orchestrated possession as follows (q. 05):

> 05 First, you feel an energy rising from the earth, roughly up to your [solar] plexus (an area near the top of the abdomen) and heart, and [then] you feel something coming down, covering you entirely, like a warm cloak … And you'll [enter] a kind of dream state (17: 221-229).

The quote illustrates the emphasis on religious experiences and seeking out altered states of consciousness in Wicca. The main method of acquiring these is through engagement in the many ceremonies in the ritual year.

1.3.3 The sabbats

The neo-Pagan ritual year consists of eight festivals, Wiccans call *sabbats* (For an overview, see Harvey, 1997, pp. 1-16; Magliocco, 2004, pp. 104-110; for a graphic display, see Figure 2). Four of these are the lesser sabbats, which mark the beginning of each of the four seasons and point to the four cardinal astronomical events of the earth year: the two *equinoxes* (i.e., the two moments when the length of day and night are equal) and the two *solstices* (i.e., the moments of the longest and the shortest day). Some Wiccans, therefore, refer to these events as the *solar cycle* (Merlin Sythove, 1999, p. 44).

   Ostara, associated with 'our' Easter, is traditionally celebrated around[21] the 21st of March, and therefore sometimes referred to as the spring equinox, whereas its counterpart, *Mabon*, a harvest festival, celebrated around the 21st of September, is also known as the autumn equinox. The summer solstice, in turn, is known among some Wiccans as under its Germanic name *Litha*, or simply as Midsummer, and takes places on the longest day of the year, around the 21st June, whereas the also Germanic-derived *Yule*, which, like Christmas, is likely to have developed from a pre-Christian Northern European festival demarcating the coming of a new year, is held around the 21st of December (Hutton, 1996, p. 8).

   The four greater sabbats are each held on or the day before the first of a month: *Imbolc* on the 1st of February, *Beltane* on the 1st of May, *Lammas* (sometimes referred to by its Celtic name *Lughnasadh*) on the 1st of August, and *Samhain* on the 1st of November. In contrast to the lesser, 'solar' sabbats, the greater sabbats are part of the *agricultural cycle*, the dates of which therefore should in principle be prone to differ somewhat, as nature's rhythm depends on climatic quirks. The greater sabbats

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[20] The enactment, experience and manifestation of deity are covered in Chapter 8: *Domesticating the Imagination*. Section 8.3 deals with experiences related to *drawing down the Moon*.

[21] I use 'around' for the dates of the sabbats, because these may differ from year to year. Also, traditions may use slightly different dates, and some groups choose to hold the celebrations in the weekend closest to the actual date for practical reasons.
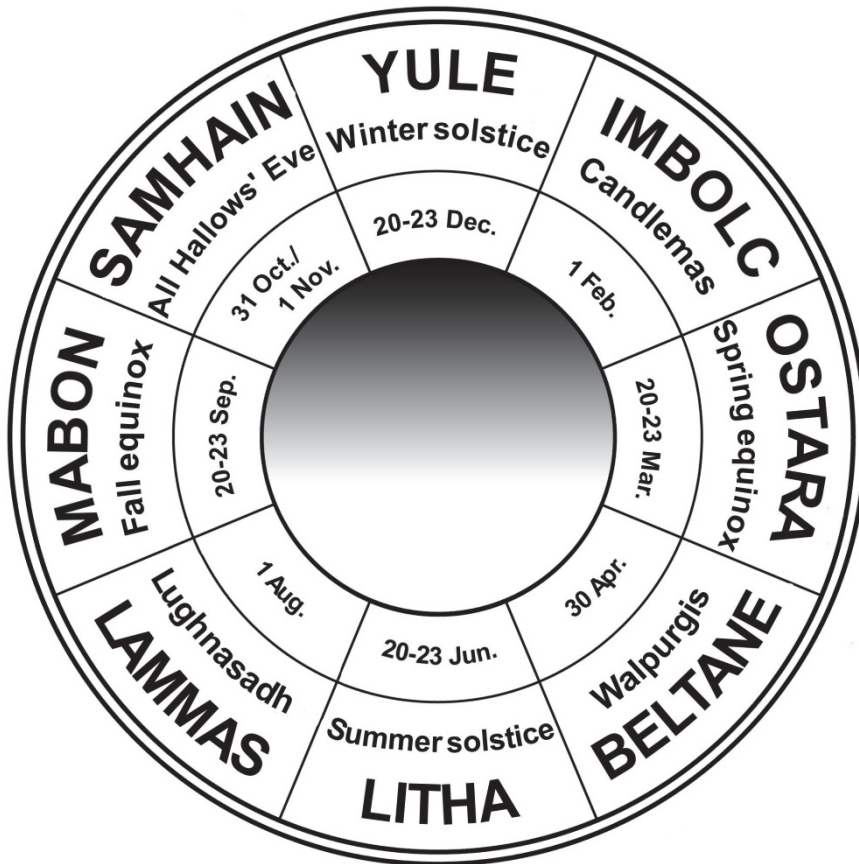
FIGURE 2: *Wheel of the year*
In the circle, the various names of the sabbats and the associated days of the month are displayed.

are seen as primary because their rural nature makes them more closely related to the human life cycle of birth, puberty, marriage, and death (Merlin Sythove, 1999, pp. 44-48). That is, through the celebration of the agricultural and natural life cycle, Wiccans seek metaphors to understand the human and personal life cycle (Bado-Fralick, 2005, p. 34).

This attempt can best be illustrated by two greater sabbats that stand opposite of each other in the Wiccan wheel of life, embodying death and rebirth: Samhain and Beltane. Traditionally, these festivals are seen as liminal periods in the year, referred to by Wiccans as 'in-between times' (Farrar & Farrar, 1981a, p. 92) at which they believe the veil between this world and the Otherworld to be at its thinnest. With Beltane, in which sexuality is central, the Otherworld is thought to manifest itself most likely through the activity of the fairy folk. The ancestors, in turn, are argued to be

most easily contacted at Samhain, which is associated with Death (Magliocco, 2004, p. 133). While on a mythical level, the fairies need to be appeased to prevent mischief and bad luck and the ancestors need to be honoured and remembered, on a personal or social level, the festivals represent extroversive and introversive extremities.

Beltane is a joyful and carnivalesque occasion—a feast of fertility; Samhain is a solemn, dark, subdued and grave matter. On an individual level, the atmosphere of Beltane smacks of the rapturous uncertainty of embarking on new endeavours, and the impregnation of one's future, very much representable by the errant fairy folk. Samhain, in contrast, entails grounding oneself in one's past, perhaps finally seeking to release clung-to habits of yesteryear, or, in contrast, making amends to an unacknowledged old aspect of one's identity. In each instance, a remembered ancestor may mediate between these past selves and future selves.[22]

1.3.4 Other rituals

Apart from the *solar cycle* of sabbats, Wiccans also celebrate the *lunar cycle* of full moons. These gatherings are called *esbats* and offer an opportunity for magical practice, experimentation, and feasting.[23] The esbats are each named after one of the thirteen full moons in the year. Nevill Drury (2009, pp. 63, n. 209) offers a brief overview of these moons, from which I will quote two examples.

> The first esbat occurs in October just before the festival of Samhain … and is known as *Blood Moon*. It is traditionally associated with the slaughter of animals for food prior to the onset of winter and is therefore represented by the colour red. … *Oak Moon* is the full moon in December. It is linked to the colour black and also to the oak, sacred symbol of the Dark Lord aspect of Cernunnos, since it is his wood which is burnt at Yule.

The sabbats and esbats make up the recurrent rituals of Wicca. There is, however, a host of sporadic rituals. Of particular importance are the initiations that are mostly observed by the more traditional branches. Since these understand Wicca to be a secretive practice, aspirant members have to undergo a laborious training program, gradually obtaining the knowledge and experience required to warrant a first-degree initiation. Apart from these principally measurable qualities, also a judgement of character is weighted in by the coven leaders before deciding a candidate is ready or even suitable.

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[22] This obvious coupling of the ritual year to the personal life cycle can also be found in Greencraft's tree calendar, which is discussed in Section 4.3 and Subsection 5.2.1. For the mediation between past and future selves, see also 7.1.

[23] Although apparently esbats would have been very interesting occasions for fieldwork on religious creativity, I had no access to them. For ethical reasons, I chose not become initiated into the inner court (i.e., first grade and up) of the coven I was active in during my participatory observation, and such initiation is required for partaking in the esbats. Therefore, these are not discussed any further in this thesis. I have, however, most courteously been provided with some material that was either devised or tested in various esbats (see, e.g., the *Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain* as discussed in 8.7).

Upon initiation, new coven members have conferred upon them the title of priest or priestess. Depending on the tradition, they become high priest and high priestess after their second initiation or third initiation. In most branches, they only gain the right to 'hive off' from their mother coven to form their own when they get their third-degree initiation. Some traditions, like Greencraft, have four levels: apart from the three degrees they also have the lower rank of 'neophyte,' who is initiated as such after completing a basic course of Greencraft Wicca. The initiation ritual has been published in detail by the Flemish journalist Jan de Zutter (2003, pp. 127-131; see also 4.2).

Over the years, some other rites have become included in Wicca: *wiccanings*, ceremonies to welcome a newborn or child in the spiritual community and invoke the divine protection (Farrar & Farrar, 1981a, pp. 153-159); *handfastings*, Wiccan marriages, of which the oaths taken depend on the couple, but of which some Wiccans also claim it would bind the couple for at least a year and a day (for a discussion see, e.g., Farrar, 1991, pp. 161-164); and Wiccan *funerals*.

Ritual, then, is the primal means of religious expression in Wicca. Considering the sabbats and esbats that count for 21 rituals per calendar year, all these initiations, rites of passage, and perhaps the occasional open ritual make Wicca a very ritualistic—and demanding—religion. The very self-conscious way in which many Wiccans deal with ritual, further adds to this picture, "Let's do a ritual about it," might be a Wiccan catch phrase. Many emic publications, then—not surprisingly tilting heavily towards eclectic Wicca and general neo-Paganism—deal with the creation of new rituals, not only discussing their rationale and design but also addressing practical issues (see, e.g., Bonewits, 2007; Restall Orr, 2000; Zell-Ravenheart & Zell-Ravenheart, 2006).

1.4 Creativity

From its eclectic start, through its penchant for ritual, the prominence of the expressive individual in it, its emphasis on experientiality, and because of its openness to change, Wicca represents an excellent case to study religious dynamics. Although concepts like 'ritual creativity' and 'religious renewal' have been in vogue in religious studies for a few years now, the use of the key term 'creativity' has hardly been informed by the fairly large body of psychological literature on the topic. To maximize theory development and to aim for an integrative approach between the humanities and social sciences, I will discuss the notion of creativity in some detail, briefly outlining the relevance of each of its aspects for processes of religious change and renewal in general. In Subsection 1.4.1 I will give a historical overview of the development of the concept, leading up to a definition. I then proceed (in 1.4.2 and 1.4.3) to discuss two system approaches to creativity, that can explain the phenomenon in its sociocultural context. These approaches are then critically assessed (in 1.4.4), and

will eventually be complemented and corrected by incorporating the notion of experiential creativity (in 1.4.5).

1.4.1 An overview

The concept of creativity has a long history. Starting with the ancient Greeks and their ideas of a personal *daemon* who aided inspiration, supernatural explanations have long been the hallmark of understandings of creativity. While shifting attention from the personal to the social aspects of creativity, after the rise of Christianity people still clung to the idea of a divine basis for all creative acts. Moreover, the dogma of creationism implied that creative deeds of man were merely acts of discovery that attested to the glory of God. While due to the rise of scientific and scholarly enquiry supernatural interpretations of creativity were eventually replaced by naturalistic ones, the mechanistic outlook kept the emphasis on discovery rather than on the generation of novelty (Albert & Runco, 1999). Only after the advent of romanticism, when the person became central to theory and speculation, a well-rounded but still *scientific* concept of creativity could emerge.

One recurring classification of modern research of creativity is dividing the phenomenon and its studies into in the aspects *Person*, *Process*, *Press* and *Product*: the so-called *four P's of creativity* (Rhodes, 1987; Runco, 2004). 'Person' refers to creative people and their personality, skills, habits, temperament, background and so forth. 'Process' relates to the question of motivation, action, and cognition. How does the creative product come about? A notable early process model is the *stage theory* of Graham Wallas (1926, in Gilhooly, 1996, pp. 219-221), who distinguished between preparation, incubation, illumination and verification as the consecutive parts of a creative endeavour. 'Press' describes the pressures of the relationship between creative people and their environment, and how these influence the creative process. Sometimes 'press' is divided into objective—real—and subjective—perceived or interpreted—forms. 'Product,' the last *P*, is the tangible outcome of a novel idea, anything like a painting, symbol, string of words, object, device, ritual, procedure, and so forth.

But apart from its aspects, what *is* creativity? Although novelty is a core feature of creativity in areas as far apart as art and technology, in itself, it is not sufficient to classify any addition to an existing body of work as truly *creative*. Both originality *and* usefulness determine if the label creativity will be granted—a duality on which most researchers agree (see, e.g., Gaut, 2003; Cropley, 1999; Mayer, 1999; Sternberg & Lubart, 1999). These criteria—which, very importantly, may be at odds with each other—assume a social level to creativity. Critical acclaim by the gatekeepers of a community might be needed for any idea to be judged as creative to begin with (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, pp. 43-44).[24] The social context also provides peers, com-

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[24] The tension between these criteria is the subject of Chapter 3: *The Pagan Parallax*. There, they are played out as arguments in the discussion between traditional and eclectic Wiccans. In Chapter 4, *Sticks and Stones*, I show that the tension can also exist *within* a group—Greencraft—even if they have partially resolved it by downplaying the need for authenticity.

petitors, and supporters. On what basis would they judge creative efforts? And—to ask an even more pertinent question—how would a creator bring about novelty? The answer to both questions can be found in the cultural context: *through the sharing of meanings*. These not only inform critical analysis but also sustain techniques to generate novelty and add to the symbolical repertoire that provides building material for the creator. The complexities that come with the numerous interactions between creators, the social world, and the cultural context require an approach to creativity as a system. The dynamics of that system is what I henceforth will call the *creative process*, in contrast to its original use as a series of mental activities.

In the psychological literature on creativity, two systems approaches dominate: the *systems perspective* of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi[25] (1996, 1999; Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, & Gardner, 1994), and the *evolving systems approach* of the late Howard Gruber (see, e.g., Gruber & Wallace, 1999). Each has valuable elements for the interpretation of data on religious creativity and change in the context of a new religious movement. I will discuss Csikszentmihalyi's contribution first (in 1.4.2) since it is based on the three contexts of creativity I mentioned. Gruber's work (treated in 1.4.3), in turn, provides further details for each of the contexts and draws attention to a crucial, but as yet missing, element of creativity.

1.4.2 Csikszentmihalyi's systems perspective

The Hungarian-American psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi developed a tripartite model of the creative process, consisting of the subsystems *person, domain*, and *field* (see Figure 3). Although he ultimately sought to explore creativity with a big *C*, i.e., as "a process by which a symbolic domain in the culture is changed" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 8), the general properties of his model make it compatible with my more modest interpretation of the term. Csikszentmihalyi understands its three elements as follows.

Individuals (or '*persons*') generate creativity and insights in their development and personality may offer knowledge about how they got the potential to become creators (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, pp. 327-332). The characteristics of the successful, gifted individual have received a great deal of attention throughout the history of creativity research. Perhaps, therefore, Csikszentmihalyi has not offered anything new to the understanding of the individual. When contextualizing the person, he merely draws a distinction between personality traits and personal history (in Figure 3 both subsumed under 'background'). He leaves open how personal backgrounds regarding things like cultural capital, wealth, opportunities are all accumulations derive from the contexts of other two subsystems: society (for the field) and culture (for the domain).

This observation shows the underlying dynamics of Csikszentmihalyi's model as well as its stretchable timescale. To relate the element of the person to religion: one

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[25] Pronounced as 'chick-sent-me-high-ee.'
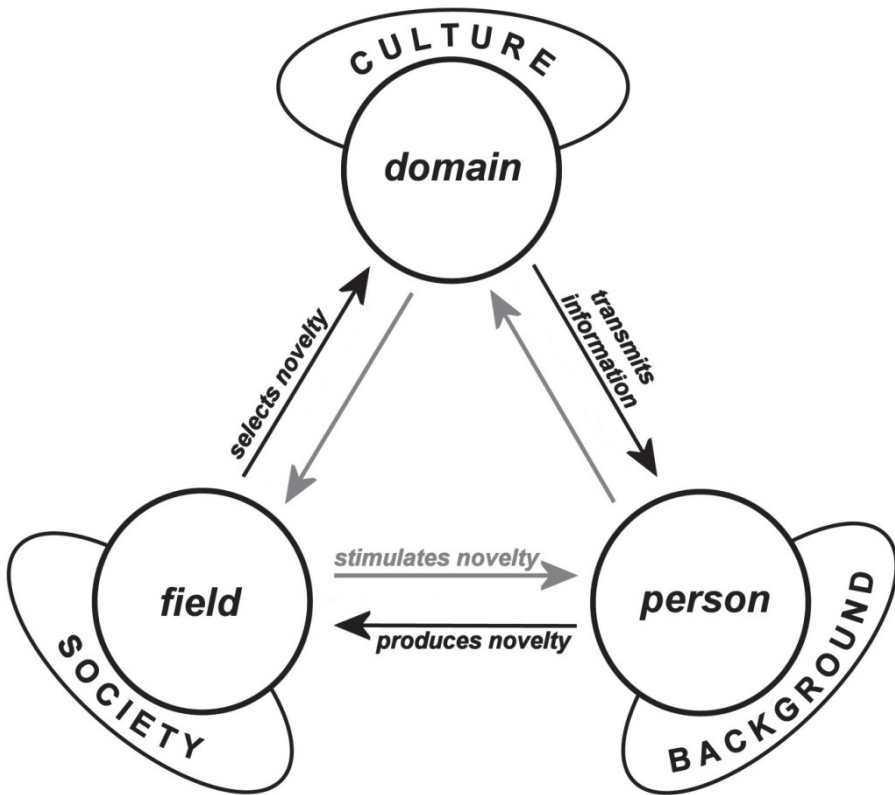
FIGURE 3: *Csikszentmihalyi's systems model*
The systems model of creativity consists of three mutually interacting components. The original system emphasizes the impact of person on field, field on domain, and domain on person, to the relative neglect of the opposite directions.

can easily envision a ritual routine as part of someone's background, if we diminish the scale to a few years, rather than, for instance, a generation. Mere exposure to religious symbols and sufficient repetition of similar ritual forms, then, might contribute to an internalized repertoire of a practitioner, and as such have an impact on a creative process. In such a time frame, personality factors could shrink to motivations and episodic states of personal development.

Apart from the person, we need to understand that creativity unavoidably takes place in a specific *domain*, a configuration which consists of tacit and explicit regulations, tastes, interests, techniques, styles, and so forth. The elements of the domain are essentially wrought in the idiom of a generative system of rules (e.g., mathematical rules, grammatical rules, musicological rules, ritual rules) from which new structures emerge (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, pp. 316-321). In the sense that Csikszentmihalyi uses the term, culture can be seen as an interrelated system of domains, e.g.,

those of particular religions, the cuisine, rules of kinship, specific technologies, and so forth (p. 317). Clearly with creativity with a big *C* in mind, he offers examples about how academic and technological breakthroughs of a person, after having been accepted by the field, change domains entirely. For everyday creativity, the domain is a given, and only changes autonomously.

Domains can either sustain or repress creativity. Relevant to their impact on creative output are the clarity of structure within the domain, the centrality of the domain in the culture of which it is a part, and the accessibility of the domain to any one individual. These relationships exist regardless of scale, but a smaller time frame could reveal how, in contrast to Csikszentmihalyi's contention, how modest, but repetitive creative efforts by people may eventually come to affect a domain. In the context of religious renewal things like routinization of ritual and an apprenticeship during novicehood could contribute to an increased quality of creative output and impact on the domain.[26] In contrast, secrecy, lack of a coherent symbolism, and so forth, would, on the whole, be detrimental.[27]

The third aspect of Csikszentmihalyi's theory is the *field*. The field refers to the gatekeepers of the domain: peers, critics, teachers, the elite, and so forth. The inclusion of the field in the systems view of creativity is in agreement with the basic premise that 'true' creativity needs to be acknowledged as such by the community. Just as with the domain, the field has an impact on the rate of creativity. First, a field is either proactive or reactive with regard to renewal (i.e., what is its openness to creative input?). Second, a field may either employ a narrow or broad filter when selecting novel input (i.e., how many new ideas are accepted in the canon, and on the basis of what criteria?). Third, pertaining to the relationship between the field and the domain, the position of the field in the social system at large determines the extent the field can support creative development (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, pp. 43-44). In Wicca, the field consists of each of its branches, its writers, its coven leaders, but also each peer any creative participant might encounter.

All in all, Csikszentmihalyi's system perspective is a useful framework for the conceptualization of religious creativity and change. Its general, perhaps even sketchy, character makes it easy to adapt to different contexts. However, even if it is on the whole compatible to my purpose, the model falls short in two respects.

First, Csikszentmihalyi's model ultimately deals with successful creative products and is therefore lacking in its treatment of the development of intermediary products. The domain is a given; even if it is an accumulation of creative efforts in itself, incremental advancements and internal heterogeneity are hard to fit in—something that is, in turn, especially apparent in the subsystem of the field. Csikszentmihalyi draws a sharp distinction between the gatekeepers and society as a whole but passes over

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[26] This theme is taken up in Chapter 8, *Domesticating the Imagination*, especially in 8.5.

[27] The precarious role of secrecy for religious creativity is discussed in Chapter 6: *Secrecy and Ritual Hygiene.*

the fact that there might be more layers between the two. Also, not all gatekeepers may think alike, as I will argue in 1.4.4.

Second, formulated in terms of structures, the model fails to capture the dynamics of the creative process and change. Csikszentmihalyi devotes considerable attention to the three subsystems, but he discusses the interaction-indicating arrows only very briefly. This neglect is even more striking, because he changed the one-way arrows that moved from person to field, from field to domain, and from domain back to person (as shown in Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi and Gardner (1994, p. 21) to bidirectional arrows between each subsystem (in Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 315). However, he did not explain how he envisioned that the person would influence the domain, or how the domain would impact on the field. Perhaps hidden compatibilities with Gruber's more particularized model can be used to improve a systems approach to religious creativity.

1.4.3 Gruber's evolving system approach

Where Csikszentmihalyi argues that one needs to understand the outcome of creative efforts on a grand scale first, Howard Gruber's (1999) approach seems to be the opposite: creativity is to be assessed by tapping into the growth process of ideas in the individual. His approach is played out in cognitive case studies of high-profile creative people. Starting with his work on the creative development of Darwin,[28] Gruber's approach—or perhaps rather *method*—yielded a host of case studies by others on both scientists and artists (see Wallace & Gruber, 1989).

Gruber makes the classic distinction between cognitions, motivations, and emotions to understand the creative process. These levels of analysis require the addition of two criteria to the definition of creative work: Gruber and Wallace (1999, p. 94) supplement novelty and usefulness with purpose and duration. That is, creative work is the result of intentional behaviour, and 'true' creativity, carried out as hard tasks, takes considerable time. Gruber's work, then, seemingly deals with the person/personal background subsystem. Yet, his highly detailed method also exhibits a sensitivity to interactions between the subsystems of domain and person. From the looks of it, Gruber's approach delivers where Csikszentmihalyi's does not: Gruber takes the incremental advancements and the intermediate products into account.

Generalizing from his research, Gruber was able to formulate nine facets that, he argued, make up the creative enterprise (Gruber & Wallace, 1999, p. 100-110). I will limit myself to the explanations of those that are relevant either directly or indirectly for my present purposes.

Evolving *systems of belief*, for instance, have an impact on the creative process. In an archival study, one would be able to retrace the developmental path of a person's thinking. Questions like "What beliefs had been there from the beginning?" or "How did the beliefs change over time?" could be answered by analysing sequential records

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[28] For an overview on this series of studies, see Gruber and Bödeker (2005, pp. 105-166).

of mental activity like diaries, logs, and so forth. Obviously, this facet could be transformed to include groups to hold records about recurrent rituals or iterative aspects that most rituals share (see, e.g., Gründer, 2010, pp. 150-168). In Csikszentmihalyi's model, this exercise would amount to comparing the states of the person subsystem at different times.

The facet *modalities of thought* refers to (1) the way knowledge is internally processed in modalities of perception, such as visual thinking through images, numbers, words, or perhaps even auditory, like sounds; and (2) how these thoughts are conceptualized and communicated through the use of metaphor. While 'inner perception' has a clear relationship with religious experiences,[29] metaphors are often the mainstay of the interpretations of such episodes. Eventually, Gruber devised the idea of the 'ensemble of metaphors' denoting how "all the metaphors in a given text [can be examined] and try to express how, taken together, they represent a field of meaning" (Gruber & Wallace, 1999, pp. 103-104).

At first sight, the *ensemble of metaphors* is hard to fit into Csikszentmihalyi's model. Yet, if we see metaphors as purposely built 'mind tools' that are self-consciously used by the people observed in the model, we can add them to the Csikszentmihalyian domain. In the case of my research, this may be the intentionally built symbolical canon of a particular tradition, like the totality of deities, power animals, or tutelary spirits I mentioned in the case description of Abigail's labyrinth (see 1.1.1). Gruber, however, referred primarily to provisional—perhaps even latent—resources of thought that help to carry out the creative work (Gruber & Bödeker, 2005, pp. 232-233). This second understanding relies on a larger timescale where internalized elements from the domain have become part of the background of the individual in terms of Csikszentmihalyi's model.

Where modalities of thought represent the mind tools of creators, *networks of enterprise* can be considered their 'external' counterparts and therefore can be easily equated with aspects of a Csikszentmihalyian domain. That is to say, an enterprise is an organizational habitus, and as such provides a structure for action. In Gruber's understanding of the term, an enterprise is "an enduring group of related activities aimed at producing a series of kindred products" (Gruber & Wallace, 1999, p. 105). If one interprets 'kindred products' as 'similar outcomes,' this facet can be seen as the means to sustain recurring ritual activity and upholding standards of practice and belief through training. Moving closer to the notion of the ensemble of metaphors— Gruber's rather vague descriptions warrant such liberty—a network of enterprise might also be envisioned as the totality of activities and techniques as related to a specific religious system. An example of such a socialization are the initiations that follow prolonged periods of dedicated learning and practising to master the know-

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[29] See, e.g., Section 8.2 on autonomous imagination.

ledge and uses of the Wiccan cosmology and develop a priestly mindset, as I discussed in Subsection 1.3.4.[30]

The last two relevant facets are *contextual frames* and *values*. The inclusion of 'contextual frames' can be read as an attempt to meet with Csikszentmihalyi's critique of the lack of context in Gruber's work (Gruber & Wallace, 1999, pp. 98-99, 109-110). The facet of values, in turn, refers to affects, aesthetics, and morality—all personal motivators to bridge the gap between the real and the ideal. These aspects have not been worked out well in Csikszentmihalyi's model but are merely assumed in the impact of the subsystem of the person on the domain and the field. Admitting negligence on his own part as well, Gruber asserts that these issues ought to play a more central role in creativity research.

Following suit, and still with an eye to developing an alternative interpretation of Csikszentmihalyi's model, I have included affects and aesthetics as creative factors in my analysis of Wicca; together with morality, which speaks for itself, they can be observed throughout the presentation of my fieldwork. A last, but pervasive issue that needs to be resolved before I can frame my research questions, is the implication that comes with the elitist rendition of personal creativity as featured in both Csikszentmihalyi's and Gruber's approaches.

1.4.4 What is 'true' creativity?

A truly dynamic understanding of the creative process requires an analysis of the modest changes that take place in a creative enterprise, and what these mean for each person involved. A sound systems approach to creativity should cater for those needs, but both Csikszentmihalyi and Gruber insist on a very narrow definition of 'true' creativity. Remarkably, they base this definition on the gatekeepers in the field, yet pass off that rendition as scientific fare. The pragmatism of the definition does not sit well with its essentialist use. Where Csikszentmihalyi mixes up personal with collective novelty and usefulness, Gruber mistakenly asserts that he is reading creativity forward. That is, although he identifies the seeds of a new idea, analyses their development, and discovers how they eventually come to bear fruits themselves, he does so with prior knowledge of what are to become successful, 'truly' creative endeavours.[31]

Social anthropologists Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam (2007, p. 2) frown at the idea of a polarity between novelty and convention, and hence reject the distinction

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[30] Smaller scale examples of networks of enterprise are Greencraft's rendition of the Kabbalistic tree of life and their employment of Robert Graves' Celtic tree calendar, discussed in Section 4.3.

[31] There might be a practical reason for limiting himself to gifted people: their cases are easier to reconstruct, because these people's efforts are better documented, or otherwise have left useful traces of their creative efforts. It would be misleading, however, to claim any insight in how processes of 'genuine' creativity are different from those of 'average' creativity for the simple reason that the latter have not been researched. In fact, case studies of 'average' creativity are rare. The book *Everyday Creativity*, edited by Ruth Richards (2007), offers an overview of rare examples.

between—what they call—innovation and improvisation. The former, used by Csikszentmihalyi and Gruber, is sometimes labelled 'genuine' creativity (see, e.g., Boden, 1994, p. 78). In her rendering of the term, it is not the generation of new forms within a system of rules that is labelled creative, but the overcoming of the rules themselves. Thinking out of the box is presented like an all-or-nothing phenomenon. Ingold and Hallam (2007, p. 2), in contrast, hold that "[people] are compelled to improvise, not because they are operating *on the inside* of an established body of convention, but because no system of codes, rules, and norms can anticipate every possible circumstance." They imply that such a system emerges from the social interactions and improvisations, so it would be meaningless to talk about a priorly known symbolical domain. I briefly touched on the issue of a gradually changing domain when I discussed Csikszentmihalyi's perspective.

But there is more. Apart from the potential impact of the person on the domain that becomes visible when one changes the time scale, culture and society may be more heterogeneous than the model assumes. There might be different domains that compete for the same niche or that are alternative means to a single end. In a religious landscape scattered by small enterprises that each developed its own tools of the trade, creators might select the ones that best fit their needs, leading to the 'spiritual supermarket' whereas the creator would be forced to work with any material that is available without such competition. Creative people, in turn, may have disparate motives, conflicting social relationships, or opposing sides to their personality, that each may leave its mark on any creative venture.[32] In contrast, religious practices might be developed to harmonize inner tensions by finding a way to meaningfully relate them to each other, as I illustrated with Abigail's labyrinth (see 1.1.1).

The heterogeneity of the domain hints at similar issues in the subsystems of the field and the person. To start with the former: do all the gatekeepers think alike? A creative effort might mean different things to different people. Gatekeepers might have conflicting opinions. Also, an uneven distribution of knowledge combined with an even distribution of power may thwart a proper assessment of 'true' creativity.[33] In a democratic field even creators themselves might have a word on their creative output; there contexts of discovery and contexts of justification start to overlap. Returning to my object of study, any novel way to come into contact with the divine might be considered creative because of the self-validating quality of any resulting mystical experiences, and, in effect, their interpretations (see also 8.2).

The problems with the restrictive definition of 'true' creativity are the most troublesome in connection with the person. One need to ask: what is novel and what is

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[32] Chapter 7, *Coining Names, Casting Selves*, offers a remarkable example of how conflicting elements may come to serve the development of a new spiritual identity. Creativity plays an implicit role there, and is seen as the outcome of a long process of negotiating meanings and associations between Wiccan symbols and one's self-understanding.

[33] In 3.3 and 3.4 I discuss some problems with the proper assessment of creativity by the traditionalist gatekeepers of Wicca for a lack of understanding of the motives of eclectic Wiccans.

useful to whom, and how do the answers to these questions change over time? What is the real to whom, and what is the ideal? Mere social acceptance, then, whether on the grounds of novelty or utility may be extrinsic to the base value of a creative act. A creative 'product' may be of sole use to its originator, and only later—if at all—prove its value to others. In addition, what counts as novel differs from person to person, and there is no psychological reason to abandon the idea of novelty when there is proof that some solution, invention, idea, or any other thinkable 'product' has been created by a person who has no knowledge of prior instances leading to the same outcome. In the literature this type of creativity is labelled *P-creativity* (*P* for 'psychological'), to distinguish it from *H-creativity* (*H* for 'historical') in which an idea has arisen for the first time in history (Boden, 1994, pp. 76-77).[34] Personal utility and novelty, however, hints at another important aspect of creativity that I have not yet discussed: *exploratory creativity*—an aspect that needs a place in what is to become my adapted systems model as well.

1.4.5 Imagination and improvisation

In their capacity as explorers, creators see creativity as a journey, not a destination; that is to say, their efforts and not their outputs are paramount. The smallest units of observation in the creative process, then, are *actions*, rather than ideas. While goal-oriented creativity has its four *P*'s, exploratory creativity boasts its two *I*'s: *Imagination* and *Improvisation*.[35] Imagination and improvisation roughly coincide with receptive, or inner, and active, or outer, creativity, respectively. Since both are central to Wicca, and with both actions potentially overlapping, perhaps the best single term for this kind of creativity would be *experiential creativity*.

The first *I* of experiential creativity—that of *imagination and fantasy*—requires receptivity and comes with passive, often internalized or internalizing actions: the creator 'undergoes' creativity, as it were.[36] In its most modest sense, receptive creativity is like divergent thinking—a playful cognitive style that makes it possible for people to easily see commonalities between objects that seem very dissimilar or that can generate associative chains that help them integrate their knowledge and find novel ways of dealing with problems (Gilhooly, 1996, pp. 194-244). Still, there is more to imagination and fantasy than mere association: these activities may be employed to relate to reality symbolically (Wartofsky, 1979, pp. 188-210), and thus form the basis of culture.

Along these lines is the work of the Dutch-American psychoanalyst Paul Pruyser who examined the relationship between imagination and religion. Following Donald Winnicott (1971), Pruyser (1983, pp. 64-67) distinguishes between three 'worlds' or

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[34] Cf. Piaget's notion of functional correspondence, as discussed in Gruber & Bödeker (2005, p. 10).

[35] See, e.g., Ward, Smith & Finke (1999, p. 207) for a distinction between goal-oriented and exploratory creativity.

[36] I have discussed this at some length in 8.1. See also, e.g., Beaney (2005) and Singer (1999).

'spheres' of human psychological functioning. In the *autistic* world, one finds the incommunicable, untutored, dreamlike and lust-driven fantasies and urges. The features of its opposite, the *realistic* world, are, in principle, there for all to see: sensory data, facts, artefacts,[37] people, events and so forth. Different to the autistic inner world, this world is tangible and all-encompassing in its physicality. Between these two extremes, Pruyser suggested a third sphere: the *illusionistic*—or, in Winnicott's words, *transitional*—world. Here one finds products of the creative imagination, powered by the internal drive of the person, but wrought in the symbols shared by the culture, to make sense of the external world of fact. Pruyser sums up:

> Between the 'wild,' subjective fantasy of dreams or autistic reverie and the clarity and objectivity of sense perception lies another kind of fantasy that might be called tutored. The moment a [person] is told a fairy tale, a myth, a religious story, or is shown a work of art, he is made to share in a collective form of imagination that has a respectable lineage and formal status. These tutored fantasies are not at all ineffable—they are talked about and written about in words and concepts that have proven eminently communicable among members of a culture. … Between utter whimsicality and the hard facts of reality there is room and opportunity for the orderly imagination that has produced novels, poetry, theological and philosophical propositions, musical compositions, choreographic works, and scientific models. … Between the ineffable images of the deepest strata of private thought and the look-and-see referents of reality testing, there is a great historical collection of perfectly circumscribable and culturally transmitted images … documented by a virtual library of works on symbols, signs, and emblems … Between hallucinations and actual entities or events—the plastic arts, operas, liturgical acts, dances with masks impersonating historical or fictional figures, musical performances, all testifying to a rich cultural inheritance (Pruyser, 1983, pp. 66-67).

Like Csikszentmihalyi, Pruyser implies that the meaningfulness of creativity relies on the common language among creators and between them and the gatekeepers. In contrast to Csikszentmihalyi, however, Pruyser emphasizes how the domain helps to inform the field, rather than the field guarding entry to the domain. In addition, Pruyser implies the shared language of creators and gatekeepers is formed by universal human needs, or even by the ways these can become expressed by various cultural means. The transitional sphere also allows for the *enactment* of shared symbols. To this end, it requires real-world places to be arranged as stages with requisites for a serious game of make-believe (Gilhooly, 1996, pp. 194-212). Rituals are the most obvious examples of these as-if enactments (see, e.g., Seligman, Weller, Puett, & Simon, 2008). In them, people may engage in activities such as playing out a particular myth, re-assert the order of the cosmos, or ceremonially merge their lives with the religious world. Although each time aided by their imagination, ritual participation first and foremost requires an active stance.

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[37] With the term 'artefact' I denote anything man-made, including non-physical things like ideas, procedures and concepts. This broad understanding of the term also allows for its traditional meaning of an unintended by-product.

These activities bring me to the second *I* of experiential creativity: creators may induce novelty through *improvisation*. Although some rituals constitute ecstatic techniques in themselves or instil aesthetic value through their performance (Van Gulik, 2011b), improvisation may be found both in participating in these ceremonies and in their construction. Ronald Grimes (2000, pp. 12-13) has described two socially sanctioned roles to fit these purposes.

Ritual diviners improvise performatively and allow creativity to flow inside a ritual by undergoing spontaneous irruptions of religious experiences and gleaning emergent meanings to contrive new vistas and understandings of the sacred, while also facilitating 'charismatic' experiences and spontaneous actions in others.[38] In contrast, often, but certainly not exclusively outside ritual space, we find improvisatory creativity in the work of the so-called *ritual plumbers*. Their improvisation is primarily practical: issues of ritual preparation are dealt with, rituals that no longer work are 'repaired,' and new rituals are devised when the need arises. Grimes' performative dichotomy is useful for three reasons: (1) it shows how maintenance and renewal may go hand in hand; (2) it demonstrates how 'exploratory' and 'goal-oriented' impulses of renewal may overlap in improvisation; and (3) it indicates that groups rather than individuals can claim authorship of creativity in rituals.

In its most modest sense, 'improvisation' simply refers to those instances of creative efforts that lack preparation. Indeed, Ingold and Hallam (2007, pp. 1-3) go as far as to say that creativity *equals* improvisation. They argue that as "there is no script for social and cultural life, people have to work it out as they go along" (p. 1). Thus understood, improvisation leaves specific outcomes unforeseeable, even if exploration itself is the common goal, one has a clear intention, the required tools, and the competence to this end.

I would argue that such contingency may have to do with things like the *simultaneity* of input (i.e., the co-creation of ritual through the contribution of others), the *transformation* of representations to presentations (i.e., turning a thoughts into objects), the *chaining* of unforeseen consecutive choices that come with prolonged creative endeavours (e.g., when each step towards a goal introduces new requirements), or the *performative* character of some creative efforts (e.g., dancing, demonstrating, telling stories, and the like).[39] The unpredictability of these aspects, not to mention their interaction, shows how each creative process will develop its own dynamics.

Taking stock of the gradual revision of Csikszentmihalyi's systems perspective to creativity, I found that the triad of domain, field and person in the model, augmented by facets from Gruber's evolving systems approach, comprises a sufficient basis of the *structure* of contextualized creativity to work with in my study. However, the model also needs to include a proper coverage of the creative *process*, by looking at aspects

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[38] For an in-depth discussion of the creative aspects of charisma, see, e.g., Csordas (1997). In relation to Wicca, the notion is explored in 8.4.

[39] Some examples of performative creativity can be found in Chapter 5, *Scholar versus Pagan*, mostly in 5.2.2.

such as the interactions between each subsystem, to the addition of techniques for the perpetuation and renewal of the religious system, and it needs to attend to factors like motivation, aesthetics, and morality. By emphasizing action over ideas and incorporating the concept of exploratory creativity, I also integrated all these aspects of the creative process into what I will henceforth call the *adapted systems model*. I will use that model as a set of guiding principles throughout the thesis to label, describe, and make sense of my findings.

1.5 Objectives

With Wicca discussed and the notion of creativity explored and assessed, the time has come to set out the aims and phrase the research questions in this study. Also, I will offer an overview of the thesis (in 1.5.2).

1.5.1 Research questions

The general aim of this thesis is to contribute to a cultural psychological understanding of religious dynamics. I have done so by seeking to answer the main question of this project: *How does religious creativity work in Wicca?* With an eye to my employment of grounded theory (see 2.4.1), I have broken down this primary question to two secondary questions, using the adapted systems model as a heuristic device to help pinpoint the elements where instances of creativity can be observed.[40]

My first secondary question is: *What are the contents and structures of the sub-systems of the domain, the field, and the person with regard to religious creativity in Wicca?* Grounded theory, however, cannot be completed by answering a mostly descriptive question, so I formulated another—more explanatory—secondary question, aimed at constructing formal theory (see 2.4.4) and dealing with the shortcomings I observed in the systems approaches: *Through what processes do these sub-systems of religious creativity interact in the Wiccan context?*

Both questions had their contributories (i.e., modest operational questions that lead up to the answers of the secondary ones). Throughout the fieldwork, contributory questions emerged and were subsequently answered, further determining the final scope of the study. Obviously, some of the contributories were purely observational: e.g., "What are the sources of creativity?"; "What does it look like in the religious context?"; and "What impact does it have on the religious system?" Faithful to the nature of the grounded theory, its contributory questions mostly pertained to *processes* (Hood, 2007, p. 155): e.g., "How is creativity invoked?"; "How is it valued?"; and "How does it take its particular forms?" In addition, I have explored the 'lived' aspect

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[40] Boeije (2005, pp. 41-44) and Charmaz (2008, p. 85) both argue that grounded theory requires the specification of an originally broad question, e.g., through the use of sensitizing concepts (see also 2.4.1).

of Wicca by engaging in interpretive phenomenological analysis, answering questions about the aesthetics and meanings of religious experiences.

From these last questions and the narratives about lived religion, a *subsidiary* question emerged —a corollary to the main question and therefore to be discussed as an afterthought.[41] This question, "*What is the relationship between religious creativity in Wicca and religious change?*" is pertinent, not only because it denotes the boundary between theory and practice, but also because it is aimed at understanding religious dynamics. That is, it helps to pinpoint how religious change comes about. Change is an elusive concept—its direct observation requiring a longitudinal research design and causal relationships proving hard to find—with a systems approach and a firm grasp of the role of the individual, I can assess the motives, potency and conditions of change and identify the efforts of the Wiccan movement to change itself. Also, creativity and cultural evolution seem to go hand in hand as contributors to change, since creativity may evoke non-intended results and byproducts, and cultural evolution, in turn, may either help or hinder future creative efforts.[42]

1.5.2 Overview of the thesis

Apart from the research questions, their contributories and the subsidiary question (addressed in Chapter 9), the body of the thesis (i.e., chapters 3 to 8) is comprised of separate publications that each have their own research questions, dynamics and narratives.[43] The connection to religious creativity, therefore, may only be implied in the research questions, but the texts demonstrate clear linkages with the subject. In fact, taken together, the chapters represent all the different phases of the creative process, stringing together the structural subsystems of the domain, field, and person and showing the interactions between each. As such they support a narrative meta-structure that unifies the study. I will outline this structure here by briefly introducing each of the core chapters with an eye to religious creativity. Please note, however, that at each of the title pages of these chapters, I retained the original abstracts as much as possible.

The first chapter of the core of the thesis—Chapter 3, *The Pagan Parallax*, deals with the tension between traditionalism and eclecticism in Wicca. Regarding a systems approach to religious creativity, the chapter mainly concerns itself with the interplay between creative people longing to express themselves and the field of caretakers and gatekeepers, embodied by the Wiccan elite. The chapter also focuses on how Wiccan adherents are typically children of their time, and as expressive individualists seek authentic ways to position themselves in the religious context. The sub-

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[41] For a discussion on the difference between contributory and subsidiary questions, see Andrews (2003, p. 45). Note, however, that I use 'secondary' where he uses 'contributory' questions. I have reserved the term 'contributory' for temporary or implicit questions that guided my developing analysis.

[42] For a brief discussion on researching change, see Wolcott (1994, p. 178).

[43] For an overview of the chapter-based research questions, see Appendix A.

system of the person, then, is discussed with an eye to its sociohistorical context. About the notion of creativity itself, I discuss whether Wiccan novelties ought to be judged on their originality or experiential quality and, relatedly, raise the question what counts as purposeful creativity. Through the creative tensions, I also show how the self-understanding of Wicca slowly alters over time, and how the constant need for novel experiences propels religious change.

Given the fact that it is also about the tension between traditionalism and eclecticism— cast as two forms of neo-colonialism for purposes of the edited book it was written for—Chapter 4, *Sticks and Stones*, is complementary to Chapter 3. That is, while it deals with the said tension, rather than focusing on the individual, it discusses how an established tradition in Wicca as a whole—Greencraft in this case—legitimizes itself to other groups in the field and implicitly to society at large. The chapter also deals with the impact the field has on the domain, by offering a detailed description of Greencraft's contributions to the Wiccan canon, and their rationale. Creativity, then, is mainly treated in the sense of products and the appropriation and reinterpretation of existing material. Together with the following chapter, it has a distinct anthropological flavour.

Chapter 5, *Scholar versus Pagan*, continues with the description of Greencraft's creative work. As perhaps the most obvious ethnographic piece in the thesis, the chapter also offers a first-person perspective of how people simultaneously try to fit in the field and master the domain. Although Greencraft's tree walk as a creative product of sorts is of central concern, my understanding of creativity in the chapter includes exploration and imagination, as well as performance. On a different level, the chapter is also the most reflective piece, where I juxtapose two competing perspectives that may emerge from doing fieldwork.

Complementary to the perspective of Chapter 5, which effectively is that of the introduction of a person to specific Wiccan material, Chapter 6, *Secrecy and Ritual Hygiene*, to an extent is about keeping outsiders out. Like *Scholar Versus Pagan*, this chapter also contains some reflective material of my fieldwork experiences. Its main concern, however, is the role and meaning of secrecy in Wicca, and implied in it is a consideration of how the institutionalization of secrecy and upholding 'ritual hygiene' impacts, in intentional as well as in unintentional ways, on religious creativity. In the chapter, secrecy is envisaged as a technique that raises the cultural capital of the artefacts—perhaps even their perceived splendour—in the domain, supports explorative creativity to those in the know, and, again in terms of the systems approach, marks the border between the person and the field.

In Chapter 7, *Coining Names, Casting Selves*, I explore how many Wiccans adopt a new name, which is often taken from the symbols, deities and imagery of the movement. These names have self-defining qualities, and as such are instances of the interplay between the one's autobiography and aspirations and the religious outlook. Creativity here, then, is mainly understood as explorative and improvisatory: new names are in a sense *performed*, and only acquire their full meaning through practice and interpretative self-narratives. With regard to the systems perspective to creati-

vity, the topic of the chapter is the impact of the subsystems of the domain on that of the person.

The relation between the domain and the person, however, is mutual. Whereas this important conclusion is only hinted at in the preceding chapter, in the eighth and last core chapter, *Domesticating the Imagination*, it is of central concern. In fact, the chapter makes a full turn. Starting with the imaginative creativity of the individual, it then deals with how these are evoked, canalized and become domesticated through the employment of ritual techniques, before reversing to explain how the imagination may also come to have an impact on the religious system. Regarding the systems perspective to creativity, the chapter deals with how the field distributes the artefacts of the domain to the creative individual, aiding his imagination. In contrast, it also deals with the incremental impact of the tutored imaginations of the person on the religious system of the domain.

chapter two

METHOD

2.1 Perspectives

In this study, I approach religion from the perspectives of functionalism, pragmatism, and methodological agnosticism. I will briefly explain what these outlooks constitute and why I made these choices in 2.1.1. Following the argument, I will conclude with a discussion of ethical concerns in 2.1.2.

2.1.1 Functionalism, pragmatism and methodological agnosticism

Since my objective is to try to understand how creativity works in the context of Wicca, I have to ultimately understand religion from its function rather than from its contents. My functionalism is a *psychological* functionalism. That is, my interest lies primarily in the use and meaning of cultural elements like ideas, practices, and objects, and only secondarily in their many appearances.

Although not incompatible with the cognitivism of evolutionary psychology (cf. Kirkpatrick, 2005, p. 109), my functionalism better suits the emergentism of ecological (see, e.g., Heft, 2001, pp. 327-370) and cultural psychology (see Cole, 1996). Both cultural elements and their functions—even if the former were created with the latter in mind—can be explained as new structures that emerge from the ongoing interactions between a changing cultural landscape and people's intentions. Therefore, neither the external structure nor the internal intention has to be biologically determined. In addition, this emergentist outlook prevents making functionalist errors by assuming that the genesis and existence of a cultural element exclusively rely on its intended function (cf. Sayer, 2000, p. 142). In other words, things may have been invented for other purposes or even be by-products.

Apart from warning against its misuse in general, functionalism has also been criticized in the context of religion. In her study on religious imagination, Jongsma-Tieleman (1996, p. 106) argues that (1) a functional definition of religion is necessarily derivate and thus secondary to a substantial definition, and that (2) a functional definition would allow for almost anything to count as religious, as long as it shares the functions of religion, rendering the concept superfluous.

We can riposte the first comment easily by arguing that many substantial definitions of religion may inform a single functional one. Although derivative, a functional definition, then, may help to create order in a heap of undigested descriptive data, advance theory, and reveal how universal functions and structures may be expressed in particular religious contexts.[44] The other critique can be countered by keeping a pragmatist outlook.

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[44] Note that the distinction made here is between *functional* and substantive *definitions* of religion, not between formal and substantive theory. The universalism I refer to here, then, does not lie in the assumption of a single prototypical religion, but in seeking out commonalities between different religious forms in terms of their corresponding functions (see, e.g. Ruprecht, 2007, p. 213).

The perception that through functionalism religion may become an overinclusive concept relies on the implicit assumption that the very word 'religion' points to a neat and analytical category of beliefs and practices, maintained by scholars. However, religion is a lay term, that, similar to a term like 'culture,' only later was adopted in academe. Besides that, the meaning of religion has remained in flux ever since the term was invented (for a brief overview, see Wulff, 1997, pp. 3-5).[45] That is not to say that we can do away with the word, for although fuzzy, religion is a viable and much used emic term, and as a phenomenon continually coagulates into concrete institutional components. Rather, we should embrace a pragmatic stance and consider everything religious that has been designated as such by the person or group involved, and let go of the idea that religion can be defined in a way that would please everyone.[46]

Allowing the practitioners themselves to be the prime definers of religion, and limiting ourselves to religion as a social and psychological phenomenon has another benefit: it prevents us becoming entangled in theological discussions and having to assess supernatural claims (cf. McCutcheon, 2001).[47] Still, such reductionism should not be used to *replace* the believed intrinsic significance of religion nor its supernatural claims. Any naturalistic and functional explanation should be framed thus, that it would allow for a complementary confessional understanding, even if, or rather, *especially because* such an explanation falls outside the scope of the research methods of the social sciences and humanities. Although not without its challenges for fieldwork, such methodological agnosticism of neither accepting nor rejecting claims of the supernatural is the only way to respect both the beliefs of participants and the integrity of scientific enquiry (Bell & Taylor, 2014).

2.1.2 Ethical concerns

The modesty that comes with methodological agnosticism serves as the basis for the ethical treatment of the participants in the study. My prime concerns here are the specific ethical concerns of confidentiality and permission, which are particularly relevant in the context of Wicca given its secretive nature and society's lack of acceptance some Wiccans expect or perceive. Besides attending to those neatly circumscribable aspects, I will also discuss sympathy and upfrontness as two important research attitudes that I upheld during my extended field work.

To protect the identity of the participants of my study, I replaced their real names with self-chosen pseudonyms or any names that they preferred to use those. Quite remarkably, nearly all Wiccans I interviewed insisted or at least suggested that I use

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[45] See, e.g., Subsection 1.1.2 on the two etymologies of the term 'religion.'

[46] I have taken a similar approach to normative statements about creativity.

[47] As a perhaps slightly paternalistic but benevolent argument, Wicca can be said to be better served by giving it a critical academic assessment, than by resorting to apologetics, or otherwise appropriating academic enquiry for religious self-interests. See Section 6.4 for an exposition of this argument.

their Craft names in my published material. [48] This preference suggests something about their relationship with the divine. To some, interviewing almost seemed like an exercise in the 'spiritual work' that was to be done. Often it would appear they were not so much arguing *about*, but rather *through* their religious identity. However, this effect waned when I talked to them as an insider—i.e., during my focused fieldwork. Whatever their motives, their choice to be quoted by their Craft name made them identifiable by fellow Wiccans. Most of the experts, however, who had well-known public profiles as neo-Pagans or Wiccans suggested that I use their real names.

With regard to the use of insider material that was disclosed to me, I first established if it had been made public prior to my research, or was itself taken from other, published sources. If so, I would use it, and refer to its public records; if not, I would ask for permission to quote and reproduce. I did not use any particular information from closed rituals I participated in, in the sense of who did what and for what specific purpose, but I quoted such information in the rare case informants told me about their contributions in a particular ritual. As to the interviews in general, I indicated that interviewees could request their transcripts for inspection. Finally, as a means of offering something in return, I made my articles and chapters based on the research project available on the Internet or would send them out if requested.

I could not have engaged in participatory observation if I did not in principle *sympathize* with the neo-Pagan movement. Although empathy, which entails sharing the emotions, beliefs, and concerns of the movement and its adherents as your own would be too strong a claim, the intimacy of ritual participation in Wicca required a level of commitment that I could only muster by keeping a sense of wonder about its practices. Although initially my curiosity motivated me as a private person as well as a scholar, I noticed that my personal attraction gradually waned, while scientifically the interest only grew. The completion of the fieldwork, however, was timely; nowhere did I have to feign interest. [49]

The fact that my main theoretical interest was so far removed from the substance of the movement itself was also helpful to prevent researcher bias. Also, I took care not to become too involved in the groups I did my fieldwork in. I have both been enticed and invited to become initiated into the inner circle on more than one occasion, but I made clear I could not follow through. Had I done so, I would not only have compromised my work as a researcher by having to vow secrecy, but since I do not endorse the Wiccan oath in general, I would also have been disrespectful to both the religion and myself as a private person.

These considerations led me to decide to work towards an initiation in the outer circle grade of neophyte in Greencraft. The initiation allowed me to partake in the first-level ('roedi') training program of the Greencraft tradition and granted me ac-

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[48] Craft names are personal names that Wiccans adopt when they become involved in the religion. Chapter 7, *Coining Names, Casting Selves*, is devoted to this subject.

[49] The complexities that come with simultaneously maintaining sympathy, attraction, and a critical outlook are featured prominently in Chapter 5, *Scholar Versus Pagan*.

cess to traditional Wiccan material and rituals, without having to deal with the stringency of the inner circle grades of any of the other initiatory traditions. After becoming a neophyte, I was invited to all the sabbats and even some other closed ceremonies. I also attended the second-level training course, but I made clear at the outset that I was not going to pursue a first-grade initiation after finishing.

The negotiations that came with my request to become trained in Greencraft Wicca are illustrations of my *upfrontness* (see Urban, 1998, pp. 215-217) about my identity as a researcher. In a general sense, at appropriate times, I would explain the Wiccans I connected with, that regardless my personal interest in neo-Paganism, I was also a researcher. I told them that my primary motive was not so much in learning about the movement itself, but rather in coming to understand the process of religious creativity and renewal in the specific context of Wicca. I did so each time it was practically possible: before entering the field, before enrolling in courses, and before interviews.

Having thus introduced myself to the community gatekeepers, I would then engage in (semi-) open rituals, workshops, and other gatherings without explicitly mentioning my continuous fieldwork to prevent a chilling effect (see 6.3.3). However, I was always happy to share my research interests when asked to tell about myself. My openness was much appreciated by the vast majority of the Wiccans in my study, but it led to one incident that in a strange way proved very fruitful for my understanding of the role of secrecy in the transmission of religious ideas.[50]

2.2 Participants

This section deals with the recruitment and details of the people who acted as interview informants. At the beginning of my project, however, I also devoted attention to two online discussion boards. That study (included here as Chapter 3: *The Pagan Parallax*) provided me with two quotable discussion threads. Although presented in a similar fashion to those of the interviews, the quotes are considered to be integral parts of the threads. Since the threads are group discussions, the discussants, although individually referred to when quoted, are not described here (see 3.3 for more details). I neither included any information here on the occasional quote from Internet sources I stumbled upon (for that, please refer to q. 33, 34 and 45 themselves).

2.2.1 Recruitment

The first step I took for my fieldwork was to make acquaintances and create rapport with the various Wiccan and neo-Pagan groups in the Netherlands and Flanders. I became active in online groups, contacted Wiccans I had in my network, and went to

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[50] This incident is briefly discussed in Section 6.4.

various open rituals, workshops and social gatherings. Besides that, I approached several gatekeepers of the community to create leverage for my fieldwork. Some of these elders played only a minor role, whereas others became key informants who not only provided me with contact information of potentially interested Wiccans to interview, but also allowed access to ritual, teachings, and written material. During my research project, I also contacted several international neo-Pagan personalities to act as experts.

For the recruitment of my interview informants, I initially used snowball sampling, because of the secretive nature of Wicca. However, when my name as a respectable researcher was gradually becoming established among the groups, and the research progressed, I could move on to purposive sampling. I selected potential informants following two guidelines. First, I approached Wiccans who belonged to the same covens, or were associated through lineage or past membership with some of the others I was interviewing. In that way I would not only be able to triangulate notes from my fieldwork with the interview material, I would also maximize the impact benefits of shadowed data.[51]

Second, within these linked cases, I aimed at maintaining variation between my informants regarding gender, age, background, and religious seniority. For the rest, I also made sure there was a balance between initiatory and eclectic Wiccans for my interviews. Thus the final sample represents the optimum between coherency and variance, offering the richest possible network of interactions within and between individuals, groups, and religious elements and thus best suits adapted systems model.

2.2.2 Brief characteristics

Over the entire course of my research, I have conducted forty-five interviews (including five double interviews) with forty-seven people. Eventually, I used the interview material of forty-one of them (two of whom I interview twice, and one I interviewed three times). I did so either directly (in quotes) or indirectly (in paraphrases or implicitly, as a general description of the field). The group consisted of twenty-three women and eighteen men. Eighteen people resided in Flanders (Belgium), sixteen in the Netherlands, five in the UK, two in Ireland and one in Germany. The country of residence matched their country of origin in all but six cases. The vast majority of the informants belonged to a Wiccan tradition at the time of their interviews: seventeen Greencrafters, thirteen eclectics, four Gardnerians, and two Alexandrians. Of the non-Greencrafters, eleven were either directly or indirectly associated with Silver Circle. Ten Wiccans in the sample had moved from another Wiccan tradition to the present one, with all of them moving from British Traditional Wicca to either eclectic

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[51] Data becomes 'shadowed' when different informants would reminisce about the same event, explain a similar topic, or talk about each other's opinions, actions and perceptions (see Morse, 2001). Cf. the notion of data source triangulation as discussed in Subsection 2.4.4.

or Greencraft Wicca, and two former eclectics had turned religious atheists not long before the interview.

Apart from thirty-one regular informants, the sample also contained ten experts, of whom four belonged to the groups or areas I primarily researched. Six were internationally known neo-Pagan personalities, either Wiccan or belonging to Ásatrú and Druidry. Hailing from the British Isles, these six provided further links to the origins and history of the neo-Pagan movement. Although the material of most experts is used indirectly, their extensive insider knowledge greatly helped me to place my local findings in a wider context and shed light on my preliminary interpretations of the gathered data.

Table 1 offers an overview of the interviewees, including their key demographics, backgrounds, current religious affiliation, and the place and time of the conversation. Note that the first time someone is quoted directly in one of the chapters, relevant bits of this information are repeated.

2.3 Procedure

To answer the research questions, I needed a conceptual base from which the phenomenon of creativity could be mapped out as broadly as possible. Therefore I planned a combination of three methods of acquiring data. In this section, I describe these: focused participatory observation (in 2.3.1), lightly structured depth interviews (in 2.3.2) and textual research (in 2.3.3). Together, these offer a means of triangulating the data. Incidentally, Harry Wolcott (1992) relates these methods to the three *modes of data gathering* in qualitative research: experiencing, enquiring, and examining, respectively.

2.3.1 Participatory observation

The multi-method research on religious creativity in Wicca required me to immerse myself in various neo-Pagan and Wiccan movements for a few years. My fieldwork would often be as much about networking to access rituals and find new informants for my interviews, as it would be about getting to know the community and its social constitution first-hand. Therefore, I restrict the term 'participatory observation' to those rituals, workshops, lectures and training sessions that required an active or at least focused participation. Particularly in ritual, the participatory observation allowed me to witness feats of exploratory creativity as they took place. Likewise, it provided me with a backdrop for the narratives of the people I interviewed; in some cases this even enabled me to see these very informants in action. As Marc Galanter (1999, p. 14) argues, participating in groups has the benefit of being able to directly observe the psychological forces released by collective behaviour, such as social cohesiveness, shared beliefs and altered consciousness. Motives and actions aiming for

TABLE 1: *Overview of interview informants*

DEMOGRAPHICS				BACKGROUND	
Name	S.	A.	Cnt.	Religion	Education
Magdalena*	F	25	NL	None	Tertiary (academic): psychology (current)
Theresa*	F	22	NL	None	Tertiary (academic): sexology
Richard*	M	57	BE	None	Tertiary (academic): economics (BA)
Aleesha*	F	40	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (academic): psychology (current)
Magus*	M	66	NL	Esoteric	Secondary
Phaedrus	M	47	NL	Catholic	Tertiary (vocational): art school
Lida*	F	36	NL	Catholic	Tertiary (academic): philosophy (BA)
Jana Hollesdochter	F	50	NL	Catholic	Tertiary (vocational): library studies
Joke Lankester	F	64	NL	None	Primary
Ko Lankester	M	63	NL	Calvinist	Tertiary (academic): psychology
Amor	M	60	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (vocational): military school
Stefaan van den Eynde*	M	43	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (academic): religious studies
Egil	M	56	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (academic): theology
Arghuicha	M	67	NL (BE)	Catholic	Tertiary (academic): mathematics
Willow	F	37	BE	Catholic	Primary
Mandragora	F	34	NL	None	Tertiary (vocational): art school
Aria	F	55	BE	Catholic	Secondary
Nymphaea	F	30	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (academic): Egyptology
Abigail	F	69	BE	None	Tertiary (academic): physical education
Raven	F	44	BE	None	Secondary
Eostrel	F	29	BE	None	Tertiary (vocational): precious metal worker
Owencrowe	M	32	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (vocational): mechanical engineering
Morgana	F	60	NL (UK)	Methodist	Tertiary (vocational): primary teacher training

TABLE 1 (CONT.)

BACKGROUND (CONT.)	CURRENT RELIGION		INTERVIEW		
Occupation	Tradition	Gr.	#	Location	Date
Sex worker	None (f. eclectic)	N/A	3	Tilburg (NL)	27 Aug. 2010
Psychology student	None (f. eclectic)	N/A	3	Tilburg (NL)	27 Aug. 2010
Bartender	Greencraft	Roe.	4	Deurne (BE)	27 Aug. 2010
Unlicensed psychotherapist	Eclectic	N/A	5	Brecht (BE)	28 Aug. 2010
Manager (retired)	Eclectic; Ceremonial magic (n.)	N/A	6	Malden (NL)	30 Aug. 2010
Visual artist (self-employed)	Gardnerian	N/A	7	Amsterdam (NL)	26 Feb. 2011
Administrator	Eclectic	N/A	7	Amsterdam (NL)	26 Feb. 2011
Librarian and funeral officiant (self-employed)	Gardnerian	3rd	8	Utrecht (NL)	27 Feb. 2011
Various (disabled)	Gardnerian	3rd	9	Utrecht (NL)	27 Feb. 2011
Civil servant	Gardnerian	3rd	9	Utrecht (NL)	27 Feb. 2011
Non-commissioned officer (retired)	Greencraft (c. Eburon)	3rd	10	Zoersel (BE)	3 Mar. 2011
Medical advisor	Ásatrú (n.)	N/A	11	Diest (BE)	3 Mar. 2011
None	Greencraft (c. Lyonesse)	3rd	12 42	Boom (BE)	4 Mar. 2011
IT specialist (retired)	Greencraft; Freemasonry (n.)	3rd	13 37 45	Hulst (NL)	4 Mar. 2011; 17 Jan. 2012; 28 Mar. 2014
Cleaning lady	Greencraft	3rd	15	Lier (BE)	5 Mar. 2011
Motion graphics designer	Eclectic	N/A	16	Zaanstad (NL)	29 May 2011
Civil servant	Greencraft (c. Eburon)	3rd	17	Zoersel (BE)	9 Jun. 2011
Librarian	Greencraft (c. Eburon)	1st	18	Leuven (BE)	10 Jun. 2011
Gym teacher (retired); funeral officiant (volunteer)	Greencraft	2nd	19	Waasmunster (BE)	11 Jun. 2011
Administrator	Greencraft (c. Lyonesse)	2nd	20	Wuustwezel (BE)	11 Jun. 2011
Shopkeeper	Greencraft (c. Eburon)	1st	21	Zoersel (BE)	12 Jun. 2011
Assistant project manager	Greencraft (c. Eburon)	Neo.	21	Zoersel (BE)	12 Jun 2011
International coordinator PFI	Gardnerian	3rd	22 39	Zeist (NL); Nijmegen	14 Jun. 2011, 9 May 2012

TABLE 1 (CONT.)

DEMOGRAPHICS				BACKGROUND	
Name	S.	A.	Cnt.	Religion	Education
Cellum	M	21	BE	None	Tertiary (vocational): applied information technology
Albijon	M	51	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (vocational): police school
Merlyn	M	49	BE	Catholic	Secondary
Daisy*	F	37	NL	None	Tertiary (academic): religious studies (current)
Flierefluiter	M	40	NL	Catholic	Tertiary (academic): communication studies
Fauna	F	53	NL	None	Tertiary (vocational): library studies
Pete Jennings	M	58	UK	Anglican	Tertiary (vocational): social work
Dreow Bennett	M	45	UK	Anglican	Tertiary (academic): environmental biology
Janet Farrar	F	61	IE (UK)	Anglican	Secondary
Gavin Bone	M	47	IE (UK)	None	Tertiary (vocational): nursing
Rufus Harrington	M	47	UK	Anglican	Tertiary (academic): undisclosed
Melissa Harrington	M	47	UK	Anglican	Tertiary (academic): religious studies (PhD)
Selena	F	36	NL (PL)	Catholic	Secondary
Brighid Marlitha	F	55	DE (NL)	Catholic	Tertiary (vocational): undisclosed
Andrea	F	35	NL	None	Tertiary (academic): biology
Wanda	F	64	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (academic): economics
Renco	M	66	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (academic): history
Phebe	F	30	BE	Catholic	Tertiary (vocational): primary teacher training

Note: All information listed was current at the time of each interview (or *first* interview in case I conducted more than one interview with the same informant).
Explanation of the categories: DEMOGRAPHICS: *Name*: Craft name or pseudonym (the latter with *). Italics indicate experts, bold indicates key informants); *S* = Sex: M(ale) or F(emale); *A* = Age; *Cnt*. = Country: Country of residence (and country of birth between brackets, if different)…

TABLE 1 (CONT.)

BACKGROUND (CONT.)	CURRENT RELIGION		INTERVIEW		
Occupation	Tradition	Gr.	#	Location	Date
None	Greencraft (c. Eburon)	Neo.	23	Kalmthout (BE)	23 Jun 2011
Police detective	Greencraft (c. Eburon)	2nd	24	Zoersel (BE)	23 Jun. 2011
None	Greencraft	3rd	25	De Klinge (BE)	24 Jun. 2011
Psychiatric nurse; student	Eclectic (f. Gardnerian)	N/A	27	Cuijk (NL)	27 Jul. 2011
Tax advisor (self-employed)	Eclectic (f. Gardnerian)	N/A	28	Nijmegen (NL)	30 Aug. 2011
Helpdesk employee	Eclectic (f. Gardnerian)	N/A	29	Genderingen (NL)	14 Sep. 2011
Social worker (semi-retired)	Ásatrú (n.)	N/A	32	Great Yeld-ham (UK)	12 Oct. 2011
Archdruid of Glastonbury	Druidry (n.)	N/A	33	Glastonbury (UK)	16 Oct. 2011
Pagan/Wiccan expert (self-employed)	Eclectic (f. Alexandrian)	3rd	34	Ethelstown (IE)	18 Oct. 2011
Pagan/Wiccan expert (self-employed); nurse	Eclectic (f. Alexandrian)	3rd	34	Ethelstown (IE)	18 Oct. 2011
Psychotherapist	Alexandrian	3rd	35	Grange-over-Sands	23 Oct. 2011
Visiting psychology lecturer	Alexandrian	3rd	36	Grange-over-Sands	23 Oct. 2011
College coordinator; IT specialist (until recent)	Eclectic	N/A	38	Cuijk (NL)	8 May 2012
Spiritual coach (self-employed)	Eclectic	N/A	40	Kranenburg (DE)	16 May 2012
Secondary school teacher (biology)	Eclectic (f. Gardnerian)	N/A	41	Arnhem (NL)	16 May 2012
Banker (retired)	Greencraft (c. Lyonesse)	2nd	43	Antwerp (BE)	14 Dec. 2013
Historian (retired)	Greencraft (c. Lyonesse)	2nd	43	Antwerp (BE)	14 Dec. 2013
Primary school teacher	Greencraft (c. Eburon)	Neo.	44	Venlo (NL)	22 Dec. 2013

...BACKGROUND: *Religion*: Religious background; *Education*: Highest education completed, unless stated 'current'; *Occupation* = present occupation, unless stated 'retired'; CURRENT RELIGION: *Tradition*: current Wiccan denomination or branch (in case of a relevant membership of a coven ('c.'), its name is given be-tween brackets; former ('f.') Wiccan denominations are also given between brackets; non-Wiccan ('n.') traditions are indicated as such between brackets); *Gr.* = Grade: Grade according to current Wiccan ini-tiatory tradition (if any) (Roe. = Roedi, Neo. = Neophyte); INTERVIEW: *#* = Number: data identifier; *Loca-tion* = location of the interview; *Date* = date of the interview.

these ends facilitate creativity and change, but cannot be understood at the individual level.

Over the years, I have been involved in Ásatrúic, Druidic, and neo-Shamanic rituals in the Netherlands and the UK. However, the various Wiccan or Wicca-inspired gatherings I attended in the Netherlands, Belgium, the UK and even Hungary comprised the bulk of my participatory observation. Most of these meetings were workshops and seasonal celebrations (see Figure 4 for an artistic impression of an Ostara ritual I participated in). As the dominant Wiccan organisations in the Low Countries, Silver Circle and Greencraft provided the best opportunities for fieldwork (see 1.2.5) and means of finding informants. Most of my interviewees were in some way associated with either one of them (see also Table 1), but each network came to play a different role in my research. I used the Silver Circle network predominantly to come into contact with Dutch Gardnerians and eclectics. Because of their strict observation of traditional—and thus secretive—Gardnerian Wicca, neither Silver Circle itself nor the offshoots of its defunct mother coven were suitable for any focused fieldwork. However, my sole Dutch key informant Morgana Sythove, the chair of Silver Circle, did offer me general insights in the rationale of Wicca, outlined the history of the movement in the Netherlands, and generously shared her experiences and vision as a Wiccan high priestess. In addition, I went to several of Morgana's workshops. Also, through her, I managed to find most of the Dutch Wiccans who are featured in my research.

In Greencraft, the tradition in which I did most of my participatory observations, I partook in open, as well as semi-open and closed activities, whereas other the Wiccan gatherings I went to were mostly open.[52] The reason for the emphasis on Greencraft, however, was not only their generous acceptance of my fieldwork. They also offered the most constant, developed, and far-reaching innovations in Wiccan cosmological system and its practice. During my time with Greencraft, I took part in several tree walks of three different covens: Aurora Borealis (located in Hulst, the Netherlands), Archania (De Klinge, Belgium), and Eburon (Zoersel, Belgium). The latter, together with the now defunct Lyonesse (Boom, Belgium), were the chief suppliers of my Greencraft informants. Also, I became an outer court member of Eburon.[53] It thus became my home coven, where I celebrated the sabbats, and had two extensive training courses, first as a roedi, then as a neophyte. During my time in Greencraft, I also went to the multi-day Greencraft Coven Convention, the Greencraft Summer and Winter Circles, and various other meetings.

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[52] See Balfer (2009) for a discussion on the three levels of openness in a neo-Pagan context.

[53] In Greencraft, outer court members are those who had a first (i.e., neophyte) initiation, and can thus partake in the sabbats, but are not allowed to the esbats. The inner court consists of coven members from first grade and up.

FIGURE 4: *Phaedrus' impression of an Ostara sabbat with his ritual group*
Phaedrus keeps a graphic diary for all his religious activities. After each meeting, he paints a watercolour picture on paper in a primitive style that depicts the essence of the activity. Here he has painted the seaside beach near IJmuiden in the Netherlands. Like always, he has drawn people like pawns: a black pawn for himself, white pawns for the other initiated people (here Lida and Mandragora and her partner), and grey for the outsiders, which incidentally included me (the figure on the left in the foreground). Note that the child of Phaedrus and his wife Lida is the only person that is painted with two colours. In the sand, the ritual circle can be seen. Next to the beach pole, we find two red-painted eggs among some ritual objects. A third egg has just been offered to the sea.

2.3.2 Depth interviews

The series of lightly structured depth interviews were my primary means of research and yielded by far the most data.[54] Although the interviews were also concerned with the social aspect, the emphasis was on identifying the human imagination as a *conditio sine qua non* for the emergence of new religious forms. My series started with a few pilot interviews to test the appropriateness of the questions regarding understandability and relevance as well as to establish how to order the topics. The pilot also enabled me to gauge the willingness of participants to discuss private, personal and confrontational issues. Of these pilot interviews, the last one had roughly the same format as the topic and question list used for my first batch of regular inform-

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[54] Both the recordings and the verbatim reports of the interviews are available for inspection through the author (for reasons of privacy, authorized people only).

ants: a list in which one's religious experiences, their interpretations, the means of sharing these with others, as well as the experiences of others, were the main topics.

From there, my topic and question list evolved with questions rephrased and themes added but retaining the biographical questions that concerned demographics, religious background, and current affiliation. Some topical questions were understood better when phrased differently, and sensitivity grew about the differences between theoretical and lay understandings of key terms like creativity. Some topics were added because they emerged from the concerns that informants in the earlier batches voiced, others I encountered in the literature, or emerged as analytical categories from my simultaneous analysis of the interview material. Thus in later versions, ritual experience and renewal were included, as well as spiritual development and conversion, whereas the topics lists for my last batch also contained secrecy as an expert-derived topic and the analytically derived Craft names.[55] Taken together, the topics and approach of the interviews balanced between a phenomenological (i.e., aimed at charting the experiential quality of religious phenomena) and a hermeneutical angle (i.e., seeking meaning and working towards an understanding of these experiences).[56]

The interviews I conducted fall either into the regular or expert category. The *regular interviews* dealt with all the topics mentioned above. My intention with the interviews was here to uncover the 'lived' quality of religion, with an emphasis on elements of renewal. Aiming to understand Wiccan adherence from a first-person perspective, I invited my interview informants to answer as much from their own assumptions and viewpoint. This way of working allowed for approaching religious creativity from interesting angles but also posed some challenges.

First, the first-person perspective required me to draw a sharp distinction between the theoretical questions of the research and those of the interviews,[57] and also to be vigilant of the fact that the way specific terms are used by informants may differ from how scholars, and perhaps even other Wiccans, would understand them. For instance, what do people mean when they use the term 'creativity'? It turned out that many people understand it as fiddling at worst and crafting at best. To give an example, Lida, the high priestess of Phaedrus' Gardnerian Dutch coven, states (q. 06):

> 06   Creativity binds us [coven members] together, I think. … Making your own tools [means] that you've all been sweating over your robe because you can't sew, and you went to great lengths assembling an athame. Well, it creates a bond having to go through these things (7: 448).

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[55] In order to keep the data of all the interviews sufficiently comparable, I sometimes contacted the earlier informants again to obtain their stories on the subject matter that I had included in my topic and questions list after I did my original interview with them. For the complete topic list see Appendix B.

[56] This distinction is based on Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, p. 14), cf. interpretative phenomenological analysis and grounded theory as discussed in Subsection 2.4.1.

[57] See Maxwell (2005, pp. 91-93) and Wengraf (2001, pp. 60-70), for discussions on keeping these apart.

Some others were referring to creativity when they talked about dancing, singing, claying, cutting, cooking, and brewing. Therefore, I had to deconstruct the term for my interviews and transcript analysis and use it as a theoretical category only.

Second, apart from misunderstandings that could arise out of poorly phrased questions, there is also the difficulty of talking about the imagination, feelings, and personal issues in general that have not been reflected upon by the informants prior to the interview. Posed with a hard question about religious experiences, a young Greencrafter named Cellum intermittently yet assiduously responded (q. 07):

> 07 An experience is, in any case, something we may not refute because it is something personal. … It often goes awry when [people] start to explain why they had the experience. … Just let the experience do its job. … Moreover, I notice even in this interview—we try to interpret [experiences]. However, we find that words are often a rather limited medium, in the sense that you cannot express everything in words, or capture by a limited—conversion. … Because everyone has his own frame of reference, [experiences] may become deformed, when we put them into words (23: 1193-1209).

The best option for the regular interviews, then, was to keep the questions basic, and carefully direct the meandering responses toward the topics under consideration only by the gentlest of interventions. Over the course of the many interviews I conducted, I succeeded more and more in minimizing my impact as an interviewer, by letting go of the order of topics and introduce them only at the moment that the narratives of the informants were starting to touch upon them.

Third, I also made an effort to differentiate between manifest and latent levels of information.[58] These levels did become not only prominent when I would tease out the subtexts of the interviews, but also when informants had problems with understanding their motives, or discerning between what were their own assumptions versus what had been taught to them. Research has repeatedly shown the unreliability of introspective causal inferences,[59] but such explicit beliefs, in turn, serve to facilitate new behavioural strategies and self-navigation.[60] The informants' creative effort, then, could best be observed in the way they envisage themselves as Wiccans or what beliefs they professed, rather than relying on their own understanding of the term or their assumptions about their own behaviour.[61]

The *expert interviews* contained the same material as that of the regular informants, but I gave the experts additional questions and discussed the kind of answers

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[58] Although this distinction pervades all my analyses, it is most evident in Chapter 6, *Secrecy and Cleanliness*.

[59] For general overviews, see Baumeister & Masicampo (2010, pp. 946-947); Nisbett & Wilson (1977).

[60] This creative function of memory is further discussed in Section 7.1. For a similar argument in the context of religion, see Whitehouse (2004, pp. 24-25).

[61] This mode of observation best fits the description of the weak version of the double hermeneutic, as described in 5.1.2.

that the regulars had given.[62] I returned to Arghuicha, Egil and Morgana for follow-up interviews to test preliminary interpretations of the data and to learn more about their specific traditions. Apart from the phenomenological and hermeneutical angles to interviewing, then, I also used the expert interviews for obtaining factual knowledge. On the whole, the issues with the regular interviews did not pose much of a problem with the *expert interviews*, but there was one complexity both shared: some informants use so-called '*talk tracks.*' Talk tracks are scripted ways of giving information that promote a specific viewpoint, and may be detached from the original question (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 147).

At its worst, talk tracks would cause an answer to lack specificity, a personal voice, or both. These problems would occur most often with regulars or during answering questions about motives or beliefs. In those cases, the talk track was the modus operandi of clueless introspection. Stock explanations of my interviewees could best be overcome by persistently following up on the original question by assessing assumptions and deconstruct platitudes. At their best, however, talk tracks were genuine *stories* that although fixed—Arghuicha, for one, repeated himself almost verbatim when he discussed the origins of Greencraft—conveyed important, but often latent, information pertinent to the question at hand (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, pp. 174-176). Rather than breaking them down, these talk tracks need to be appreciated as developed narratives that may echo implicit concerns, carry felt convictions, and even underscore championed principles.

2.3.3 Textual research

I studied various emic, written sources mostly as a means to generate supplemental data in service of the other two methods. The sources could be used to show the practices, self-understanding and self-professed beliefs of Wiccans, but I ignored any theorizing and explanatory elements, as the sources may be unreliable, speculative, and at odds with established facts of scientific enquiry.[63]

First, I used the grey literature of the group I focused on with my participatory observation: Greencraft tradition. These included the roedi (Hera & Arghuicha, 1999) and neophyte courses (Hera & Arghuicha, 2001), the *Greencraft Tarot* (Delaere, 2010, 2013), Arghuicha's (2002) *Pilgrimage to Alba*, and assorted unpublished material that I was handed during the courses, I found online (through greencraft-

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[62] Although the additional parts of the expert interviews varied greatly, I would ask some similar theoretical questions, among many others, such as "Where can I find creativity in Wicca?"; "To what extent does improvisation play a role in wiccan practice?"; "How do Wiccans deal with the notion of unverified personal gnosis?" What questions I would ask depended on what topics were most prominent in my research at that time.

[63] For the same reasons, some literature from the academic field of Pagan studies has been labelled suspect (see, e.g., Davidsen, 2012). While I share his concerns about apologetics, special pleading, and a lack of methodological rigour (see Section 6.4 for a brief discussion thereof), I did not classify Pagan studies literature as 'emic' in my work.

wicca.org, among others), or that I received courtesy of Arghuicha, Egil, and Aria. This dataset was mainly used to verify and supplement the material I gleaned from my interviews and participatory observation, or as a means to offer a more comprehensive understanding of specific practices or motives. To provide a background on Silver Circle, I used various bits of online material (exclusively through silvercircle.org) and used Merlin Sythove's (1999) commercially published *Moderne Hekserij—Modern Witchcraft* in English—and *De bezem voorbij*—i.e., *Beyond the Broomstick*—by Boris and Bran (2005).

Second, I consulted several neo-Pagan and Wiccan publications that deal with the main features of these movements. Most important for general neo-Paganism were Adler's (2006) *Drawing Down the Moon* and *Pagan paths* by Pete Jennings (2002). For initiatory Wicca, in turn, the work of Farrar and Farrar (e.g., 1981b, 1987) and De Zutter's (2003) *Eko Eko,* were particularly relevant. The eclectic branches were represented by *Progressive Witchcraft* from Farrar and Bone (2004), Starhawk's (1999) seminal *The Spiral Dance*, and to a lesser extent the introductory work *Buckland's Complete Book of Witchcraft* by Raymond Buckland (2002). These publications were mainly used to relate particular narratives of my informants to the wider context of general Wicca. For this reason, I have not attempted to draw a representative sample of the literature, nor subjected it to any analysis.

Third, apart from these, I conducted my first investigation on two discussion boards on the Internet, partaking in a self-instigated debate at each. This effort culminated in the study reported in Chapter 3: *The Pagan Parallax*. Although its material can also be argued to be a part of my participatory observation, its nature is truly textual, and because it had been envisioned as data in my first exploratory study of the motives of renewal and creativity, I mention it here. Details of my employed method there are provided in the introductory part of Section 3.3.

2.4 Analysis

In this paragraph I discuss the way I analysed the data, starting with a description of the blended qualitative methodology I used (in 2.4.1) and how I put that framework to work to transform my data (in 2.4.2). In Subsection 2.4.3 I explain the format in which I presented the findings and discuss its challenges. Research quality, lastly, is the subject of 2.4.4.

2.4.1 Qualitative methodology

The scope of my research required the combination of two related methods: interpretative phenomenological analysis and grounded theory.[64] Central to interpretative

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[64] See Starks and Brown Trinidad (2007) for a comparison between the two and an indication of their compatibility.

phenomenological analysis is the exploration of personal perception of some event or object in contrast to an objective statement thereof (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53). With regard to transforming data, interpretative phenomenological analysis is primarily aimed at generating rich and detailed descriptions, rather than theoretical explanations (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 9). Still, the participants of the research will interpret their own experiences and the researchers, in turn, will have to try to make sense of these interpretations, which leads to a double hermeneutic (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 53).[65] I used the methodology to explore lived religion as the motivational and experiential basis for creativity. Interpretative phenomenological analysis, then, was particularly important in the descriptions of the interview material presented in chapters 7 and 8, whereas it was implied in the autoethnographic parts of chapters 5 and 6.

Grounded theory, however, very much served as the backbone of my analysis, as it is well-suited for my research project as a whole. First, it integrates positivist and interpretive aspects of research as to allow researchers to use systematic techniques for data transformation while keeping an open eye to the subjective life-worlds of the people observed (Charmaz, 2008, p. 84). This dual nature reflects my interdisciplinary approach to the subject of religious creativity and change. Second, it allows me to combine individual with collective levels of analysis. As Kathy Charmaz (p. 83) notes, grounded theory "can be used for individual processes, interpersonal relationships and reciprocal effects between individuals and larger societal processes." Incidentally, this emphasis on processes also fits the systems approach to creativity, which is the third point. Fourth, it provides a means to integrate various bits of data and seek out implicit relationships between these. In other words, it facilitates the distinction between manifest and latent levels of observation,[66] or, as Charmaz (p. 90) puts it, between *layers of meaning*, including explanations of, assumptions about, and intentions of a person's actions, and all consequences for others and the person in question. Although grounded theory permeates all studies in the present series, it is most visible in the interpretative parts of my work (e.g., the last two sections of Chapter 4, or the theoretical exposition in Chapter 7) and the studies that make the most explicit comparisons between individual and collective levels of analysis (e.g., chapters 3, 6 and 8).

What, then, are the principles of grounded theory? Strictly speaking a methodology rather than a theory, grounded theory is a series of guidelines to construct theory by transforming qualitative data. Even if interpretative phenomenological analysis may involve some re-interpretations of first-hand experiences, in grounded theory the juxtaposition of phenomena discussed in interviews and observed in participatory observation on the one hand, and the construction of their theoretical ramifica-

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[65] See Chapter 5, *Scholar versus Pagan* (5.1.2 in particular), for a discussion on the double hermeneutic with regard to my research.

[66] See Chapter 6, *Secrecy and Ritual Hygiene*, for the most obvious example of distinguishing between these levels.

tions on the other, is core business. In the end, grounded theory method is aimed at overcoming the incidental and anecdotal, moving towards interpretation and context-sensitive theory building.

This inclination towards universalism is already visible at the outset. Although grounded theory works in a pragmatist way,[67] starting to build theory from emic perspectives and interpretations, it does so with the aid of *sensitizing concepts*. These are abstract notions that lack empirical content, but are theoretically informative as directions along which to look for meaningful takes on the topics in interviews and field data (Kelle, 2007, pp. 207-209). In my studies, notions from the systems approach and the terms related to exploratory creativity have provided these means of theoretical furtherance.

Data collection and analysis take place in tandem, with each interview being analysed as much as possible before a new interview is conducted (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007, p. 1). Working in that fashion allows emergent themes from earlier interviews to become incorporated in the topic list of later ones, thus adding to a continually increased focus (Charmaz, 2008, p. 86). In addition, I have used the knowledge and experience of several expert informants to test these emerging theoretical interpretations (see also 2.4.4).

2.4.2 Coding and categorizing

Since its founders Barney Glaser and the late Anselm Strauss have different understandings of how to conduct grounded theory (see Kelle, 2007, pp. 198-206; Urquhart, 2007, pp. 342-343), I felt free to liberally apply the method in my coding procedure, using it as I saw fit with regard to the data and my combination of grounded theory with interpretative phenomenological analysis. Coding refers to the process of making sense of the data, by marking passages in interview transcriptions and field notes that signify meaningful bits and patterned regularities (Charmaz, 2008, p. 92).

Throughout my studies, I distinguished between three levels of coding, the first one of which also requires some preparatory work.[68] As a strictly pre-coding operation, I designated themes and descriptive units of meaning, by selecting large chunks of data that dealt with particular issues. Partly these issues emerged from the concerns and perspectives voiced by my interview informants, partly, they were informed by the sensitizing concepts I defined.

After the groundwork, I began with open coding, which on the outset entailed the breaking down of these chunks into smaller units of meaning (i.e., line-by-line coding). Later, these units developed through iteration from descriptive and idiosyncratic ones into more 'conceptual' and 'universal' entities, and the first patterns emerged.[69] Second, I designated categories of codes through so-called axial coding, in

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[67] See Star (2007) for a discussion on the links between grounded theory and pragmatism.

[68] See, e.g., Saldaña (2009), for an overview of different coding procedures.

[69] Holton (2007) describes this procedure.

which I sought to find out relationships between the open codes on the basis of their position and interdependence in the narratives, the similarities between the different narratives, their significance for the sensitizing concepts, or at face value (Boeije, 2005, pp. 98-104). Third, I worked out these emergent categories as theoretical codes, that embodied novel, but grounded concepts, which are featured in the various studies of this research project. I used the grandest of these categories to formulate the overarching conclusions of the project in 9.2 and 9.3—the *de facto* grounded theory, if you will—as well as some elaborations thereof, that I will discuss in 9.4.

Simultaneously to coding, I created memos, i.e., written records of the analysis as it unfolded (Friese, 2012, pp. 133-149). Some of these were mere notes with suggestions how to handle the data, sometimes culminating in rules how to proceed, whereas others matured into definitions of codes, or even developed into building blocks— paragraphs even—of the core chapters. At their highest level of sophistication, memos as the written accounts of the analyses of the axial and theoretical coding could even provide story lines.[70] Overall, then, the memos marked the steps from the analytical operations to the actual writing up of the studies that are reported in the various chapters of this thesis, most of them dissolving in the process.

2.4.3 Presentation of the data

Apart from the ethnographic aspects of my research, which I formatted as continuous narratives, the results of my qualitative analyses are mostly presented as ordered progressions of grounded interpretations interspersed with quotes from the interviews I conducted. I have taken care, however, to prevent the fallacy of what Harry Wolcott (1994, p. 13) has called 'heaped data,' in which researchers "have informants present their accounts 'entirely' in their own words ... passing on 'raw' rather than 'cooked' data," as to "[empower readers] to reach independent conclusions as to what is going on or how things come to have particular meanings in particular contexts." The problem of such excessively descriptive reporting, Wolcott (p. 14) argues, is that the researcher stops short of doing any analytical work, leaving it all up to the hapless reader. On a more stylistic note, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, pp. 269-270) suggest that excessive use of quotes makes for colourless reports.

I have opted for the middle ground, by being engaging, but responsible in reporting the data. Therefore, I have chosen my quotes to act as illustrations of–more than to act as proofs in–my analytical work and took care that they did not stand in the way of a proper development of my arguments.[71] In addition, by continually alternating between quotes and explanations, I have not only shown the way Wiccans understand their actions, but I have also drawn attention to the implications of their ac-

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[70] See Corbin and Strauss (2008, pp. 117-118) for a discussion on the various used of memos.

[71] Note, however, that in the article versions of the chapters some quotes have been shortened of have even been replaced by paraphrases to save words and make for a more engaging, albeit less justificatory presentation of the data.

tions, both in terms of unintended consequences and how each aspect interlocks with others to form an overarching structure or contribute to an encompassing process.

Still, my form of presenting the data came with challenges of its own. The first is the *holographic quality* of the data. The quotes from the Wiccans I interviewed were like shards of a broken hologram: although each could be put back to form the fractured whole, every bit also contained the entire image. In other words, it was very hard to find any quote that illustrated only one code or category. Although each motive, belief, self-understanding and so forth, I set out to illustrate predominates the quotes I have selected, most quotes are multi-layered and multifaceted containers of meaning. Often my interpretation was indispensable in drawing attention to the relevant aspect under discussion. This requirement again shows how the use of verbatim quotes cannot but be illustrative.

The second challenge came with the non-linear nature of the intricate interrelationships of the various categories in the data, whereas a written narrative, like a research report, dictates a sequential treatment of the material. As Howard Becker (2007, pp. 57-62) explains, there is no rational way to solve the problem of organizing what one has to say. Whatever order one chooses, one still has to say it all and one cannot but start *in medias res*. Perhaps the logic of the narrative, then, can best be chosen on the basis of what makes the most compelling story. This logic, however, does suggest a level of arbitrariness in the way one chooses to present his data. Take for instance my treatment of Craft name adoption in Chapter 7, *Coining Names, Casting Selves*. My exposition might have taken the form of a set of case studies, or a chronologically narrated process of conversion, or of an ethnology of name-giving practices. I feel that my resolution of combining these three is the optimum between doing justice to the complexity of the data and theoretical furtherance.

2.4.4 Quality control

Quantitative research and qualitative studies need to be subjected to assessments of quality and scientific rigour. However, scholars disagree about what criteria apply for the latter. Claire Anderson (2010), for instance, states that reliability and validity—both quality measures for quantitative research—are increasingly seen as meaningful actions in a qualitative context. Lucy Yardley (2008, p. 236), in contrast, argues that objectivity, reliability, and statistical generalizability are often mistakenly applied to qualitative studies because of the dominance of quantitative research, where they are part and parcel. Perhaps apparent differences about the usefulness of the terms dissolve when we redefine their meaning. The first step to reconciliation is to look at the different perspective or aim of one methodology compared to the other.

Much different than with quantitative methods, in qualitative analysis not the variable itself, nor its value, but its complex interrelations are essential. Complexity and emergency, rather than dissection and control, are the means to establish the significance of the 'variable' or 'notion.' For example, there is more than one way a quote (as a 'carrier' of a 'variable,' or rather a container of a 'notion' or 'concept') fits in a

narrative. It might even fit more narratives and thereby supports more and different interpretations. Contrary to what a quantitatively inclined critic might think, this is not a bad thing, because unlike a variable, a 'notion', 'relation,' or 'concept' may have more than one meaning. In fact, much of qualitative analysis is about finding what meaning should prevail. The best choice of meaning would be that with the most explanatory power, that is, the one that can become embedded in the largest, most coherent or most useful narrative with an eye to theoretical furtherance.[72]

From the aim of qualitative research to understand the interrelationships between the central concepts, objects, people and so forth, come different understandings that are required for objectivity, reliability and (statistical) generalizability. The need for objectivity, for starters, dissolves, since it cannot be attained for the simple reason, that not so much discrete entities themselves, but their relationships and meanings are central. Most we can hope for is to achieve a level of intersubjectivity and the presence of an able researcher, who explicates the kind of theoretical advancement he or she is pursuing and is honest and self-critical enough to explicate the means by which he or she is trying to achieve that aim.

These considerations bring us to the reliability of a study: a sound description of the followed methodology is required, even though sometimes straying from the path of procedural exactness cannot be prevented if any interpretational depth is to be achieved. Another aspect of reliability, namely that of the robustness of the findings, can be enhanced by aiming for saturation in the data set, which is precisely what grounded theorists prescribe (see, e.g., Hood, 2007, p. 161). If in a study additional interviews stop yielding any new insights, not only enough data has been collected, but also the stability of the outcome of the analysis is assured.

Apart from objectivity and reliability, claims of generalizability need to be made carefully. Rather than statistical generalizability from a representative sample of respondents,[73] which would be the goal of a quantitative researcher, his or her qualitative counterpart aims for theoretical generalizability of the processes and structure between the categories he or she developed (see Boeije, 2005, pp. 155-156; Johnson, 1997, pp. 195-205; Yardley, 2008, pp. 236-238). In grounded theory, such generalizations are often related to the switch between substantive and formal theory, the differences about which many misunderstandings exist (Glaser, 2007, pp. 101-104). Without delving into these, substantive theory is grounded in concrete situations and primarily aimed at explaining those in terms of their specific context, whereas formal

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[72] To draw a strange, but fitting analogy: an egg has many 'meanings' (i.e., uses); there is no simple right or wrong, but one use might be better than another. Partly this is inherent to the physical properties of the egg (e.g., it would not represent toughness or squareness very well), partly this relies on the intentions of its user (does one want to throw it against a window or does one want to paint it), or of the intentions of its creator as compared to its user (i.e., the chicken would want it to hatch, while a human wants to collect and eat it). In the end, the egg also becomes meaningfully related to other ingredients when we use it as cooks to make a meal.

[73] For a discussion on the use of the word 'respondent' as opposed to 'informant,' see Spradley (1979, pp. 31-32).

theory may emerge from various empirical sources to arrive at a higher level of abstraction and a more general applicability. As a rule of thumb, the different studies that are featured in chapters 3 to 8 mostly represent substantial theorizing, whereas the overarching conclusion proceeds to the level of doing formal theory.

In order to enhance the validity of my research, I triangulated my data (e.g., comparing responses about similar issues from informants in the same covens) as well as my methods (i.e., comparing the data yielded by my three means of acquisition), and I used 'respondent' validation by asking experts about my interpretations and checking up with regulars if they agreed with prior conclusions. Working with the CAQDAS-package[74] ATLAS.ti, in turn, also increased the precision and rigour with which I could analyse the material, despite the complexities that came with developing separate studies and integrating them in an overarching narrative.

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[74] CAQDAS stands for Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software.

THE PAGAN PARALLAX

The more things change, the more they stay the same.

French proverb

Postmodern nature religions face the challenge of justifying their practices and theology since there is no unbroken line between classic and the various neo-Pagan paths. Against the background of progressing historical knowledge, these religions constantly have to reinvent or reconstruct their traditions. At the same time, the present context is entirely different from that of the period when the classic pagan beliefs emerged. By discussing their roots in romanticism and expressivism, both the relevance of the revived nature religions and the challenges they face are explained. These issues are illustrated by drawing on the results of a qualitative analysis of online discussions between Dutch Wiccans, yielding imaginative narratives of self-justification and self-identification amidst a continuous tension between traditionalism and eclecticism. Generalizing these findings to neo-Paganism at large, I have argued that this movement is counterbalancing sociohistorical developments by its changing acts of sanctioning, its aims to remain the maverick, and its constant striving for experiential receptivity creating an illusion of autonomous movement: the Pagan parallax.
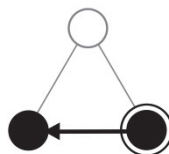
3.1 Introduction

The Dutch cabaret artist Theo Maassen (2005) once said about dancing: "*Die eerste stap is altijd lullig,*" ("that first step is always shitty"). That is, the transition from walking to dancing is experienced as awkward. Picture this: one walks onto the dance floor, seemingly unaffected by the music, and then, merely as a function of reaching the desired spot, the bodily posture changes dramatically to facilitate the getting into the groove. The same uneasiness goes for the abrupt start of a new religion. How does one begin? Starting from scratch seems hardly an option. The rituals would be adrift, and the deities dreamt up on the spot would be as capricious as the invented theology. Neo-Paganism, which consists of various nature-religious movements that are clearly new in their focus, their practice, the role of the self, their understanding of divinity, and their specific appropriation of older material like texts, imagery and so forth, is in such a position. How are genuinely novel initiatives justified? I argue that the answer depends on whether one puts emphasis on the belief system as a whole, or on the people who consider themselves part of the movement. Although in both levels claimed historicity as well as observed efficacy play a major role, the former is more easily encountered on a collective level, whereas the latter is the mainstay of personal involvement. One also has to acknowledge, however, that these levels are potentially conflicting since present-day identities are formed by the very processes of modernization, the excrescences of which neo-Pagans seek to overcome in their acts of re-enchantment.

Each belief system in neo-Paganism cannot but suggest continuity with a suitable and pre-existing form. On this collective level, a historical anchor point is provided by what historian Eric Hobsbawn (1983) has called *invented tradition*. Each branch of neo-Paganism, then, will either have to be imagined or reconstructed, to make new ideas and especially practices believable. Wicca falls in the category of imagining; that is to say that to the *bricolage* of various European traditions and folklore, we need to add the initial belief in the myth of Wicca as a remnant of a pan-European pre-Christian fertility cult (see 1.2.2). Other neo-Pagan paths like Druidry and Ásatrú, who have a 'genuine' past regarding locality and ethnicity, are in a somewhat different position to Wicca. Rather than merely imagining, they have to reconstruct their traditions. The greatest challenge posed to these paths is to ascertain to what extent the world views emerging from historical texts are applicable, useful and meaningful in our present day, and even to what extent the historical record is sufficient to establish what the original tradition was like in the first place. In the end, imagination touches reconstructionism at the point where contemporary needs and tastes have an impact on the choices made in the name of restoration.[75]

On the verge of oversimplification, one might say that whereas in Druidry and Ásatrú most effort is put in forging a rationale to justify the re-invigorated tradition

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[75] For a similar line of argumentation see, e.g., Strmiska (2005).

and deduce original material that was lost, in Wicca eclecticism dominates. However, I must already add that there is a huge difference between initiatory Wicca and non-initiatory Wicca or general neo-Paganism in this respect, adding to the intricacies involved in the tension between eclecticism and traditionalism. For instance, initiatory Wiccans of both Gardnerian and Alexandrian incarnation have begun to crystallize as coherent traditions in their own right. In contrast, in much of non-initiatory Wicca, people are left to their own devices in building their spiritual system, even if the parameters of such are constrained by the available literature and the insiders' community of which they feel they are a part. Here truthfulness and sincerity are continually negotiated rather than established. What all branches of neo-Paganism share, however, is the collective level of observed efficacy: present-day needs constitute a utility criterion for religion. In the present case, this may entail raising awareness about the ecological crisis.

The sense of history on the level of the belief system as a whole is complemented with a personal understanding of religious efficacy. I see this individualized efficacy as the utility and functionality of adherence in terms of religious experiences, real effects, meaning-making, and a general sense of well-being internally understood in terms of the specific theology, symbolism, and beliefs of the religion from the vantage point of a single believer.[76] As said, observed efficacy as such is easier understood on this individual level, since the person by definition is either the beginning or the end of each instant. On this level, especially Wicca—as a mystery tradition where personal revelations and direct experiences of the divine are sought out—is an excellent basis to discuss arguments of justification. Wicca is also interesting since its history is shorter and perhaps more eclectic in its essence than the traditions of the reconstructionists. Perhaps paradoxically, however, initiatory Wiccans are stricter in their observance of specific ritual forms and relation to a system of meaning than the adherents of other branches of neo-Paganism.

The mythistory of Wicca may offer a suitable excuse to remain conservative, as if the music eventually started playing because they were already dancing. Not for nothing, Wiccan conversions are often voiced with the phrase: "It felt like coming home" (see, e.g., Harrington, 2000). Homecoming requires an uncontested anchor point in the past: the very reason for dancing, if you will; a position that entails an imagined core self, or an inner child, with which one regains contact. Any biographical information, then, will be reconstructed to fit their present self-understanding (Reid, 2009).[77] Strictly speaking, these acts of revisiting and refiguring one's past are a way to justify adherence on the basis of the historicity on the level of the individual.[78] However, regardless of the reinvention of either a collective or personal

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[76] Cf. Subsection 1.4.4, about the question of who decides what is novel and useful with regard to 'true' creativity.

[77] These kinds of a posteriori reasoning, such as self-attribution and cognitive dissonance reduction, are well researched in the field of social psychology. For an overview, see, e.g., Zimbardo and Leippe (1991).

[78] This particular kind of reconstruction is discussed more fully in 7.3.1.

past, with the advent of non-initiatory Wicca, the *self-validation of belief* has come into play.[79] Among the initiatory and non-initiatory Wiccans the tension between established tradition and personal revelation seems to be the greatest, and therefore Wicca is my context of choice to discuss these neo-Pagan tensions in this chapter.

The differences between both kinds of Wicca notwithstanding, as far as adherence goes personal revelations need to be shared and mutually sanctioned. Direct experiences of the divine, although allegedly ineffable as scholars of religion like William James (1902, p. 380) and Walter Stace (1960, p. 55) remind us, cannot but be understood and appreciated to the extent that the mystics paradoxically have words, imagery, or metaphors at their disposal that their peers or would-be followers can relate to.[80] 'Relating to' in this respect amounts to nothing less than having had a similar experience and thus grasping the association. However, subjectivity leaves any imagined direct relationship between the divine and one's life both unchecked and incontestable. Apart from the centrality and self-validating quality of experiences in Wicca as a mystery tradition, then, we need to acknowledge the need for collectivity. In the end, the personal level and its associated ways of justification need to be recognized either in a group as small as a coven, or as grand as the entire community of neo-Pagans.[81]

All neo-Pagan groups inevitably share a tension between the individual and the collective, even if each tradition or initiative seems to have developed its own resolution. Also, there is an incompatibility between the dominant Western worldview and neo-Paganism as the latter is understood to be a response to the ecological crisis and the disenchantment associated with the former. In the present chapter, I will discuss the way Wiccans cope with the difficulties of justifying their beliefs and their identity to their community and the world at large, within the changing context of historical knowledge and modern civilization in and out of which their allegedly old ways are reborn. More specifically, I will address the tensions between traditionalists and eclectics derived from these contexts. The first step in this exposition is the identification of the sociohistorical roots of discontent with the current world order: romanticism. From there the increasing role of the person can be gleaned, and a picture of the complex double field of tension of individual versus community and neo-Pagan worldview versus non-Pagan worldview emerges.

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[79] The concept of *self-validation of belief* is similar to that of *self-authentication* (see, e.g., Paloutzian, Swenson &, McNamara, 2006, as cited in Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009, p. 297). Both terms are related to the phenomenological notion of *experiential empiricism* (see Roche, 1973, p.38). In the emic literature the term *unverified personal gnosis* is used (see, e.g., MacMorgan-Douglas (2007, p. 25). The notion of self-validation of belief is itself discussed in Hervieu-Léger (2001), who distinguishes it from institutional, communal, and mutual validations (see pp. 165-170).

[80] Note that these studies refer to mystical experiences as a subset of religious experiences.

[81] For the differences between institutional, communal, mutual and self-validation see Hervieu-Léger (2001).

3.2 Romanticism and individualism

When Pete Jennings took office as the new president of the United Kingdom's Pagan Federation, his predecessor warned him of what seems to be the whimsical nature of his job, saying, "It's like herding cats" (Jennings, 2002, p. 8). Remarks like these are often explained by the fact that neo-Paganism lacks a central doctrine and typically attracts people who have issues with authority. While such an impression might be true, I think it somewhat misses the point. For it is the originally Wiccan adage "An [If] Ye Harm None, Do What Ye Will," adopted by the Pagan Federation as one of their three principles, that itself amounts to the attitude of not willy-nilly accepting authority. In that sense, there might be more of a central doctrine to neo-Paganism than is often acknowledged, but its positive morality sustains the centripetal tendencies of neo-Pagans as well. To make matters even more complicated, to Wiccans "do what you will" does not equal "do as you like." Interpreting the adage from its emic perspective, it challenges devotees to learn to act according to their 'true Will,' and thus requires a prior effort to find out what one's 'Will' is.[82] Wicca, and perhaps neo-Paganism at large, thus seems to be all about self-discovery and, ideally, self-actualization. Ultimately, authority will be found in the largely unmediated experience of the divine and existential experiences of the Wiccan, amounting to a personal gnosis that eventually will be communicated with others, and will be treated as a justification of the idiosyncratic form Wicca may take in any one adherent (MacMorgan-Douglas, 2007, pp. 16-44).

This religiously inspired individualism can be understood from the sociohistorical context of personhood in the Western world. Neo-Paganism as a broad movement is seemingly rooted in the expressive individualism that developed in the 1960s and 1970s and dominates postmodernity.[83] In utilitarian individualism, in many respects its predecessor, human action is motivated by self-interest, leading to societal contracts—laws—in order protect property and entrepreneurship. Legislation regulates the interaction between persons and many of these relationships are thought to emerge naturally from the tensions between the often conflicting interests. With expressive individualism, in contrast, people tend to continually emphasize their uniqueness through practices that procreate authenticity (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985).[84] The idea of the self-validation of belief referred to earlier, is clearly mirrored here, and, more subtly, the actual understanding of the "Do What Ye Will" adage, that nevertheless also has a utilitarian twist in the restriction "An Ye

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[82] 'Will' refers here to the intent of a practitioner, explicitly addressed in ritual. In this sense, a link between Wicca and ceremonial magic can be observed.

[83] This view is dominant, but not uncontested; cf. Reid (2009).

[84] Cf. "utilitarianism" and "expressivism" in Taylor (1989).

Harm None." Therefore, it may be hard to draw the line between the two in Wicca or neo-Paganism in general.[85]

But there is more. Expressivism is carried on the wings of romanticism, which perhaps now more than ever has its role to play. Romanticism did not originally imply a yearning for a better world or the spiritual awakening of mankind, both of which might theoretically be achieved in a distant future. On the contrary, the romantic mourns the loss of an old world, no longer tangible. Romanticism requires *sehnsucht*—unfulfilled longing. The cultivation of wild nature, increased technological mediation between the world and human beings, and the associated processes of institutionalization, mechanization, rationalization, and pragmatization left modern people uprooted and the fabric of direct experience torn.[86] The acts of re-enchantment in neo-Paganism, then, not only entail probing what is left, and inferring a past to justify and make sense of the present, but rather also involve acting as if the old structures are in place, but with hindsight knowledge of what was their fate. Indeed, neo-Pagan romanticism stretches beyond its repertoire of melancholy and sweet suffering to an activism of restoration, a charismatic mission (Puckett, 2009). Expressivism cannot but be the driving force behind such course of action, working towards change from the perspective of a personally felt inadequacy of modern day life, and the fulfilment of the individual Will, even if such pursuits of authenticity are performed in a neo-Pagan context of a distinct signature.

What greatly hinders such endeavours is that with the loss of traditions, the sense of place and human dimension went, and processes of democratization eroded societal cohesion. Therefore, preordained life trajectories can no longer be drawn (Connerton, 2009). The self has become saturated with choices, leaving it clueless at the same time (Gergen, 2000). In addition, present-day practices of going on holiday, visiting museums, appreciating history, retaining archival data—all disjunctive activities—are separating lived-through reality from a newly acquired third-person perspective. All typify modernity. All objectify what once was subjective. On a smaller scale, even the self has become an object of scrutiny. Reflectivity and self-reference are relative newcomers in our cognitive repertoire[87] and arguably distance ourselves from who we once were—both phylogenetically and ontogenetically. Pertaining to the latter, in reaction, some sort of *ersatz*-continuity is achieved by 'romancing the self' through constructing narratives to make sense of the complexities of life in the postmodern world. In self-narratives tradition, myth, purpose and human potential are all folded back onto the ego, which has become the focal point of one's life in a normative sense.[88] Re-attachment with the outside world and the appropriation of avail-

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[85] The grey area between expressive and utilitarian individualism as observable in neo-Paganism is mirrored in the division between mutual and communal validation of belief as described in Hervieu-Léger (2001).

[86] For an account on the effect of these developments on direct sensory experience see Reed (1996b).

[87] See Giddens (1991) for a sociological discussion on the emergence of reflexivity.

[88] This is dealt with in Chapter 7: *Coining Names, Casting Selves*.

able systems of meaning now seems the imperative. In neo-Paganism, these sensibilities have taken the form of a return to the alleged old ways of being.

All in all, the great paradox is that the process of modernity that divorced us from our past also bears the seeds of its undoing. That is, as a function of the acquired ability for self-reference the modern individual has emancipated from passively undergoing change, minding her own business, to asking the great questions of "What's it all about?" with unprecedented freedom to act accordingly. Neo-Paganism is one of the responses formulated. Yet reasoning back, every step attempted towards the pristine world of old simultaneously affirms the gap between the here and there, the then and now; it painfully shows the misfit and the rites out of place. If re-enchantment is, indeed, a renaissance—first and foremost the self itself needs to be reborn. Since innocence is lost forever, a simple retracing of steps will not do. Not unlike the dialectics of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, the paradox can only be resolved when one moves beyond modernity; in the end, expressive individualism may well be the fate that is freedom.

Religion is compelled to change according to the newly formed centrality of the self. That is, rather than reconnecting the person to the divine, the divine is now often re-directed to the person. Neo-Paganism caters for such an existential orientation, allowing Wiccans to match their faith to their idiosyncrasies. This state of affairs entails that the more exotic religious expressions get, the greater the ego-involvement will be: here the size of investment equals the lengths of justification.[89] Apart from the tailoring of religious material, eclecticism, the same holds for the adoption of a religious tradition as one complete package, where one could have picked another entirely: there is a freedom of choice. As I stated earlier, these make only sense when they are communicated between people who share similar, associated experiences. Neo-Paganism ultimately is very much an acquired taste, provoking practitioners, followers, and would-be connoisseurs to go to great lengths to justify their practices and beliefs. The defensive posture and touchiness that sometimes can be observed with the prodding of neo-Pagan beliefs often tempt detractors to question the sincerity of neo-Pagan desires for community and to identify ego-involvement with narcissism. Although the latter two may sometimes coincide, they are not identical. Neo-Paganism attempts to walk the stepping stones across them; the movement pulsates, supercharged as a gathering of Wills that keep it in dynamic flux. Neo-Paganism may yet serve as a showcase for the human condition in our day and age. Caught as it is between the perturbation of religion and the pertinence of spirituality, it is literally a *movement*, continually adapting to remain viable, authentic, and sincere—remaining firm by change: a Pagan parallax.

In the next section, I will show how the paradox of modernity comes to the fore in the narratives of self-justifications and self-identifications of Wiccans, who are con-

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[89] I would, in contrast to Stark and Bainbridge's (1987) employment of 'stakes in conformity' speak about 'stakes in nonconformity'; since we are talking about the prolonged ego-investment in Wicca, as well as in maintaining the self-image of deviancy (cf. Reid, 2009; see also note 155 in Subsection 7.4.1).

fronted with the traditionalism/eclecticism dichotomy in their movement. From there, some specifics emerge of the constant adjustments that make up the parallax.

3.3 Self-identification and self-justification

On two—now defunct—Dutch Internet forums, one of which (Silver Circle Online) mostly catered for the needs of initiatory Wiccans, and the other (OccultNed) was populated by a very diverse array of mostly eclectic Wiccans and neo-Pagans, I started a new thread *Tradition or Own Preference?* In the initial post, I asked the members to discuss why they would opt for eclecticism in their own practice, rather follow a tradition, or something in between. All the people who participated in the discussion were of Dutch nationality. Particularly on the Wiccan board, the participants of the discussion had impressive records when it comes to the number of postings, indicating a long-standing tradition of online debate. Within a week I got one hundred ten posts on the Wiccan board, roughly twenty-five percent of which were complete answers, and serious additions to the discussion, and sixteen on the general neo-Pagan board. Once the discussion was over, I revealed my purpose as a researcher and asked permission to the administrators and members to use the data. For reasons of privacy, I was asked not to disclose any information on their personal backgrounds apart from their age and nationality. Since the boards were openly accessible, I have retained the screen names. While this shields the identity of the forum members from outsiders, I have reasons to believe that especially on the Wiccan board, people knew each other from real life, even if they were not so close as in being in the same covens; the Dutch neo-Pagan community is small enough for that.

By utilizing discussion boards as a variation of the focus group method, I was able to study discussions in their natural context. By disclosing my identity as a researcher only afterwards, I prevented influencing the discourse. I analysed the collected material by seeking out commonalities in the various responses, turning these into three categories. In their initial reactions, the discussants often painstakingly explained their preferences for their own practice (see 3.3.1). After the discussion started, they would engage in a debate on how they would like to see others practice Wicca under specific circumstances and given specific motives (see 3.3.2). Also, they would deconstruct the very terms 'tradition' and 'eclecticism' and question their applicability (see 3.3.3).

These three aspects of the forum discussions—reflections one one's own practice, reflections on that of others, and reflections on the terms—make up the leitmotivs of the Pagan parallax. Therefore, I will treat the findings by topical relatedness, rather than by order of appearance. The numbers in the text refer to the quotes; each comes with the name, age, and adherence of the discussant. To get a sense of individuals behind the participants, I have chosen as many quotes as possible from the same people, if they voiced what I have found to be a commonality of opinion with others.

3.3.1 Reflections on one's own practice

Most notably, Wiccans displaying tendencies of eclecticism tended to opt for an in-between position, although that on the basis of their stories and examples, one would be tempted to place them in the category of 'eclectics' (q. 08, 09).

> 08 To me it is a matter of and/and [rather than either/or] (Lieke, 41, eclectic; 1: 22).

> 09 Magic according to tradition or according to your own method are both fine, as long as you can feel the magic. At least, that is my experience (Famillinar, 21, eclectic; 1: 43).

As the debate developed, however, most redefined their positions, leaning more towards eclecticism (q. 10, 11). One Wiccan even shifted from a middle position to eclecticism in one long message (q. 12). Although rather speculative, these changes might be explained by the negative connotation of the term 'eclecticism' in some Wiccan circles or the lack of self-reflection, the latter gradually dissolving during the discussion. All in all, we may conclude, that contrary to their traditionalist counterparts, the eclectics argue that choosing for eclecticism or tradition is up to the individual, whereas the traditionalists, as I will show, justify their choice depending on the context, even if they eschew the very term 'eclectic.'

> 10 I shall have to opt for the eclectic side. I am hopeless when it comes to sticking to traditions or standards. Trying things out nice and easy, and thinking about the results (DogonM31, age unknown, eclectic; 1: 91).

> 11 Silently I call most of these [traditional] actions 'hoo-ha' that don't work—of course it works, but not for me (Famillinar; 1: 38).

> 12 On the one hand, I prefer to give my own personal interpretation to my rituals and magical acts. What I do find important in that, though, is finding out why something is, the way it is. … Where the traditional comes into play for me is in, for instance, the drawing of a circle, and invoking the elements. I wouldn't do East first and then do West, South, and North. The order isn't right, you end up with a mess in your circle, and the energy won't flow properly. But that as well—has to do with feeling. … In the end, coming to think of it, I mainly follow my feeling [in doing rituals]. When the feeling is not right, the magical work won't work for me either. Then I can't approve of it, and could as well have done nothing at all (Lieke; 1: 23-31).

At first glance, the feel-good sensitivity of the eclectics seemed to come to the fore when eclectic choices were asked to be explained. In the course of the debate, however, these affects gradually became more articulate. Although the centrality of emotion among eclectics remained, 'good' came to be interpreted as 'right' in due time. In that respect, some negative emotions were still considered 'good,' as long as they contributed to an overall learning experience (q. 13). In addition, cathartic releases of built-up tensions due to enduring negative moods outside of the ritual were also discussed,

as was the changing nature of feelings during the different episodes of a single ritual (q. 14), and the heterogeneity of feelings between the various rituals, where one general neo-Pagan even compared rituals to episodes in a romantic relationship with its ups and downs (q. 15).

13 Setting your emotions free provides relief. And not only the laughing but also anger, grief, impatience, frustration, etc., etc., etc. Often it helps me moving forward on my path, and getting to know myself somewhat better! (Lieke; 1: 230).

14 I think a fit of laughter from time to time, also in rituals, can set you free. To me, laughing is a strongly positive emotion which I am glad to be able to feel. The energy flows profusely. I experienced once, that I was laughing [so] loudly, which worked as a release, that I could let go of my grief. Crying suddenly! (Lieke; 1: 228).

15 Just as in a [romantic] relationship [in your relation with the divine world there are] good days and [days] where doors are being slammed. … I see it as a personal relationship where there should be room for humour as well as the expression of frustration. One's inclination to be decent and respectful has to be stamped out. An advantage compared to the normal romantic relationship is that in this case, your lover won't leave his or her socks lying about (DogonM31; 1: 218-220).

One Wiccan remarked that my manner of "inciting the debate was much appreciated," arguably because my constant probing into the nature of their experiences gradually dissolved the feeling-good stopgap of their initial responses. Although less fluent than the initiatory group, I suggest that the affective motivation to and in performing ritual is rather similar in the eclectics I met online. Yet, it remains open to debate whether both groups share a worldview beyond the epithet 'Wiccan' or 'neo-Pagan'—most notably about the role and meaning of the self. The use of disjointed assumptions when most eclectics were asked to reflect upon the meaning of tradition (saying "it works for me" one instant, and later "things either work or they don't, regardless of me") indicates that some may not have thought things through, or at least have never felt the urge to do so.

3.3.2 Reflections on the practice of others

In traditionalist quarters, the motivated choices more or less coincided with what they argued that Wiccans ought to choose. Notably, one traditionalist, half jokingly, half seriously, referred to eclecticism as "suitable only for the far-far-advanced." Many related to rituals as to content in need of a form, demarcating between the structure of ritual, which is traditional, and the form, that was allowed by most Wiccans to be more open to adaptation. Some distinguished in that respect between coven work, and solitary praxis, which may well be performed by the same person (q. 16). When allowing for these different approaches depending on context, traditionalists keep stressing that effectiveness rather than affect ought the be the judge of

what to do in solitary praxis, especially when it comes to working magic, rather than mere celebration (q. 17).

> 16 Inside a coven-setting, you work magic according to tradition, and at home, you do other magical work in another way and use that—obviously, ha ha—what works for you. But this has nothing to do with eclecticism because the magic you work at home, is mostly [done] in a traditional fashion, [like with] talismans or candle magic and so forth (Merlin Sythove, 54, Gardnerian; 2: 96).

> 17 In rituals like a celebration, thank[ing the Gods], and so forth, it may be all about 'what feels good'—yech! newagefluffylingo— but to reach states of altered consciousness— magic—often a strong stimulation is needed. That does not have to feel good at all. A grim experience might just even work very well (Oz, age unknown, non-specified Wiccan; 2: 60).

The need for tradition is evident as a point of reference and heralded as superior to eclectic praxis because it is tried and tested (q. 18). In this regard, some lean to supernatural explanations like the heightened energetic quality through repetition of the traditional praxis (q. 19), or the increased efficacy of the ritual itself as a function of the increasing number of practitioners since was first performed (q. 20).

> 18 In a process of many years, and [through] many users [and] initiates, traditional systems have been tried, tested, and found meaningful. Otherwise [they] would have been changed or discarded. The idea that traditional systems are full of rubbish that doesn't work is nonsense. Traditional systems have not remained unaltered since day 1. On the contrary, they have been refined until they form[ed] a well-built structure (Merlin Sythove; 2: 101).

> 19 To focus it helps enormously if you would learn all the ways of one system/mythology/worldview, by devoting yourself exclusively to it for a longer period. And indeed there exist these 'well-worn energetic pathways,' where you end up. When you touch these, all of a sudden, you are sucked into the experiences of many that went before you (Zia, age unknown, eclectic; 2: 248-250).

> 20 Purely from a magic/energetic viewpoint, I see the Western magical tradition of the say last 200 years as a large flow, with tributaries going from it, and sometimes go into it. This stream is powerful because of its inherent potency, but especially because of everything the practitioners put into it. A tradition gains momentum through its adherents. Through that, it becomes easier to go with the flow (Oz; 2: 299).

Implicit in virtually all descriptions the more tradition-inclined Wiccans offered is the notion of the efficacy of ritual, supporting this group's interpretation of ritual work as primarily magical rather than religious.[90] Interestingly, the agreement be-

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[90] Such traditionalism is also implied in the need for secrecy with regard to the use of magic (see Subsection 6.2.3, e.g., q. 36).

tween traditionalists and eclectics on the fact that there is a place for both permits an interpretation that both groups mostly differ in their praxis, rather than in their systems of belief. Wicca can cater for both contexts, by the flexible rendition its source material affords, and the dominance of experience over beliefs in the movement (q. 21).[91]

> 21 The effectiveness not only holds for the magic but also for the religious bit. Wicca, but in a wider context all other [neo-]Pagan schools, are characterized by practices and much less by beliefs, the difference between orthopraxy and orthodoxy. Also, the rituals and acts that apparently have a religious purpose primarily, certainly serve, within the context of the western mystery traditions certainly a practical magical and spiritual purpose as well, often in relation to the spiritual development of the person [in question] (Merlin Sythove; 2: 510).

3.3.3 Reflections on the terms

Prompted to define the word 'tradition,' one Wiccan responded (q. 22):

> 22 [It] is a fixed vision, closely linked to a set of fixed practices, employed by [at least] several people in a fixed context and for a longer period (Owain, 42, non-specified Wiccan).

Tradition, it seems, can only be retained, insofar the eclectic strands themselves are perceived to form a coherent whole, and, more importantly, have endured a longer period of usage which apparently proves their value. In the course of the online discussion, the genesis of tradition was criticized. Various discussants argued that traditions cannot but be built from components that had not been associated with each other before—inevitably leading up to a process of arbitrary compilation, that only with hindsight can be justified and thus can easily be likened to eclecticism. Some debate arose about whether the grandfather of Wicca, Gerald Gardner, was himself an eclectic, although his ground-laying work is now referred to as tradition (q. 23).

> 23 Personally, I find that the people who initiated the various traditions were no eclectics, but people who, on the basis of an existing strand, through a lot of research, knowledge, wisdom, inspiration, possibly divine inspiration, constructed variations, which led to new strands. … Indeed, Gardner is sometimes being called an eclectic … but if you think that on that basis you can be an eclectic witch yourself, you mix up [different understandings of eclecticism], and that is very blond (Merlin Sythove; 2: 338-344).

Interestingly, what not too long ago in the Netherlands was still accepted as a historical fact, namely the so-called Murray thesis, which states that modern-day Wicca has an unbroken line back to a pre-Christian fertility cult, was not deployed in defence of Gardner. Rather a stark pragmatic justification prevailed. Some would argue, "It has proved to be effective, so it must be right."

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[91] For an emic publication arguing this very viewpoint, see Lamond (1987).

An important aspect both the *unbroken line* and *efficacy* justifications have in common, on the other hand, is the relative neglect of establishing truths of the onto-logical status of the divine, regardless of its veneration and presence as supernatural agents in a magical context. In turn, the discussants went on to deconstruct the term 'eclectic' into the egocentric and superficial *dabbler* of one's own free but uninformed choice versus the dedicated and enlightened *autodidact* born out of necessity (q. 24).

> 24 In general, [speaking] about creating something new, I think that there are two ap-proaches. You could call these the top-down and bottom- up approach, and I look at them also as the puzzle and the collage. In a puzzle … the total picture is complete before you start. The actual work consists of finding the right pieces for the right bit of the im-age. Some- times you choose a provisional piece—in other words replacing pieces for better ones, is a characteristic [of this way of working]. In a collage … you start with a random set of unrelated pieces you really like, and through turning [them] this way and that, you try to make a whole of it. Something arises then, that could not have been known beforehand. Because the pieces were all selected personally, replacing them [for better ones] does not come up (Merlin Sythove; 2: 528-532).

All in all, what holds as tradition and eclecticism in both Wiccan groups is rather flu-id. Apart from both respective deconstructions, the interdependence of both terms was noted: there is more than mere word-juggling to the phrases 'eclecticism of tradi-tions' and 'traditional eclecticism' (q. 25).

> 25 I think … that 'tradition' and 'eclecticism' are not each other's opposites. Every tradition has … something eclectic within and all forms of eclecticism is based on a tradition. I think that the choice between 'traditional' or 'eclectic' is not a real choice, you will always get an element of both (BajorRon, 48, eclectic; 2: 183).

3.4 Towards the Pagan parallax

The time has come to draw some tentative conclusions, which may be heuristically represented by the parallax image. The illusion of movement is maintained by three intertwined motives among Wiccans: *the changing acts of sanctioning*, *the aim to remain the maverick*, and *the constant strive for receptivity*. These three motives will then be linked to suggestions for further research in the coda to this chapter.

The acquired taste of neo-Paganism is rationalized by upholding a self-image that perpetuates a tension with the secular world without, and sometimes even the non-initiated world within. This tension can, for instance, be observed in the clinging to the term 'witch' in Wiccan circles, the meaning of which clearly differs between insid-ers and outsiders. The bad press which Wicca received is criticized or lamented on the one hand, yet exploited on the other to uphold the image of deviancy: "Yes, I am a witch, deal with it!" By the look of it, the gradual acceptance of the neo-Pagan phe-nomenon by society at large and its adoption into pop culture led to distancing be-

tween initiated, old-school neo-Pagans and younger adherents. The uncertain first steps of the latter are now interpreted by the former as a lack of truthfulness (the so-called 'fluffy bunnies'), rather than as just a lack of experience while genuinely heeding the call. A factor not to be underestimated is that of the Internet as an important means of communication.

The Internet not only made information gathering a two-way process (compared to, for instance, books), the anonymity associated with its use might trigger deception and makes unchecked pretences of being knowledgeable easier. Together with the problem of unverified personal gnosis, and the 'hyping' of particularly Wicca by the popular press, these developments cannot but trigger a wave of reactionary elitism. That is, when external structures of authority, vested by publishers and tradition, have come under pressure, a collective reaction of group sanctioning has to take its place (Coco & Woodward, 2007). Apart from these specific dynamics in Wicca, the disembodiment associated with online communication has generated similar in-group dynamics in, for instance, gaming communities where wannabe players, showing pretence without substance or skill, are dismissed as *noobs* (derived from 'newbies') and cast out of the in-crowd. The same holds for *trolls*, labelled as such after the community reached consensus in identifying them as troublemakers, who do not abide by the rules (Haythornthwaite, 2007).

The online Wicca community, then, has rules of conduct, which may or may not be explicated, but which can be gleaned from the interactions between eclectics and traditionalists. More widely, with the gradual crystallization of online communities, different subgroups catering to the diverse array of neo-Pagans have been established. Still, with neo-Paganism as a religious movement being the odd man out, neo-Pagans of various persuasions, spiritual literacy, and age, seemingly do encounter one another more often than do people in other communities. That is, neo-Paganism seems to have a narrative centre of gravity strong enough that commonalities rather than differences are emphasized in the way people decide what forums and what communities to become members of. This state of affairs makes for fertile grounds for debate and controversy regarding practices and beliefs among all its denominations. All in all, not only the Internet, but also the way Wiccans make use of it, drive the gradual change in the way tradition and origin are defined in neo-Pagan circles. These tendencies offer us the first key to the Pagan parallax: because of this narrative centre of gravity, neo-Paganism seemingly shifts, but only in response to the internal tensions and changing motives of its adherents. From the inside out, the counterbalancing which keeps neo-Paganism on course in a sea of change, is the way acts of sanctioning are continually adapting themselves.

When looking at the relation between Wicca—or neo-Paganism in general for that matter—and the outside world, we can clearly observe a compelling difference between the kinds of criticism it receives from outsiders and those that befall other religions. Not only does it seem that critique, of, for instance, the internal logic of the theological underpinnings and the ontological status of (the) God(s) is largely absent, but most engaged criticisms revolve around the issue of invented tradition. The most

striking difference, however, is the fact that these discussions outside neo-Paganism and those inside are virtually identical. Neo-Pagans and non-Pagans alike seem to display the same concerns, even if their conclusions may differ. Neo-Paganism, therefore, has the potential to change, or promptly respond at least, to emerging critique. The paradox with its self-chosen exile disappears when we conclude that perceived otherness necessitates some extent of sameness, what psychologists call the *level of optimal distinction*. Besides needing a clear vision of what one is distinguishing from, to keep the difference constant one is bound to change in accord with developments in society as a whole as well.

With the debunking of the Murray thesis, new ways to justify practices and beliefs have emerged in traditionalist Wiccan circles. The gradual increase in the emphasis on the green nature of the religion, first emerging in the 1970s, is telling in that respect. Moving justifications from the mythistory of its genesis to its viability and significance to the ecological crisis is a fitting response to the detractors. Apart from other neo-Pagans like Ásatrúar and Druids, who point at historical records to justify their practices and beliefs, Wiccans, who may boast being part of a now crystallized new tradition, increasingly emphasize the efficacy of the magical aspects of the tradition. Again, we can observe neo-Paganism not so much on the move, but merely changing complementary to its shifting sociohistorical context. In contrast to the internal affair of the changing acts of sanctioning, we see neo-Paganism adapting here to changing demands of the sociohistorical landscape: another key to the Pagan parallax. These shifts both in self-image and in debate all contribute to the constant generation of new vistas, possibilities and material, that also can be put to work intrinsically: to creatively adapt religious practices themselves. Most notably, however, counterbalancing is what it means to be a counterculture in the first place: neo-Paganism is aiming to remain the maverick.

At the end of my forum discussions some important clues of a larger picture were offered when the eclectics stressed a need for receptivity, creating the right atmosphere, aiming for spontaneity, and appreciating feeling literally 'in place.' In her effort to justify eclecticism, one Wiccan even purposefully employed an internalizing logic: in doing away with as many ritual objects as she could, she tried to keep the ritual as natural as possible. These efforts say something about neo-Pagan creativity in general and about what drives them. The eclecticism I encountered among my sample of Wiccans was not the same as self-indulgence per se, but may rather be a sincere attempt to re-attach to the past and the raw, immediate experiences of the present. In that respect, re-enchantment is neither more nor less the attempt to appraise and foster the *qualia* of the lived life again, fleshed out in the aesthetics of indigenous European culture, symbolism, and the associated agents of the Otherworld.[92] Here religion touches earth almost literally. The ever present receptivity—or

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[92] In the philosophy of mind, qualia refer to the subjective qualities of 'what-it-is-like' to experience something (see, e.g., Levin, 1999). Since a quale (singular) has no truth value (neither positive nor nega-

openness to new experiences—will, through the trial-and-error nature of the actions of the dabbler and the eclectic, be in a continual state of flux. These motives to re-attach to the *genii loci* of Europe of old, the tribal ancestry, and, in a global context, to the return to a reciprocal relationship with the natural world, can be seen as adaptations in a cultural evolution. In turn, their fitness is continually altered by the magico-religious ecology of the group of adherents on the one hand, and the wider context of the outside world on the other.

The danger that lurks here is the fact that the forces of commercialization, anything-goes mentalities, and the emphasis on personal rights rather than duties, all born out the levelling effects of the democratization of culture, may seriously hamper the quality and viability of the religious movement in the long run. Many novice eclectics strand long before attaining any personal growth or disengage their attempts altogether; more do so even before they left a lasting impression on the gatekeepers of the faith, or society at large, for that matter. Still, I suggest that we look beyond their 'bad cooking' of religious ingredients. Sometimes they are trying to home in on the source of their contextualized direct experience—their 'Will' if you will—but are as much led astray by all the cheap imagery, as some commentators are, when they all too easily condemn the eclectics' genuine, albeit naïve quest for contextualized experience.[93]

3.5 Coda: Metaphors of religion and the quest for experience

It seems open to debate to what extent there was a need for me to resort to a metaphor like dancing to explain neo-Pagan religions in general and Wicca in particular. Still, I am in good company. Douglas Cowan, for instance, invokes imagery of the Internet, software, and programming in his aptly named work *Cyberhenge* about online neo-Pagans (Cowan, 2005). Yet a good metaphor is more than a quirk; and to find out if it is, one has to see the extent to which the metaphor is applicable and learn the possible meanings it carries. New religious initiatives are sometimes labelled *supermarket religions*. Implicit here is the centrality of the believer and the discreteness of the elements of belief. Implicit also is the freedom with which spiritual customers can choose their products—regardless of good taste, quality, or appropriateness. Hidden in this imagery is a normative discourse of rejection. Cowan's *open-source religion* (pp. 33-50) is more helpful. Implicit in his metaphor is the idea that whatever the adaptations to the freeware or shareware, the program itself needs to be

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tive), its complexities are akin to the problem of unverifiable personal gnosis and the noetic quality of mystical states (Cf. note 160 on the imagination).

[93] For the discussion of complexities and pitfalls in relationships between neo-Paganism, researchers, and the academic world see Blain, Ezzy and Harvey (2004); see also Chapter 5: *Scholar Versus Pagan*, and Section 6.4.

able to run properly, and the peer community will continually monitor user-submitted improvements, upgrades, and alterations to it.[94] Thus, not the believers so much as the belief system is central to this metaphor, and the need for internal coherency between the whole and the added element is emphasized as well. All in all the metaphor of the open-source religion is purely descriptive and is fruitful to any discussion on the effectiveness of new initiatives within the movement.

These considerations bring me once again to the issue of experience as the validation of belief. Again, Cowan (pp. 49-50) has considered this issue and identified the acceptance of personal gnosis as a true validation. He calls this the Pandora problem of the open-source religion: the perpetuation of the misfit between the historical and cultural facts and the conviction of the (eclectic) neo-Pagans that their experience is right in one way or the other. Although I share his concern to an extent, as I made clear in the last section, I must comment—and this entails a critique to the open-source metaphor—that the very process which leads to a conviction is itself not in any way explained. Moreover, the metaphor derails at the point where we want to locate the software. If we want to prevent the error of reification, we ought to address the implications for a religious system inside the person as well. Does it work? Why does it work? And most importantly: what does 'working' mean from the perspective of the adherent?

From a psychological viewpoint, it is more worthwhile to observe the attempts at receptivity, the process and techniques of getting experiences, rather than merely observing the truthfulness of the convictions arrived at after that. The tension within the duality of appropriation and innovation that Cowan uses might be partly illusory to the extent that appropriation is innovation from the person's view. That is, appropriation will only be arrived at after some unspecified course of action, which in turn is triggered by some personal motivation and intent. Innovation, understood in these terms, includes the fleshing out of affects in religious people, if this brings them new experiences.[95] Certainly, the level of spiritual literacy will influence the perceived quality of the material put to use to such an end, but the value of the material must also be appreciated from a functionalist perspective: what use it has to the believers themselves. Interestingly enough, though, James B. Pratt, arguably the first psychologist of religion to acknowledge the importance of the will to believe, recognized the importance of volitional belief already nearly a hundred years ago (Pratt, 1920; see also Wulff, 1997, pp. 505-523). In addition, he emphasized the role that our senses and imagination play in the formation of personal religiosity. In other words, receptivity needs support from imagery, and the appropriation of any material at hand may initially be preferable to any rational dismissal on the basis of apparent inadequacy or inappropriateness. Symbols must not be taken too literally: "Identifying the little thing that they say with the great thing that they mean," is one of the worst mis-

[94] An analogy with the gatekeepers of the field subsystem Csikszentmihalyi's model of creativity can be readily drawn here.

[95] Cf. the distinction between P-creativity and H-creativity as discussed in 1.4.4.

takes one can make (Pratt, 1950, p. 141). The very essence of what it is to believe then too needs to be scrutinized. In our terms, re-enchantment requires imagination and the *suspension of disbelief*, and perhaps this holds too for the physical and pictorial instantiations of these beliefs. Therefore, the need, or better, the will to believe, ought to get more attention in the study of new religions. Especially in what many call a secular age, this universal aspect of human behaviour comes to the fore. It may well overcome the paradox of modernity. In the context of neo-Paganism, I cannot but garble the line I referred to earlier: "There is no harm to know that ye Will."

S T I C K S   A N D   S T O N E S

O goat-foot God of Arcady!
This modern world is grey and old,
And what remains to us of thee? …

Then blow some trumpet loud and free,
And give thine oaten pipe away,
Ah, leave the hills of Arcady!
The modern world has need of Thee!

Oscar Wilde, *Pan: Double Villanelle*

Greencraft represents a particularly interesting case with regard to the development and diversification of Wicca on the European continent. Although the network of covens draws from Celtic mythology and its literary embellishments and hence maintains a close connection to the British Isles, Greencraft also seeks to explore the believed universal roots of ancient European nature religions. An example of the latter is the long-standing interest in stone circles that are being researched by the group. Their attempt to reconcile Celtic ethnicity with pan-European universalism not only offers a very specific illustration of the tensions between traditionalism and eclecticism in Wicca but also demonstrates the complexities surrounding the notion of neo-colonialism. In this chapter, I will show how the group has contributed to Wicca by developing their unique brand of Celtic-inspired practices. Whereas efficacy and applicability of these practices are the main topics of the first part of the chapter, the issue of authenticity is central to the second part. There, I will explain that Greencraft's legitimation of the use of specific forms of religious material is based on its (1) relational coherence and correspondence and (2) its experiential designation. These rationalizations are then juxtaposed to neo-nationalist motives to justify one's ethnic identity by the appropriation of religious material. I will discuss the opposition between these motives by placing them in their sociocultural context.
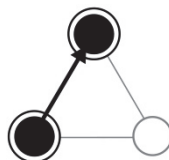
4.1 Introduction

During the 1960s and 1970s what today is referred to as British Traditional Wicca (BTW) or Traditional Craft Wicca (TCW) was spreading through the Anglo-American world. In the early 1980s, the main strands also got a foothold in continental Europe. From its initial dissemination, the movement always retained a strong connection with its source through stressing the fundamental importance of a lineage of initiates. Originating with Gerald Gardner and Alex Sanders, who each founded a strand of BTW—called Gardnerians and Alexandrians, respectively—the new nature religion quickly developed a steady, albeit somewhat conservative core that even nowadays is seen as Wicca proper. The emphasis put on pedigree and orthopraxy implied a high fidelity of the culturally transmitted elements of Britishness that gave rise to the movement in the first place.

When in the 1970s American feminism and deep ecology fused with Wicca, reactionary forces within BTW were quick to dismiss what they saw as unwarranted straying from the original path. The new movements, in turn, did away with what they perceived as the rigid structures of BTW and became theologically eclectic and organizationally egalitarian. Much in the spirit of this age of liberation, new, often non-initiatory groups emerged and freely reassessed and 'reclaimed' the spiritual heritage of what they referred to as *the Old Religion* or *the Craft*. More widely, people attracted to earth-based spirituality felt free to appropriate ancient European myths and traditions. Thus Wicca brought forth a broader association of nature spiritualities that go under the umbrella term of neo-Paganism. These developments, in a nutshell, explain the complex relationship between BTW and strands of the broader neo-Pagan movement that it originally helped to develop.

As a consequence, a tension between the perspectives of eclecticism and traditionalism now exists on two levels simultaneously. First, a disparity exists between the original take on Wicca as developed by the British traditionalists and its derivations in both structure and content (see Chapter 3, *The Pagan Parallax*). Second, both eclecticism and traditionalism seek to root themselves in ethnic pasts that, although deemed appropriate, are too underdetermined or too alien to be catering to the spiritual needs of contemporary individuals. The solution is adapting, inventing, reconstructing, or a combination of these. Most Wiccan traditions choose to lump the various sources together, which amounted in the reclamation of a pan-European fertility cult, whereas other neo-Pagans paths like Druidry (Celtic neo-Paganism), Ásatrú (Germanic neo-Paganism), and Rodnovery (Slavic neo-Paganism) emphasize the need to work out a specific ethnicity.

Focusing on religious creativity in the predominantly Flemish Wiccan community called Greencraft, in this chapter I seek to explore this double tension between eclecticism and traditionalism, but in contrast to Chapter 3, here from a collective rather than individual level and with the emphasis on eclectic reconstructionism. Greencraft represents a particularly interesting case with regard to the development and diversi-

fication of Wicca on the European continent. On the one hand, the group can be argued to be a part of BTW, in that Greencrafters consider themselves part of the Alexandrian lineage and all follow the original system that comes with this tradition. On the other hand, they have moved far beyond Alexandrian orthodoxy. That is, the network of covens explicitly draws from Celtic mythology and its literary embellishments, and hence maintains a strong link with the ethnic past of the British Isles. Yet Greencraft has also moved beyond exploring this ethnic base by seeking to uncover what are believed to be the universal roots of ancient European nature religions in a way that far exceeds the practices of BTW.

Creatively negotiating between ethnic inspirations and cognitively appealing reconfigurations Greencraft also serves as a compelling case in support of a functionalist perspective on cosmological renewal. The movement supports a view on the notion of neocolonialism that can be recast as a field of tension between traditionalism and eclecticism. The attempted reconciliation between the two can best be illustrated by contributions in the form of Greencraft's tree calendar and its correspondences on the one hand and their experiments and experiences with stone circles on the other. Together, these practices and the system of thought form the 'sticks and stones' of the 'temple' Greencrafters are building in Flanders.

4.2 Greencraft

Greencraft Traditional Craft Wicca, as its members call it, was founded in 1991 by Arghuicha and Hera, both initiates of the Dutch branch of Alexandrian Wicca. Important to Greencraft is its manifest, which consists of nine objectives, dubbed the principles of tradition, freedom, ecology, ethics, polarity, pluriformity, non-dogmatism, psychology, and folk (Greencraft Creations, n.d.-a). Even though most objectives are in line with BTW, two stand out immediately as particular to Greencraft. Firstly, regarding the principle of ecology, humans, animals, plants, and megaliths are explicitly mentioned as Gaia's children amongst whom Greencraft seeks to 're-store the pact' (see also 5.2.1). Secondly, the folk principle refers to Greencraft's objective to create a religion that is open not only to "priests and priestesses but also to those that convert to the religion without aspiring to priesthood" (Greencraft Creations, n.d.-a). In addition, the folk principle suggests a motivation to appeal to a larger group of people, seeking to serve and promote the neo-Pagan way of life. Greencraft, then, is more than an association of covens; in Flanders, the organization is arguably the primary source of information for anyone with an interest in Wicca, whether these are spiritual seekers, journalists, or the general public. Greencraft has helped found what now is her sister organization in the United States, the Sacred Well Congregation, which is aimed at exclusively supporting the Wiccan community and offers training for priests to conduct open rituals. Nowadays, Sacred Well is also active in Belgium and seeks to inform non-initiates about neo-Paganism, Wicca, and

Greencraft, whereas in Greencraft proper, the emphasis is placed on the initiated Wiccans.

In the first five years of the new millennium, Greencraft, like many other Wiccan organizations, noticed a growth in the number of people who wanted to become Wiccans. With the 'witchcraft' hype at a high, mostly youngsters started tinkering with magic. Often ill-informed and without the perseverance to learn the Wiccan ways, the enthusiasm of many a youngster in retrospect seems to have been nothing more than a fad (see also 1.2.4). The leaders of Greencraft, who wanted to keep secure their enhanced version of Wicca from the untrained but prying eyes of the aspirant new members, responded by introducing one extra hurdle in the three-grade initiation system: the neophyte initiation. Rather than becoming a neophyte after being accepted as an apprentice as in most initiatory Wiccan traditions, in Greencraft new members first become 'roedies' (that is, rudimentary 'stones'), and get a general Wiccan training with conventional material (De Zutter, 1997, pp. 80-81; 2003, pp. 115-116). Only after their initiation as neophytes, to which they must have been invited by their coven leaders, will they have access to the basics of the Greencraft system, which is then further developed in the neophyte course. In this fashion, course material and the specific Greencraft system of correspondences are better protected from dissemination by drop-outs. However, in the past, when sometimes whole covens left the tradition, Greencraft material was pirated occasionally. This course of affairs has led Greencraft to turn itself into a non-profit corporation that protects its intellectual property as a trademark (cf. 6.3.1). Consequently, all Greencraft coven leaders have to apply for a renewable license to be allowed to teach the Greencraft material.

What sets Greencraft apart from BTW, besides its organizational structure, is its attempt to reconcile Celtic ethnicity with pan-European universalism. This effort is discussed in the section below and refers to Greencraft's employment of Robert Graves' tree calendar and R. J. Stewart's tree-of-life/tarot correspondence (Stewart, 1992).[96] The latter, which I discuss in the subsequent section, concerns the long-standing interest in stone circles, which not only led to frequent visits to sites all over Europe by members of the group, but also inspired them to experiment with these and create their own circles and labyrinths. The discussions of the tree calendar and the interest in stone circles are then related to the traditionalism/eclecticism dichotomy with which I seek to deconstruct the term neocolonialism in the neo-Pagan context. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of how, on a psychological level, (re)-claimed material is internalized and consequently experienced as either collectively or privately owned.

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[96] Note that the tree calendar and the *Greencraft Tarot* are also briefly discussed in 5.2.1. For reasons of brevity, I will only discuss in passing one of the three other important aspects of the Greencraft system in this chapter: the acceptance of Michael Ragan's Celtic 'runes' (rather glyphs), which were presented by him to be used esoterically within Greencraft (Delaere, 2010, p. 199; see 4.5). Greencraft's profound revision of the *Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain* will be taken up in 8.7. The literary retelling of Celtic myth by T.W. Rolleston (1911), which Greencraft uses to contextualize and connect their symbols, is not discussed up in this study.

4.3 Twisting and turning Celtic roots and branches

In his book *The White Goddess,* the visionary British poet and writer Robert Graves (1966) used his literary skills and imagination to lend support to the supposed existence of a Celtic tree calendar. Although the calendar itself was not entirely his own invention—the amateur Celtic historian Edward Davis first constructed it on the basis of rather speculative research (De Zutter, 1997, p. 80)—Graves developed the concept according to what he called "a historical grammar of poetic myth" in an attempt to explain its origin, significance, and relation to the ogham alphabet.[97] In the calendar, native European trees and other plants stand as symbols for each synodic month, and Graves expounded on the order of the trees by explaining their folkloric significance in relation to the time of year. Birch, for instance, is placed at the beginning of the year, when the days begin to lengthen. Graves (1966, p. 166) explains:

> Birch is the tree of inception. It is indeed the earliest forest tree, with the exception of the mysterious elder, to put out new leaves (April 1st in England, the beginning of the financial year), and in Scandinavia its leafing marks the beginning of the agricultural year, because farmers use it as a directory for sowing their spring wheat. The first month begins immediately after the winter solstice, when the days after shortening to the extreme limit begin to lengthen again.

In Greencraft, a Celtic tree calendar has been adopted with only minor differences from Graves' version (see also 5.2.1). Already in Graves, we find the graphic display of the tree calendar in the form of a dolmen with two standing stones that represent the first four and last four months of a year and the capstone as the middle five months (see Figure 5).[98] The dolmen, or trilithon, symbolizes the cycle of life, death and rebirth, just as the original stone structure would be a burial chamber in which a dead hero would await rebirth (Graves, 1966, p. 213). In Greencraft this reference to a personal life cycle has been developed further. Thus the biological and folkloric properties of the trees are partly transformed into spiritual lessons:

> The birch is the pioneer among trees and has its roots in the lunar world of the personal unconscious, but its crown reaches to the solar world of the personal consciousness. The power of *Beith* (Birch) can help us to discover possibilities within us and become aware of the hidden talents that we still have to develop (Hera, Arghuicha, Kara, & Lupus, 2005, p. 13).

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[97] The alleged connection between the trees of the calendar and the letters of the script, however, had already been suggested in early modern times by scholars in the so-called arboreal tradition. While some of the letters indeed have a link with the tree names, modern scholarship only established this link for eight trees at most, while all the other etymological explanations are considered too far-fetched (see, e.g., McManus, 1988).

[98] The idea of thirteen months is derived from Graves' (1966, p. 166) argument that a true lunar month is twenty-eight days long. This would allow for thirteen months per year, leaving one (or two) so-called 'Day(s) of Liberation' (Graves, p. 249) designated to "a tree that is no tree, on a day that is no day at an hour that is no hour at a place that is no place: Mistletoe" (Hera, Arghuicha, Kara & Lupus, 2005, p. 4).

Blackthorn						Apple
Ztraiff						Quert
Z (SS=Z); IX		expansion and flourishing				Q (CC=Q), V
Heron, Nuada						Swan, Llvr
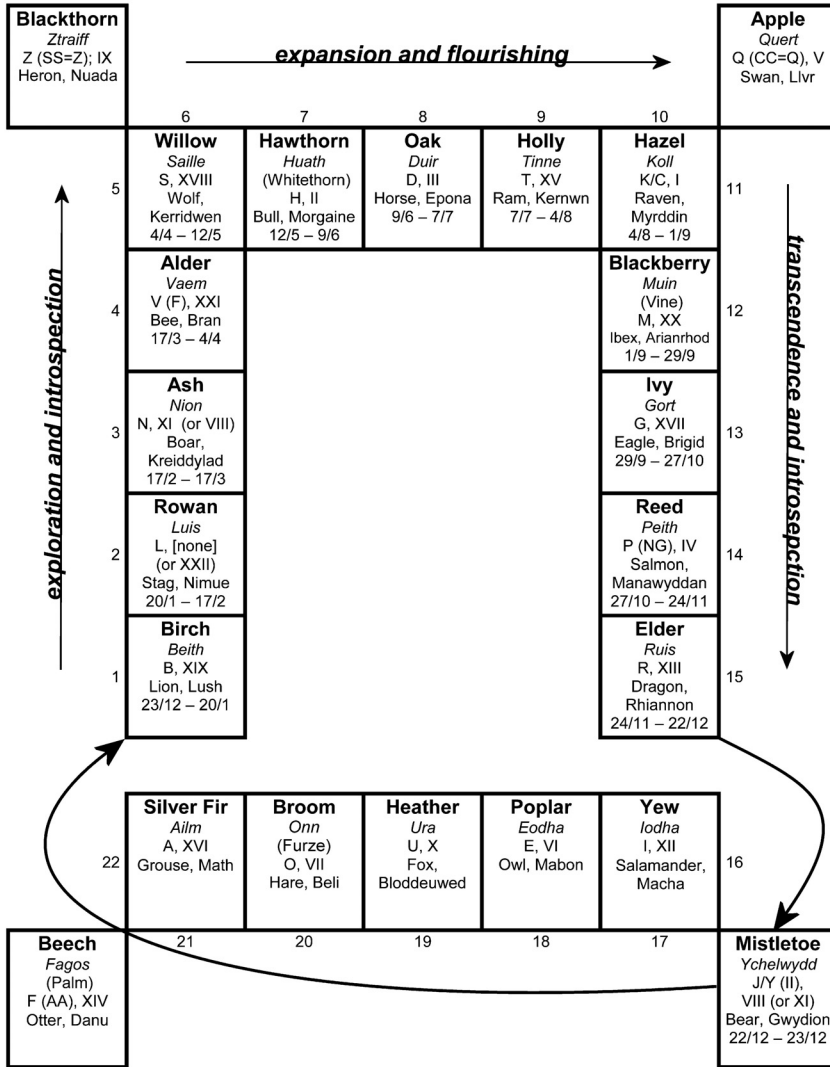
FIGURE 5: *Greencraft's tree calendar*

In each square, first the English tree name is given (in bold), followed by the Celtic name (in Italics), then the letter associated with the tree, followed on the same line by the number of the associated tarot card. The next line states the corresponding animal and deity. Where appropriate, the date range of the particular tree is given on another line. Where trees and letters differ from Graves' system, those of the latter are provided in parentheses.

The references to the lunar and solar worlds give away another elaboration of Graves' Celtic tree calendar, namely the connection with the tree of life from the Hermetic Kabbalah that Greencraft has worked out. It should be noted here that although the calendar only comprises thirteen trees, the adapted ogham alphabet of Graves consists of twenty-two letters. The extra corresponding trees are included in the calendar through the addition of a foundation stone and four trees at the corners. Each of the trees is then related to a path in the Kabbalistic tree of life, which, incidentally, also consists of twenty-two paths between its *sephiroth* (i.e., emanations or spheres; singular: *sephira*). This mapping of one esoteric system onto another is not new. A closely related operation, for instance, was the tree-of-life/tarot interrelation as originally devised by the French occultist Éliphas Lévi (1856) in his book *Le Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*. Although Greencraft followed suit, it was on the basis of another correspondence altogether: one that is most often attributed to R.J. Stewart.

The *Merlin Tarot* developed by Robert J. Stewart (1992) presents another obvious reference to Celtic mythology. With regard to the imagery on the Major Arcana,[99] Stewart's deck resembles the quintessential esoteric tarot deck of Raider-Waite. Only two cards differ between the two systems: the card of the Hierophant in Raider-Waite's deck is replaced with that of the Innocent (represented by a lady on a throne) in Stewart's deck, while the Devil has been replaced by the Guardian (represented by Pan). In the *Greencraft Tarot*, these cards are called 'Innocence' and 'Horned One' respectively, while Death has been replaced by the White Goddess (see Delaere, 2010, p. 14). Most importantly, however, Greencraft adopted the correspondences between the cards and the paths of the tree of life that Stewart used as a whole. These correspondences are entirely different from those originally proposed by Lévi and, unbeknown to most Greencrafters, were initially created by Stewart's one-time mentor, the English occultist William Gray. He argued that the original attributions according to their sequential numbering, regardless of their meaning, was amiss and needed to be recreated from scratch (see Figure 6 for an overview of the original and altered path-card associations).

> Suppose we start sorting out the tarot trumps into sets of homogenous ideas entirely apart from their official numbering. For instance, the Sun, Moon, and Star would go together as astronomical or cosmic phenomena. So would the Emperor, Empress and Hierophant as external rulers of temporality and religion. Justice, Judgment, and the Wheel of Fortune seem to connect as the workings of karmic laws of compensation and balance. Let us set up a skeleton of the Tree and see if any of these ought to fit anywhere quite naturally (Gray, 1984, p. 215).

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[99] The tarot consists of the major and minor arcana. The latter, sometimes called suit cards, are divided into the court cards and the numeral cards and together much resemble modern playing cards. In the Major Arcana, sometimes referred to as trumps, each card contains a symbolical or allegorical picture, the meaning of which is sometimes considered secret (Kaplan, 1978, pp. 1-11).

Thus Gray started out by combining the three central vertical paths with the three cosmic cards, while he placed the 'cards of balance' on the three horizontal paths that cross this central axis. This horizontal/vertical configuration constitutes the skeletal structure of the tree, and thus represents a *logic of coherence*. Then he proceeded to associate the rest of the cards to the remaining paths on the basis of a relationship between the meaning of the card and the field of tension between the sephiroth that each path forms, which represents a *logic of correspondence*. Thus, for instance, he put the Blasted Tower on the path between Severity and Beauty "as anything upsetting balance and harmony in our universe [would be on that path]" (Gray, 1984, p. 219).

Greencraft replaced the Hebrew names of the sephiroth with the names of the celestial bodies of our solar system, but both Greencraft and Stewart retained Gray's tree-of-life/tarot correspondence. Arghuicha explained to me that contemporary Wiccans are often no longer acquainted with the original concepts of the sephiroth. Without any prior study of the Hermetic Kabbalah, terms like *Malkuth*, *Yesod*, and *Hod* would just remain abstract notions.

The complete transposition of the nine sephiroth into what in essence is an astrological model saves the tree of life from what is perceived as misguided traditionalism, and becomes an esoteric way to understand the human psyche and its potential developmental paths more easily. With this operation, Greencraft has also rendered the tree of life compatible with its elaborate system of archetypal correspondences between various trees, power animals and Celtic runes. The *Greencraft Tarot* is a clear indication of this, since the hermetic symbolism on each of the cards that was present in conventional decks has been changed to fit the Greencraft system, even if most of the ideological meanings have not been altered that much.

What, then, is the appeal of the tree of life as a visual system? Arghuicha told me (q. 26):

26   The structure of the Kabbalistic tree of life is something you find very often. For example, there are pictures from the Norse-Germanic tradition where you find the structure with the different worlds connected by paths. Perhaps that is something that is hard-wired in our brain or consciousness, as a result of which it appeals [to us] (37: 753-757).

With the transposition of the sephiroth to represent our solar system, the tree of life can now be divided into three parts: the lunar, solar and stellar worlds, which are linked to the respective Jungian terms personal unconscious, personal conscious, and collective conscious. The belief in 'hard-wired' preferences for specific structures resonates well with the Jungian preformist notion of archetypes, which has been widely accepted in Wiccan circles. The concept is often employed, as I will discuss below, both to objectify cosmological systems and to validate personal belief.[100]

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[100] For other means of objectification see, e.g., Section 8.7; for self-validation, see Section 3.1 and 8.6, and Subsection 7.4.1.
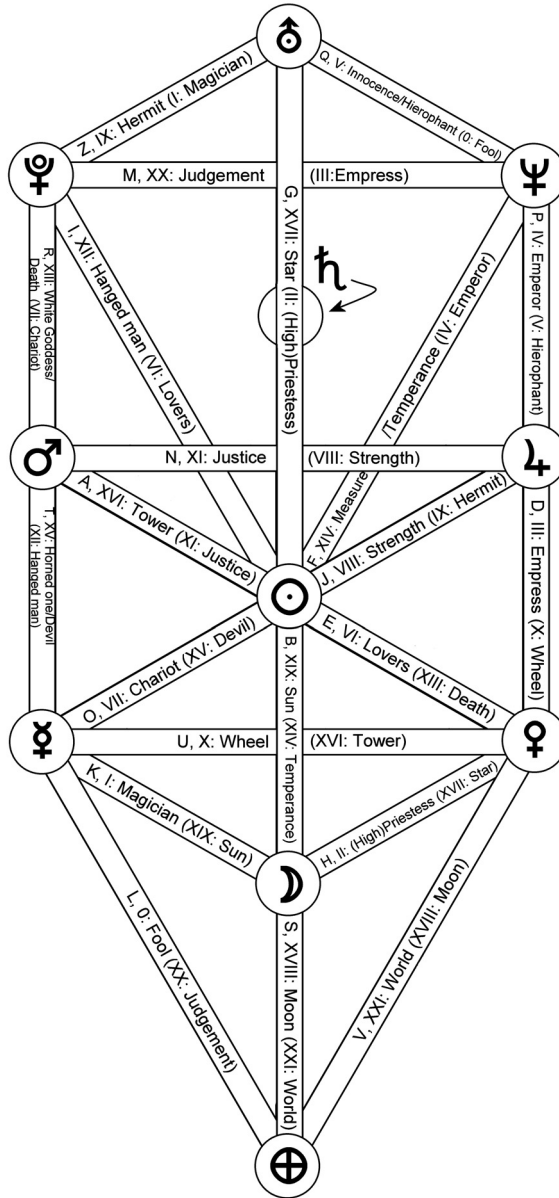
FIGURE 6: *Tree-of-life/tarot correspondences*
On each path, first the letter of the associated calendar tree is given, then the (numbered) card according to the Greencraft-Gray system (with the original names, if different, after a slash). The original path-card associations are given in parentheses.

4.4 Stone circles and pan-European universalism

Stones play a major role in Greencraft. They are considered to be the oldest children of the Earth Goddess, but humans are their midwives who released them from their bedrock, quarried them, knapped them, erected and polished them and thus granted them their individuality, as Arghuicha once explained (see also 5.2.2). Although, as with trees, the human-stone relationship must be understood in terms of human agency (that is, what actions can be performed with, through or on trees and stones), both the ethics of these measures and their experiential significance are central.

For instance, with regard to ethics, when roedies are asked to make a magical wand from a willow tree, their first task is to make contact with a specific willow and ask permission by meditating under the tree. A suitable branch is then chosen and will have to be cut off with a knife that has never been in contact with blood. Finally, something needs to be offered to the willow, thus completing the transaction and sealing a new bond between the person and the tree (Hera & Arghuicha, 1999, p. 15).[101] Experiential significance, in turn, can be gleaned for instance from the stone-singing ritual. Here participants hold a hand-sized stone near their mouth and sing to it in such a manner that, when one finds the right pitch, the sound is experienced as originating from the stone rather than the person.[102]

Arguably more than trees, which can easily be represented as an idea, the significance of stones can best be appreciated outdoors, where they either have been incorporated into sacred structures in which they have retained their individuality, like stone circles, or have become carriers of artwork and symbols. Place-bound, in both cases the stones are thought to either embody or equal the dwelling places of the *genii loci*. Interestingly, when Greencrafters erect new stone circles in permanent places they create for ritual, often located on private land, they make an effort to assemble stones from various locations they have visited (see Figure 7). Note, however, that the stones they take home are either picked up or removed from rock beds near the sites, but not from the structures themselves.[103] Following James Frazer's (1922, p. 22) famous *law of contagion*, this practice is motivated by the idea that a connection with the original location is thus maintained. In addition, soil from each of the newly built stone circles will be distributed among the others, thereby interconnecting Greencraft's own ritual places.

These practices hint at an unresolved tension between topophilia and idealism, as I will show. Topophilia manifests itself as an implicit belief in what could be called the *formal integrity* of stones, which refers to their embeddedness in a specific circle in a specific landscape. With regard to *substantive integrity*, stones are understood

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[101] See also *ethical orientation* as mentioned in 1.4.1.

[102] For a more detailed description on this ritual episode, see 5.2.2.

[103] The stones vary in size from mere pebbles (diameter of ca. 5-10 cm) to small rocks (diameter of ca. 30-40 cm).

FIGURE 7: *Eburon's stone circle*

The structure, situated on private land, was created with stones and pebbles gathered by coven members from locations throughout Europe. The fence was erected for reasons of privacy because the ritual space can be partly seen from a nearby road.

as embodying their own essence, which allows for novel arrangements of single stones to create distinctly new structures. Illustrative with regard to this tension are Arghuicha's narratives about his visits to ancient sites. Take, for instance, this quote from his *Pilgrimage to Alba[104]*:

> Alas, the understandable preoccupation of the people of Alba with the traumas of their recent past often blinds their eyes to the true greatness of Alba and the heritage from a far remoter past, the glory of DalRiada and the Picts and beyond that, the Stone Circles and Standing Stones from the people of the Oceanic Rim whose building only enhanced the sacredness of Alba's landscape instead of destroying it (Arghuicha, 2002, p. 9).

Here is an example of how Greencrafters position themselves between the imagined builders of specific structures in the landscape, which have since become cultural heritage, and the people who now inhabit the vicinity of these sacred places. I have found numerous other instances of this self-appointed stewardship: from criticizing the building of a shed near the ancient stones to observing the neglect of sites where trees have been allowed to grow inside the circle, and even in Arghuicha's description of the out-of-placeness of partying youngsters and their loud music. In the rare cases that locals are mentioned specifically in relationship to the sacred structures, their misguided care is emphasized—the local priority is to preserve the materiality of the

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[104] Alba is the Scottish Gaelic name for Scotland.

stones somewhat like a museum exhibit, rather than allow them to be a place for pilgrimage or other contemporary sacred purposes.

When visiting the thirteen stone circles of Węsiory in Poland, for instance, a small group of third-degree Greencrafters resorted to bribing a local caretaker with 100 złoty to gain access to the site at night. They locked the fence, so as not to be disturbed while engaging in ritual and meditation. In an interview, Arghuicha told me (q. 27):

> 27 You are not allowed to do much with the stones because lichen grows on them, and these are delicate and protected, and therefore you are not allowed to touch [the stones]—and of course we did want to touch them (37: 491).

One of the things Arghuicha and his fellow Greencrafters did was meditate on the stones to see if they could learn something about the purpose or history of the site. Arghuicha explained to me what he experienced (q. 28):

> 28 There were many stories locally about so and so has been [at these circles] during the night, and [ran] away screaming because he or she suddenly saw the shade of a Gothic warrior. … [The Goths] were there for a few years on their trek from Gotland to the Black Sea. … So there was much fear, many people told us that they wouldn't dare to walk there at night. … The strange thing was that we didn't … feel any fear. I had an [encounter] with what I like to call a Gothic princess, for lack of a better description, and the only thing that emanated from her was an enormous feeling of wistfulness [as if she said]: "My people have moved away, and I have remained here because of circumstances. I don't know what happened to them." … I had a strong feeling that … the Goths, when they were there … used the stone circles [to bury] their kings and important people in such a manner that their spirits are bound to that spot and remain there, which is handy, if you want to consult them (13: 179-183).

Quotes like these suggest that although the locals take care in preserving the site, according to the Greencrafters they do so for the wrong reason because the stones need to be used for communication: in this case, making contact with the deceased. Important in this respect is the fact that even if the Goths were not the builders of the circles, they put them to use in a similar manner to that which the Greencrafters believe was intended by their original creators.

Besides ritual and meditation, Greencrafters also engage in various experiments using circles like these and other stone structures. At Węsiory they noticed in one circle that what had been thought to be the position of a missing stone was in fact too small to have held one. Arghuicha explained to me (q. 29):

> 29 Typical [of some stone circles in Poland] is that there is a sort of circular pavement around each stone made from smaller rocks. [There is such a frame] around all the stones in the circle, also at the place where the stone is missing. … Only that frame is too small to have held a stone of the same size. … There must be a reason for that. … So we

experimented … with a few people around the *omphalos*[105] activating it, with one person standing at the place of the so-called missing stone, who has to pass the energy of the stone next to him to the stone on his other side. … Something that kept happening was that the person who stood there could hardly get out of it afterwards (37: 477-478, 491).

These and many other experiments they conducted have led to the Greencrafters' theory that the stone circles across Europe can be used as large centres of telepathic communication. Together with Sacred Well, Greencrafters have even built various structures in the United States, including a stone circle and a Cassini oval[106] on private land in Texas. The most important observation to make is that the experimentation with stone circles implies not only a revived usage of these ancient structures and the construction of new ones but also a complex relation between the motives of traditionalism and eclecticism. The clash between the formal and substantive integrity of the stones is best showcased in an excerpt from *Pilgrimage to Alba*:

Their only hope lies in forming a bond with the Stone Circles that are our own: so that they can be part of this great adventure that is our magnum opus. So I promised [the stones] songs and dances and the sharing of souls and asked for their alliance in our undertaking. And as I opened my soul to them I felt the flux of their soul flowing into me, binding me to Alba forever: for that is the price that must be paid. And so my song became the song of Alba. I pleaded with them and cajoled them, I sang and I cried and I howled. And went around once more in zigzag, slapping them and shaking them fully awake in sacred exhortation. And from this time on, with every Stone Circle we visited, I projected a mental image of our own Stone Circles, binding them to it: for through this bond, whenever we sing and dance in our Stone Circles, they can be part of it (Arghuicha, 2002, p. 11).

This account reveals an ambiguity. Arghuicha suggests that the "only hope" for the stone configurations to release their power is to recreate their essences in the newly built structures of Greencraft. That is, Greencraft tries to overcome its locality, so to say, by bringing in stones from various places to Flanders. This devotion to the 'Universal Stone Circle' stands in contrast with the emphasis Arghuicha puts here on the locality of the ancient circles he visited. Each place had an inherent atmosphere, which Arghuicha tapped into. The act of transpositioning, then, cannot bring closure. While the 'energy' of the stones becomes dispersed over many places, by connecting with the original circle, practitioners become bound to specific areas. This "price that must be paid" suggests the primacy of the locality.

On a different note, the perceived need for the recreation of stone circles helps us understand how neocolonialism might be deconstructed as a set of beliefs and motives. In the next section, I will address them as collective manifestations of specific criteria of eclecticism, before concluding the chapter with a discussion of the individual dispositions that give rise to them.

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[105] In this context the word *omphalos* (Greek for 'navel') refers to the centre stone of a stone circle.

[106] A Cassini oval is a geometrical figure that is (in this case) closely related to the lemniscate (∞), which is a symbol of infinity.

4.5 Criteria of eclecticism and implications for neocolonialism

So far, I have offered an overview of Greencraft's additions to the original Alexandrian lineage in Wicca with an eye to explaining the two-layered field of tension between traditionalism and eclecticism. The first layer of tension has to do with different takes on orthodoxy in Wicca. Greencraft cannot be pigeonholed into either perspective, since, as explained above, they both observe the practices of the Alexandrian branch and are developing their own system, which, even if it includes what is considered initiatory Wiccan material, sports a broad but ethnically sensitive neo-Pagan outlook. Greencraft's system, therefore, belongs to the second layer as well. To specify the role of ethnicity, I have chosen to expound on the perspectives of traditionalism and eclecticism as reconstructionism and revivalism respectively.

Bowman (1996, p. 244) suggests that whereas reconstructionists seek to replicate the past with high fidelity, revivalists aim at reinvigoration by any means necessary. The adoption of the Celtic tree calendar and the tree-of-life/tarot correspondences have been shown above to rely as much on already developed innovations to both esoteric and Celtic material as on the novel recombination of these. Analogously, I have also discussed the unresolved position towards stones as 'individuals' that are featured in both the megalithic stone circles of Europe and Greencraft's own newly created structures. In other words, with regard to both the 'sticks' and 'stones' of the 'temple' Greencrafters are building, elements of reconstructionism and revivalism can be found in both the cosmological system and the refiguring of ethnic roots.

I have addressed the traditionalism/eclecticism dichotomy previously (see Chapter 3, *The Pagan Parallax*), but here I discuss this tension on a collective, rather than an individual, level and limit myself to initiatory Wicca. Consequently, the emphasis has shifted from the motives derived from the personal 'true Will' as the driving force behind religious renewal to consensual *efforts after meaning*[107] and protocols for the adoption of novel elements in the shared cosmological system. Where, then, must we draw the line between traditionalism and eclecticism in Greencraft, and how do Greencrafters' motives relate to neo-nationalism and neocolonialism?

At first glance, one would assume that Greencraft is engaged in the discovery and reconstruction of purported esoteric aspects of traditional Celticism. A prime example would be the adoption of the so-called 'Celtic runes' that were featured in a course from the Temple of Danann, a neo-Pagan group led by Michael Ragan. Both these runes and their explanations were seen as material for internal use only, but later Greencrafters were granted permission to use them in their system. According to Arghuicha, Ragan assumed these runes were hinted at in ancient Irish texts and were allegedly used strictly by the Celtic priesthood as a sacred counterpart of the secular ogham script (Delaere, 2010, pp. 198-199). Be that as it may, there is no evi-

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[107] 'Effort after meaning' is a psychological term coined by C. F. Bartlett.

dence for these runes from an academic perspective, and even some emic sources seem to frown upon what is regarded a blatant invention.

Regardless of this critique, though, most coven leaders in Greencraft would argue that they are not after literal, but *spiritual truths*. I have treated this line of argument in Chapter 5, *Scholar Versus Pagan*, referring to it as the need for the suspension of disbelief in order to secure attunement with the divine world, which, after all, is mediated through these symbols (see 5.4.1, note 123). Besides the notion of spiritual truths, another limitation of traditionalism has been put forward in Greencraft: the dynamism of myth. Since myth is argued to be subject to historical contingency, attributes and characteristics of the Gods shift as a function of their growing or diminishing importance. As a result, in the absence of a single 'correct version' of the story, the system builders in Greencraft feel relatively free to redistribute the stones, runes, animals, Gods, tarot cards, and objects in their structure—I say 'relatively,' for there are criteria both explicit and implicit that limit the degrees of freedom in the system.

After scrutiny, these criteria appear to prevent the conclusion being drawn that Greencraft would count as purely revivalist. Where the two limitations of traditionalism may have contributed to justifying the creative invention of cosmological material, the criteria to which these are subject can be thought of as restrictions on eclecticism. Greencrafters aim at making their system ethnically commensurate in that they combine elements that are either allegedly Celtic in origin (for example, the Gods and the runes) or at least indigenous to northern Europe (for example, the animals and the stones). This aspect encompasses perhaps the most obvious link with neocolonialism, considering the various responses that critics of this kind of postmodern bricolage have made. In the literature about the neo-Pagan use of ethnic material, often the case of Native American cultures is discussed (e.g., Magliocco, 2004, pp. 215-218; Pike, 2001, pp. 134-137). Depending on the Native American group, allegations of cultural imperialism by neo-Pagans are phrased as 'borrowing,' 'appropriating,' 'strip-mining,' or even 'stealing' (Magliocco, 2004, p. 216).

In Europe, the relationship between the appropriated culture and the appropriating group is vastly different. A two-sided relationship between the guardians of Celtic heritage and Greencraft exists. Insofar as the guardians are themselves neo-Pagans from the areas that are mostly associated with Celtic culture—Scotland, Ireland, Wales, Cornwall, the Isle of Man and Brittany—these 'ethnic' neo-Pagans could accuse any foreigner of cultural imperialism. Be that as it may, their own ethnic links with the Celts may be conveniently assumed, rather than established beyond reasonable doubt, for these geographical areas have, to different extents, been subject to centuries of migration. As well as favouring the particular, postmodern rendition of 'Celticity' of these neo-Pagans, this neo-nationalist claim of ethnicity seems like an argument dusted down for the occasion, for in no way could they uphold an image of authentic Celticity because that culture has long since vanished. Also, the position of these 'Celtic' neo-Pagans relies on the implicit assumption that the Celtic world coincides only with these six remaining Celtic countries, whereas the original area of dis-

tribution of the Celtic tribes encompassed the greater parts of western and central Europe.

In turn, another group of outspoken stakeholders, Celtic scholars, attests that what constitutes Celtic culture proper belongs to the past—a past whose correct interpretation is monopolized by this very group. Ultimately, Celticity, then, can be considered as a matter of the heart rather than the mind, a position most aptly named by Bowman (1996, p. 246) as that of the 'cardiac Celt,' where "spiritual nationality is a matter of elective affinity." Still, the emphasis put by Greencraft on their system in its entirety suggests that the Celtic elements in it merely represent a pleasing aesthetic of ethnic unity. Being closely linked to the history of the English-speaking world, with its vast impact on popular culture, the appropriation of Celtic heritage since the 1970s created a lock-in effect, in that its look and feel now have become the leading aesthetic in neo-Pagan practice.

Moving beyond ethnic commensurability as the *external* logic of coherence in Greencraft's system, the second restriction of eclecticism is an *internal* logic: the need for the cosmology to be systematically consistent within Greencraft by elaborating on mythic, etymological, logical or traditional connections between its various elements.[108] The term 'cosmology' here refers to the whole of the religiously acknowledged elements that make up a specific level of reality, their interrelations, and, in turn, the interrelations among (what are believed to be) multiple layers of reality. Hence a cosmology constitutes a rationale for both the emergence and development (and perhaps even dissolution) of the reality of our life world. Among the guiding principles of the reformation of these bits and pieces of source material into a coherent cosmology are aesthetics of symmetry, elegance, parsimony, and balance on different levels. Thus when there were twenty-two—no more, no fewer—deities chosen for the Greencraft system, they needed to be divided equally into eleven males and eleven females to balance gender, while remaining fit to be superimposed on the paths of the tree of life.

Matters become even more complicated since within the (super)system each deity also needs to become associated with a tree, an animal, and a rune. Each (sub)system of these various elements, however, is different, and also the mythic, etymological, logical or traditional connections between the elements across the different subsystems often point in different directions. Integrating these in a coherent supersystem, then, is not unlike trying to solve a Rubik's Cube. For instance, Alder now is associated with Bee, whereas it could also have been related to Raven, given the fact that linguistically Raven is identical to (the deity) Bran. However, in that case, Bee would have to go with another tree, but there might be no mythological justification

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[108] Cf. Brach and Hanegraaff (2005). They argue that a religious cosmology extends both vertically and horizontally. An example of a vertical extension or *universal analogy* is the idea that the microcosm of humanity is a mirror image of the macrocosm of the divine order. Horizontal extensions, which are also called *correspondences*, entail the associations between sets of elements like animals, deities, attributes, numbers, and so forth.

for that. Examples like this show that much of the work in building the cosmology consists of looking for an optimum fit between incompatible choices, while at the same time aiming for an elegant yet complete superstructure.

The internal logic of coherence here turns into one of correspondence, which is the third restriction of eclecticism. The supersystem as a whole needs to become cosmologically exhaustive. That is, even if the chosen elements in the system cohere and amount to an intelligible unity, the structure as a whole must represent a complete cosmology in that it constitutes a well-rounded whole in which systemic elements such as the different levels of consciousness, attributes, challenges, professions, social relationships, bodily functions, ways of knowing, and so forth have their place. A one-dimensional example would be the four trumps of the tarot as representatives of the four traditional social classes: farmers, craftsmen, clergy, and nobility. Another straightforward illustration is that of the four elements—earth, water, fire, and air—that together make up the whole of the physical universe.

In turn, this internal logic of correspondence is mirrored by its external counterpart. That is, whereas a cosmology needs to be exhaustive, in that it offers a complete perspective of sacred reality, it also needs to correspond to the mundane world without. In other words, an infinite number of relationships between humans and their world need to be expressible with this finite set of cosmological elements. Therefore, the latter should be representationally generative. In Greencraft's case, for instance, any name can be related to the system using numerological transposition, whereas each date can be linked to a specific animal and tree: for example, "the Bear in the moon of Hawthorne," which in turn has an astrological bearing. To conclude this chapter, the process of coupling the collective, sacred world to the personal mundane world will be discussed.

4.6 Conclusion: Towards a cultural psychology of appropriation

Although both internal and correspondence-based criteria for eclecticism are sympathetic to a psychological understanding of the eclecticism/traditionalism dichotomy, representational generativity, in particular, has the potential to cross the bridge between a shared cosmology and a single person. Herein lies the key to the deconstruction of neocolonialism into motives of eclecticism and traditionalism. The notion of neocolonialism implies a sympathy for the 'victim' of appropriation, or at least puts an emphasis on the out-of-placeness of the used cultural material. While this is a valid anthropological argument, it may prevent an understanding of the culprit's rationale for the appropriation.

Interestingly, the charges of 'strip-mining' and 'stealing' mentioned earlier, made by Native Americans about cultural appropriation, imply that in an economic sense, culture consists of both rivalrous and excludable goods. In contrast, the other forms of cultural imperialism of which neo-Pagans have been accused—'borrowing' and

'appropriating'—at least leave room for non-rivalry, meaning that the goods still can be 'consumed' by the original owner. In that sense, these charges brought against the current use of ethnic material imply the dual understanding of culture as both a possessable and as a possessing entity, like Magliocco (2004, p. 216) also suggests. These two understandings are analogous to the fundamental distinction made in cultural psychology between substantive ("What does it consist of?") and formal or functional ("How does it work?") definitions of culture. The dichotomy of transmitted and evoked culture is of particular interest here.[109] Whereas culture may be seen as the body of transmitted information, what ultimately will spread, and how, is argued to depend on the specific sociocultural context, perennial human needs, and perhaps our evolutionary heritage. For present purposes, I want to focus on the neo-Pagan context of the two-way relationship between transmitted and evoked culture.

First, the creation of a unique configuration of existing cultural material as a way for minority groups like Wiccans to carve out a niche in society entails a move from transmission to evocation. That is, the systematization of this appropriated material often involves processes of reassessment, bricolage, socialization, and, eventually, concealment. In the institutionalization of secrecy, the system of beliefs and practices in which the once freely accessible material is incorporated becomes guarded or 'oath-bound' (that is, available only to initiates), and by that very act the appropriated material it is comprised of will eventually become perceived as being owned by the group (see Chapter 6, *Secrecy and Ritual Hygiene*).

This process of 'mesocolonization' creates a cultural landscape where various traditions simultaneously may seek to distinguish themselves from society at large and from each other. In turn, the gatekeepers of a tradition require adherents to show allegiance to their tradition by upholding secrecy and by socializing them into a logical narrative of justification of the particular adaptations of the appropriated material in their group. In the case of Greencraft, a well-developed socialization process of gradual disclosure, oaths of secrecy, and the creation of emotional attachments to the religious material prevents or limits deviation from acceptable interpretations of the system. Eventually, the whole becomes self-referential when new experiences or material become associated to the incumbent system. Moving towards a state of immunity to alternative understandings or critique, the group can now create its own conditions for the emergence, transmission, and transformation of culture.

Second, the movement from evoked to transmitted culture is typically framed in the language of Jungian archetypes. A reference to archetypes is perhaps the strongest means of objectifying, and thereby 'microcolonizing,' religious material and justifying its particular usage. The concept of the collective unconscious as the repository of archetypes turns culture-specific material into public property. In addition, the archetype is a 'quality check' for both group and individual. For instance, when the material surfaces in dreams, meditations, or religiously inspired interpretations of life

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[109] See, e.g., Nettle, 2009, for a discussion of these terms.

events, a successful explanation in terms of Jungian archetypes not only enhances the value of the personal life (one is living one's own myth) but also grants validity to the system in which the material is incorporated. In Greencraft, new material that cannot be incorporated logically will typically become the subject matter of a guided meditation to check its appropriateness. As part of the shared endeavour, having a common understanding of the significance is important. Perhaps here a *logic of consensus* applies. Nevertheless, archetypal objectification of mental states may also introduce the problem of self-validation of belief, which might lead members astray. Here the delicate fabric of collectively established meanings and interrelations that define a unique and intricate combination of eclecticism and traditionalism can easily be torn apart, and turn into the idiosyncrasies of capricious and striding individuals.

All in all, even though the relationship between neocolonialism and neo-Paganism seems evident (just as the relationship between neo-nationalism and ethnic neo-Paganism can be assumed), Greencraft presents us with a somewhat difficult case. Even if its Alexandrian lineage, and thus its relationship to BTW, is maintained, Greencraft has steered clear of a close-knit social structure and Wiccan imperialism. Instead, they have developed into a spiritually semi-independent network with a keen interest in building their own complementary system. Even if their borrowing of Celtic material looks like cultural imperialism, Greencraft's deepest interests reach far beyond ethnic association. While their extensive *bricolage* of Celtic culture and elements from esoteric cosmologies may be mistaken for random appropriation, their reconstructions are in fact coherent, and do not solely rely on either rationality or experience, but on the creative intermarriage of the two. Balancing between eclecticism and traditionalism, Greencraft's relationship with religious and cultural material is multifaceted and not without unresolved tensions. Colonizers themselves as much as colonized, collectors of material but subject to a system of their own making, a collective as much as a group of individuals, Greencrafters perpetuate a creative tension they can constantly feed off while building their 'temple' in Flanders.

SCHOLAR VERSUS PAGAN

Use human means as though divine ones didn't exist,
and divine means as though there were no human ones.

St. Ignatius of Loyola

This chapter offers an ethnography of a ritual tree walk as practised by the Belgian Greencraft Wicca movement. The description is employed to discuss the notions of reflexivity, reactivity, as-if worlds, and the double hermeneutic. Especially in the context of religious studies, these notions remind us of important issues of how to relate to the people one is observing. By telling an impressionist tale that situates me as a scholar caught between the academic and neo-Pagan world, I try to show how the double hermeneutic is rather a problem within a person than between different groups. The ritual tree walk, the description of which forms the heart of this study, illustrates that both scholar and adherents face the same transitions each time they move from the mundane to the sacred sphere and back. I have put emphasis on my introspections, as these episodes have been the most informative about the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Comparing my work to that of other scholars of neo-Paganism, I discuss the notions of guesthood and becoming one's own informant. By learning to appreciate the first-hand experiences of the tree meditations, I come to the conclusion that attunement and the suspension of disbelief are necessary requirements for both scholars and religious practitioners.
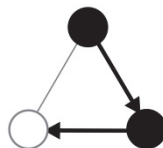
5.1 Introduction: To see the wood for the trees

In 2010, I became a member of SIEF's Ritual Year Working Group, which held annual, small-scale conferences throughout Europe. After presenting a paper that year in Tallinn, the organizers of the next symposium, to be held in Ljubljana, asked me to think along with them about possible approaches about what ultimately became the *Researchers and Performers Co-designing Heritage* conference. Their topic suggestion of the position of the scholar during his fieldwork set me off in the direction of Ronald Hutton's (2004) discussion of the reflexivity/reactivity dichotomy in his work on the history of Traditional Craft Wicca.

Somewhat later, Emily Lyle (personal communication, 30 July 2010), the then president of the working group, asked me to follow up on my brief remarks on the *as-if* mode of imagining, which I made in the context of my research on religious creativity in neo-Paganism (see Van Gulik, 2011a).[110] I can best explain the as-if mode by juxtaposing it to that of *what-if*. The latter merely entails a thought experiment. Such an exercise is neatly bracketed to keep it separate from the everyday world, and one's engagement with it is no more than a series of conscious fictions that one entertains while one simultaneously experiences oneself as remaining firmly in the *as-is* (i.e., real world). The first mode, in contrast, amounts to a full immersion in the imaginative—or *transitional* (see 1.4.5)—world that, even perhaps briefly, is acted upon as real, with behaviour or thought specifically tailored in accord with the newly set rules and culminating in experiencing its veracity (cf. Bruner, 1986, in Singer, 1999, p. 17; Vaihinger, 1925, pp. xli-xlii).

Automatically assuming that I would combine the notion of as-if worlds with that of the reflexivity/reactivity dichotomy, I quickly found myself at loggerheads as to how I would string together a theoretical exercise with my empirical research and my personal and professional concerns as a scholar with the transitional world from which I understand the identity-driven motives and actions of the participants of my studies.

The solution to my problem came with my participation in the so-called *tree walks* that are held each month by Greencraft. That part of my fieldwork served three interrelated goals that I present in this chapter. First, neither Greencraft nor their tree walks were as yet documented in the academic literature, and thus warranted a short ethnography and introduction of the movement. Second, my participation allowed me to contribute to the discussion on the mutual influence between the researcher and the researched from my perspective as a fieldworker. Third, the meditations and other techniques for altering consciousness that were part of the walks enabled me to witness the significance of as-if worlds first-hand and set the stage for my

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[110] On the basis of my presentation and the literature I suggested in a later letter, Lyle (2012) published an article on the as-if concept in the same issue of the journal *Traditiones* that featured the article-version of the present chapter (see note 1 on p. 12 in her publication, for the acknowledgement).

theoretical development on the transitional sphere, briefly outlined here (see 5.4.1), and further developed in Chapter 8.

5.1.1 The researcher

Before moving on to the ethnographic material that is at the heart of this article, I must explicate the concepts associated with what Andrew Sayer (2010, p. 49) has described as "the interpenetration of the frames of reference of observer and observed." Let me then set off from a brute fact of the natural sciences that any measurement changes the observation. Putting a thermometer into a beaker holding a liquid will, as far as the temperature of the thermometer differs from that of the liquid, have a slight impact on that of the fluid, and thus result in a minor error of measurement. Depending on the required precision, one may need to correct for this.

Analogously, as a psychologist by training, I am conditioned to be aware of reactivity–a term that, after all, originated in psychology: the often unacknowledged impact of one's presence in a research situation. Ranging from the well-known but contested Hawthorne effect, where workers under study increased their production by merely knowing they were observed,[111] to the emotional entanglements in psychotherapeutic settings called countertransference, reactivity has caused the psychological researcher to try to recede from the scene of his studies altogether. This attempt can be observed in the practice of removing as much of one's identity as possible from written reports too (cf. Wolcott, 2009, pp.16–17). The written accounts of psychological studies are phrased in a manner that any scholar could have undertaken them, and would have arrived at the same conclusions had he done so. Replicability in terms of reproduction is considered a criterion of sound reporting, whereas replicability regarding results adds to the reliability of the initial study's findings.

Conversely, as a fledgling anthropologist conducting fieldwork, I gradually became aware of the influence of the researched on the researcher—and, after starting doing deskwork, of the effect of the reflexive turn in the humanities. Even if I feel that due to the reflexive turn some studies escalated in rampant relativism, anti-naturalism, and favouring political correctness over rigorous scholarly enquiry and a sound methodology (for a similar critique, see Whitehouse, 2004, pp. 24-25), trying to understand cultural expressions from the inside out is bound to have an impact on one's personal system of convictions, beliefs, and interpretational habits. The gradual shift of literally coming to terms with a new cultural environment ought to be moni-

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[111] The Hawthorne effect was named after a factory where a series of studies were conducted that are most often remembered as seeking to establish the relationship between productivity and lighting conditions. During each of the studies, productivity briefly went up as soon as any alteration to the working condition was made (in addition to lighting, other variables were also manipulated). Yet productivity dwindled to the old level as soon as the observation ended. A generation later, when other psychologists started to reassess the studies, they concluded that the mere presence of the scientists in the experiments had caused production to rise simply because, knowing they were studied, the participants improved their performance. Later still, doubts arose whether the effect really existed (see, e.g., Adair, 1984), but the Hawthorne effect has proven to be too good a story to burden with such reservations.

tored closely to be able to sufficiently appreciate the tension between two sense-making systems when one returns home from the field. Reflexivity as a deliberate introspective effort, therefore, is an essential activity to appreciate this inherent complexity that has been referred to in the literature as the double hermeneutic.

5.1.2 The field

First coined by Anthony Giddens (1987), the double hermeneutic refers to the idea that in the social sciences the scholarly interpretation of a specific field is doubled by the interpretation of the field itself (Sayer, 2000, p. 17). That is, laypeople make assumptions about their motivations, beliefs, cognitions, and so forth, and these may be different from the scholarly understanding of these. I would like to note, however, that there is a subtle difference between the scholarly interpretation of observable cognitions and behaviours on the one hand and the scholarly interpretation of the lay interpretation of these cognitions and behaviours on the other. Whereas the (what I would call) weak version merely suggests an alternative explanation of the unreflected data, the strong version explicates the 'why' of the laypeople's different interpretation.[112] Even if the double hermeneutic proper has always been considered to be about issues of the interpretation of interpretation (see, e.g., Hollis, 1994, pp. 146), the weak version needs to be taken into consideration as soon as scholarly interpretations start to become known in the field studied. As observed by Gildemeister (2001), for instance, the analytical tools with which scholars understand specific behaviour are slipping into the language and self-understanding of the researched.

This *proto-professionalization* is especially evident in Wicca because many make active use of Jungian psychological theory in their practice and rationalizations thereof (for prominent emic sources see, e.g., Crowley, 2003; Farrar & Farrar, 1981b; Starhawk, 1999), or at least put the more eclectic psychological strands and techniques to good use, not unlike what happens in various new age traditions (Hanegraaff, 1998, pp. 482–513). In turn, the formation of the Wiccan movement is also much indebted to both academic works of history (e.g., Leland, 1899; Murray, 1921) and anthropology (e.g., Frazer, 1922). Refutations of these classical studies and newly proposed alternative interpretations of both history (e.g., Hutton, 1999) and practice (e.g., Luhrmann, 1989b) have rendered the relationship with the contemporary incarnations of these disciplines highly ambivalent (Tully, 2011). In fact, even more than ten years after its publication, Hutton's *The Triumph of the Moon* received a very critical response in the form of the book *Trials of the Moon*, written by amateur historian and Alexandrian high priest Ben Whitmore (2010). These constant tensions go to show that even if the academic world and the Wiccan world sometimes share the same the ideas, they hardly ever do so for long or at the same time, to begin with.

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[112] Cf. Willem Drees' (2015, p. 9) definition of the humanities as "academic disciplines seeking understanding of human self-understandings."

As a fieldworker, then, I have to tread a fine line. Yet I am in good company. The complexities that come with fieldwork among neo-Pagans have not gone unnoticed, and thus already culminated in the book *Researching Paganisms* (Blain et al., 2004). A belated response to the concerns raised by some of its contributors, my story here is an impressionist tale in Van Maanen's (2011, pp. 101–124) rendering of the term: sketching introspective material attached to tangible episodes in the fieldwork that mark transformations in the self-understanding of the scholar. The tree walks I walked with Greencraft were the impetus for just that. For that reason, I emphasize my personal experiences and reflect on their meaning in terms of the observer versus the observed in my presentation of this fieldwork.

5.2 A slice of ethnography: Greencraft Wicca

5.2.1 Background and perspectives

Greencraft Wicca originated in the Alexandrian tradition: a branch of Wicca that emphasizes ceremonial magic (see also 1.2.3). Its 'spiritual leaders'—for lack of a better term given its democratic nature—Arghuicha and Hera were the high priest and high priestess of Greencraft's mother coven, Corona Borealis. Greencraft soon became the dominant form of Wicca in Flanders after Arghuicha and Hera moved from Amsterdam to a small town near the Belgian border. Established in 1991, and acquiring legal status as a foundation only six years later, Greencraft Wicca became a tradition in its own right and eventually branched out to the Netherlands and the United States (Greencraft Creations, n.d.-b). In the US, they are best known for their association with the Sacred Well Congregation, a Wiccan organization with the formal status of a church and strong presence in the US military (Adler, 2006, pp. 119–121). Even if Greencraft is sparsely mentioned by the chroniclers of Wicca (Adler, 2006; and De Zutter, 2003 are rare examples), it developed steadily into a large movement that introduced various new elements to its version of Wicca to set it apart from the rest.

The primary impulse of renewal was born out of Arghuicha's perceived lack of nature—both cosmologically and in basic awareness—in the Alexandrian tradition. In one of my interviews with him, he stated (q. 30):

> 30 Frankly, the aspect of nature religion was limited to the fact that [I and other traditional Wiccans] all liked to watch those terrific documentaries on National Geographic. When we wanted to do something in nature—because everyone wanted to do a ritual in nature—off we would go, packed like mules to do exactly the same as we would have done in a temple. We had to haul along all our attributes and paraphernalia. I thought that all was very weak and unsatisfactory. … Lighting torches at Ruigoord (an artistic colony near Amsterdam) with a force nine wind is not always successful, but rather than sitting behind your TV set, at least you're in the middle of a storm and experience some-

> thing [first hand]. But there was no structure. ... If [Wicca] really is a nature religion, then there have to be elements of that very nature embedded in the tradition itself. ... From [those thoughts] Greencraft emerged (13: 74-75).

Dubbed the *ecological principle* (Greencraft Creations, n.d.-a), Greencraft seeks "to build a religion in which respect and care for nature are central." Even if this first part of the 'third aim' of the Greencraft manifest pretty much echoes well-known neo-Pagan ethics concerning nature, the second part hints at the intimacy with nature that Greencrafters seek, and set it apart from the other traditions: "Humans, plants, animals and megaliths are all Gaia's children and the sacred landscape is her body." The interconnection between Gaia's children and the adherents of Greencraft are worked out along two lines: one cosmological and one experiential.[113]

Greencraft's most notable addition to the Wiccan cosmology is the Celtic tree calendar. This element originally was constructed with obvious poetic license by Graves (1966) in his book *The White Goddess*. In the calendar, the year is divided into thirteen months (of twenty-eight days) each of which is ruled by one tree. The consecutive months can be projected onto a representation of a trilithon. The year is broken down into three periods of four, five, and four 'months' that correspond in terms of a human life with youth, adolescence to maturity, and the abyss (Hera, et al., 2005; also see Figure 5). When one adds a foundation stone to the trilithon and counts the cornerstones as doubles (that is, count the sides of the blocks of the trilithon, rather than the blocks themselves), one ends up with the twenty-two trees that make up the Greencraft alphabet. The tree calendar can thus also be related to paths between the sephiroth that make up the Kabbalistic tree of life—where the trees correspond to the twenty-two paths between each emanation (Delaere, 2010; also see Figure 6).[114] The thirteen-month tree calendar is also featured in the experiential aspect of Greencraft's quest for reconnecting with nature: the ritualistic tree walk.

5.2.2 The tree walk

Various groups in Greencraft have their own walks, which are open to both members and non-members. In most cases, the participants in the tree walk will gather at a pub half an hour before the walk starts. The walks I have participated in ranged from five to fifteen persons. I noticed that, the open invitation notwithstanding, most participants are already members of Greencraft, but there are always the odd few people who are either guests of one of the participants or even complete outsiders who want to learn about the tree walks. Regardless of one being a newcomer, an old hand, or even a participatory observer, the welcoming is always very warm. No hands are shaken, but everyone is instantly hugged and kissed, irrespective of gender. Strictly at

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[113] Cf. the two complimentary methods to establish correct magical correspondences as discussed in Section 8.7 between q. 96 and 97.

[114] Both the trilithon and the tree of life are more fully discussed in 4.3.

eight o'clock, the party will leave the pub and soon a column of cars will be on its way to nearby woodland—which may be the edge of a village—where enough trees of the particular month grow.[115]

On my first walk, which is featured here, this was the alder. After arriving at the edge of the woodland and parking all the cars, we are all asked to take a pebble from the trunk of the vehicle of one of the elders and carry it with us. Like experienced hikers, most attendants have furnished themselves with walking stools and small backpacks. And thus, with the elders leading, we set off for our stroll. The first bit of the route is typically filled with small talk until the leader tells us that from a certain point the walk will continue in silence. We are also asked to attune to the natural environment, perhaps starting to ponder the significance of the esoteric meaning of the tree of the month. The alder, the featured tree, stands for self–realization.[116] Briefly mentioning this fact, our guide makes our minds wonder with the possible scenarios of how this characteristic is meaningful in the here and now and without having a reference at first.

After some five to ten minutes, we stop at an open area. Here we settle on the ground. Some open their stools, and others take blankets from their backpacks. The leader of the tour starts talking about the biological properties of the alder, and during his talk slowly changes from fact to traditional uses, and to folklore and fiction—what legends are attached to the alder. To give an impression of the multitude of facts and fictions: we hear of the linguistic relationship between alder and bee, of Goethe's *Erlkönig*, of Bran the Blessed, of scarecrows made of alder twigs, about its protection against witches, but also learn of its prevalence near water, its white wood and blood-red sap, and the fact that male and female fruits grow on the same tree. To the average participant, all of this information is undoubtedly too much to process in a coherent way, but this overkill seems to be exactly what the leader is aiming for.

Upon finishing his 'lecture,' our guide asks us to find a nearby alder and try to make contact with it. This is perhaps the main episode on the ritual tree walk: to meditate on the tree. Some will try to find its aura; others just sit still underneath. Some have their back against the tree; others embrace it. Some sit; some stand. Fairly quickly I find 'my' tree. My mind starts to race. Here I am standing near the water's edge at a double-trunked alder. Why did I pick this tree—or did it pick me? I feel

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[115] From the descriptive account of my specific fieldwork onwards, I use the present tense as a mode of presentation. Although its usage has been criticized (see Sanjek, 1991), I feel that my emphasis on the tree walk as a lived experience of a particular episode warrants the present tense. The tree walk is a practice that can be said to exist in my own culture and owes its existence to being an attempt to distance oneself from one's social role to be able to partake in another. So, the problems of conventionality, predictability, and being rule-determined are, at least at this micro-level of observation, less relevant.

[116] Given the fact that in the Celtic tree calendar of the Greencraft tradition the alder belongs to the first pillar of the trilithon—which corresponds with youth—self-realization refers to what Corsini (1999, p. 879) has described as "a process ... of fulfilling personal potentialities, including aptitudes, goals, and capacities," and should not be mistaken to mean the attainment of the 'higher self' that the act of realization ideally strives towards.

there is a significance to its double trunk: it seems to resemble my double agenda. Am I self-realizing myself as a scholar? Or am I getting involved in this particular group as a Pagan? Arghuicha's words ring in my mind: "Beware that you might be self-realizing someone else's self." So integrity is an issue. Are the unwary people in the group actually pawns in my academic power game? It takes quite some time to release my thoughts, but slowly I feel more at ease with the trees. My consciousness now seems to slowly drift from these fears clad as rationalities—towards appreciating the feeling of being there, of standing against a tree, embracing it, and feeling embraced by it. In my mind, the rational thoughts recede, and I start having hypnogogic experiences: first phosphenes emerge and then geometric shapes in shifting colours. Eventually, moving pictures of great detail appear, of which an image of a pulsating cloud that switches between photo-negative and positive particularly strikes me, especially as it changes into an opening white rose that seems to slowly turn around its axis. Although less and less effort is required to stay in this trance-like state, there always appears to be the ability to return to the waking world.

After an unspecified period, I am called back to the group. Apparently I took longer than the rest, but in fact one can decide for oneself when one's meditation is finished. The group now settles down in a circle, in the middle of which a fire is burning in a small cauldron. In the next episode, called the talking stick,[117] we are all invited to disclose the contents of our meditation: what we saw, felt, experienced, or learnt. Each, in turn, tells his or her story, while the others listen in silence. Now some of the elements of the myths and folklore told about the trees resurface in specific relation to particular aspects of the personal lives of the participants. One Wiccan states that she felt that the particular shape of her very crooked tree resembled her feeling of having to bend over backwards to avoid some negative issues that threatened her normal life. On another walk, dedicated to the oak, which stands for contracts and commitments, one attendant spoke of signing a contract that very week for his new job, whereas another talked about dedicating herself to Wicca. In turn, Aria, who co-organized the walk, emphasized that contracts should not only be made or signed as an act of intention but need to be lived up to as well. Seeing contracts as a social engagement, the message in her meditation was apposite to her position as the coven leader, who seeks to safeguard the collective interest.

When the stick has gone round the circle, the second, 'stony,' leg of the tree walk starts. The various walks I participated in all varied with respect to the next episode: sometimes this will only start after another stroll, sometimes it will start directly. All participants are now asked to produce the pebble they received at the beginning from their pockets and form a standing circle. The pebbles are to be kept in the left hand, with the palm facing downwards, while they need to keep their right hand open, with the palm facing upwards, as to be able to receive the stone from their right-hand neighbour. Then the leader starts singing the song *Faya Siton*, and soon everybody

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[117] See the first paragraph of Section 8.6 for a brief explanation of the talking stick.

sings along.[118] The rhythmic accents are accompanied by handing over the stone with the left hand, while simultaneously receiving another stone with the right hand. The passing of stones is briefly interrupted each time the song comes to the refrain. Then each participant will hold the stone between the left and right hand, which are held together as if in prayer. With each stressed vowel, the participant briefly and slightly bows, as in paying respect. After that, the handing-over of stones is resumed. The whole process is repeated indefinitely, but will always result in one getting one's original stone back. "The magic has worked again!" someone will typically exclaim. Still, it is common knowledge among the Greencrafters that the number of attendees is always counted beforehand so that the required number of refrains can be sung for the stone to return to its original bearer.

Directly after *Faya Siton* we start the episode of stone singing. Each participant brings the stone to his or her mouth and starts vocalizing a single tone, altering the pitch and the distance between pebble and mouth, until the stone starts to reverberate, and the sound seems no longer ours. Now the stone appears to sing using our bodies as a resonance box. Together with this reversal in direction, all the individual sounds start to attune to each other until an undulating group intonation emerges. Arghuicha later told me that the spiritual significance of this practice is establishing contact with all the stone circles across the globe, of which the present circle now in effect is a portable version. It dawned on me that people in a circle holding stones literally are a stone circle. In addition to relating people to trees, people are also related to stones. All are thought to be the living children of the earth goddess, with stones being the firstborns, but the people are argued to be their midwives who delivered them from the womb and gave them their individuality.

After the stone singing, the party starts walking again for some fifteen minutes. We then reach a spot on the very edge of a residential area, where for the last time we form a circle to dance around the fire singing chants very similar to what traditional covens would do.[119] There we settle down and sharing food and drinks that pass through the circle. After an hour or so, the party heads back to the cars. The stones are returned to the leader and, after saying goodbye to each participant in much the same way as we were welcomed, everyone goes off into the night. Tree walks often last until well after midnight!

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[118] The original lyrics of this Surinam children's song are as follows: "Faya siton no bron mi so, no bron mi so. Ayden masra Jantje kiri suma pikin" ('glowing stone, don't burn me, don't burn me like that. again master Johnny is murdering the children'). Although the lyrics reflect the slave history of the former Dutch colony, in Greencraft the song was merely adopted because of its rhythmic quality and the fact that the lyrics are nonsensical to the average Dutch-speaking person, merely keeping one's consciousness engaged, without offering specific content. The song might have been available for adoption because it is used in some anthroposophical schools in the Netherlands, and will thus be known by a few Wiccans.

[119] These would be chants like "*Earth my Body,*" "*Horned One, Lover, Son,*" "*Isis, Astarte, Diana,*" and so on (see, e.g., Sanfords.net, n.d.).

5.3 How to make sense of making sense: Beating about the bush

The tree walk can best be understood as a ritual with both an oversized and under-determined spatiality compared to the average Wiccan ritual, where all the action takes place in a magically drawn circle. The routes of the walks may differ given the conditions of weather and terrain, and even the location depending on the prevalence of the trees of the month. In addition, the tree walk's extroversive activity is alternated with introversive[120] activity more than once, while separately the focus is shifted back and forth from the natural to the social. I take the stone-singing as social-introversive, and the themed meditation as natural-introversive. The former is performed in—or rather *supported by*—the group, but the exclusive focus is on the personal relationship with a stone and the changes in awareness that come with the singing. The thematic meditation is performed alone and constitutes the establishment of a personal link with a tree through which some of the mentally represented aspects of one's life are reassessed, reconstructed, or reformulated. The tree acts as a transitional space between the mundane and the Otherworld. For the participant, this encounter is embedded within a framework of cosmological meanings and religiously inspired codes of conduct; to me, it was a moment of instant reflexivity.

5.3.1 The place of the researcher in the field

My musings at the water's edge present a lived-through and mentally represented double hermeneutic. Somehow the meditation triggered both an identity as a performer and as a researcher. This self-encounter can be contrasted with an experience of a similar ambiguity, but this time between myself as a participant observing my inner self, while knowingly being observed by outsiders. The latter happened on another tree walk that was radically different from all the others since it was held in a built environment and focused on a tree not present in the calendar. In June, the month that roughly coincides with the oak, Arghuicha chose the bastions of Hulst[121] as a very specific location for our walk. Rather than oaks, the bastions were all lined with linden trees standing along the paths that were laid out on these bulwarks' very edges. Bound to these paths, our route took an angular shape, with the pointed projections of each consecutive bastion making us face the parts we had already passed before once again turning away towards the next bastion until eventually we ended up where we started: we had made a full circle. The juxtaposed centripetal and centrifugal movements in our walk coincided with both outlooks of myself: first as my own observer and then as the observed by others. Socially, I alternately turned from scholar to Pagan and back.

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[120] I understand introversive and extroversive here in the original Jungian sense as referring to attention to inner, subjective states and attention to the outer, objective world of fact, respectively (Jung, 1921/1971).

[121] Hulst is a small town in the Dutch province of Zealand, near the border with Flanders.

Linden trees have a similar folkloric meaning to oak, related as they are to justice (see, e.g., Thorpe, 1852, p. 2) and often could be found in the heart of villages as the places where contracts were made. Yet, rather than elaborating on that element as a way to enter the introspective state, the notion of gossip took hold. Regardless of the fact I once again had trouble focusing, those difficulties, in turn, became a motif around which my story spun itself. Although certainly not entering the trance state I had experienced with the alder, my rather effortful contemplations produced a feeling of exposure. Because the linden trees originally stood in the hearts of the villages and were present at all the happenings and dealings of importance, they were bound to know a lot. At other moments, when there were no official gatherings, they would merely afford shade to the villagers, but would then undoubtedly overhear many stories of broken vows, adultery, petty theft, and other dirty little secrets. When a new contract was to be sealed at their trunks the next time, would they raise their proverbial eyebrows?

Analogously, perhaps my integrity as a scholar eavesdropping on these Wiccans became active in my mind again. Be that as it may, for the first time seeing myself being observed by others, it then dawned on me that I had crossed a line. If there was a conflict in interpretation, it was a conflict between the tree-walkers and the locals from Hulst. The barrier was a social one: one's role determined one's perspective, and obviously social roles were as much cast by others as appropriated by oneself. Eventually, mainly because of the constantly alternating perspective of the observer and the observed and switching between extroversive with introversive action, my self-exposure turned into this feeling of belonging. Here I was, perhaps not going native altogether, but still rather enjoying these tree meditations that incidentally culminated in a barbecue that day—a social-extroversive activity if ever there was one— the invitation to which felt like being accepted as a kindred spirit.

Two notions that come to mind here are Jone Salomonsen's (2004) method of compassion and Graham Harvey's (2004, p. 253) concept of guesthood. He writes:

> 'Guesthood' can label a truly phenomenological approach, acknowledging that the researcher engages with particularities, makes a difference by just being there, and should accept the responsibility entailed in dialogue and relationships (…). It recognizes that while guests are not 'natives' (or 'family,' 'insiders,' etc.) they are already involved and will be expected to say something respectful (…). Guesthood research, then, does not 'walk in the shoes' of the 'other'; it sits across a fire and engages in mutually enlightening conversation.

The barbecue setting provided me with the opportunity to talk about my research activity, but also stressed the commonality between fellow countrymen and neighbours, not in the least because I speak the same language. Outside the ritualistic setting, the differences between my outlook on the world and theirs seemed smaller, even if I experienced differences in social distance between myself and some core members of the group to each other. I succeeded in the base requirement of Salomonsen's method of compassion regarding sociability: genuine interaction. Resembling Harvey's

take on one's position among informants, Salomonsen argues that "compassion in this context does not refer to a wholesale positive embrace, nor to passionate criticisms and arguing, but somewhere in between: to honesty. It designates an attitude in which belief is taken seriously, both cognitively and emotionally" (p. 50). In contrast to Harvey, Salomonsen advocates full magical involvement, although she states that both engagement for understanding and holding a distant view for recording are equally important.

5.4 Conclusion: Barking up the right tree

Because they deal with the integrity of the researchers, these propositions suggest that the fieldworker needs to come as close as possible to the people he or she observes, without 'going native.' Furthermore, they call upon the responsibility of the researcher after the return from the field. Implicit in these commentaries on fieldwork is the belief in the continuity of perspective, hermeneutic preference, and theoretical rigour. Although I sympathize with these reflexive outlooks, I feel that they neglect the intra-individual heterogeneity of perspective of any one person moving from one social setting to the other, and back. By sketching two impressions of my fieldwork with Greencraft—the hypnogogic experience and the feeling-of-being-watched experience—I suggest two interpretations of requirements in the tree walk setting. These necessities seem to hold for Wicca in general and are informative regarding the character of the mutual relationship between the observer and the observed, both in the immediacy of the fieldwork experience and the ensuing relationship between the scholar and his or her informants.

5.4.1 Towards attunement and the suspension of disbelief

First, I would like to draw attention to the need for *attunement*. The tree walk is full of exercises and tacit rules that help make the shift from our mundane, profane, troubled, and professional selves to our sacred, cleansed, lifted, and spiritual alter egos. These techniques are hardly exclusively Greencraft's; in Wicca, the ceremonies are nearly always preceded and succeeded by ritualized procedures of grounding and centring, and in a broader sense acts of secrecy and initiation obtain their significance by demarcating the sacred world within from the mundane world without.[122] Wicca, then, is as much about connecting as it is about dividing and transformation. What sets the tree walks apart from the traditional rituals—in which Greencraft also engages—is that attuning to the Otherworld and returning to the mundane sphere happen two or three times during the walks. In my own case of attuning, I experienced the last vestiges of rationality receding during my meditation at the waterside

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[122] See Chapter 6, *Secrecy and Ritual Hygiene.*

alder tree. In a sense, then and there I became 'my own informant' in the words of
Salomonsen (2004, p. 51), even if I would argue that the associated 'method of com-
passion' was triggered by the specific environment and helped mostly by adopting a
passive, receptive stance, rather than actively pursuing honesty. In fact, the extent to
which integrity became an issue equalled my initial incapacity to follow suit. Eventu-
ally, when integrity was sublimated as detached learning material resurfacing in the
meditation, I was able to come to grips with it.

Attunement here touches on the second requirement, the need for *suspension of
disbelief*. Although such suspension may be argued to be integral to the attunement
process, I feel its significance warrants a separate discussion. A complex term, the
exhaustive explanation of which is beyond the scope of this article, suspension of dis-
belief in the specific context of the tree meditation refers to the willingness or motiva-
tion of any participant to accept that engaging in tree meditation may produce a con-
versation with the tree, or with an external agent by means of the tree. More broadly,
I take the term to refer to the uncritical acceptance of an interpretation as being the
truth, either born out of repressing critique or not reflecting on that interpretation.
The notion of the suspension of disbelief has an interesting connection with Ludwig's
Wittgenstein's "Whereof one cannot speak; thereof one must be silent," in that logic
has no place in domains of value and the meaningful (Wittgenstein, 1922, p. 90).
That is, not the truth of stories is important, i.e., the relationship between them and
the realm of fact, but the message they convey. We may read Nietzsche's (1874/1983)
On the Use and Abuse of History for Life on a similar note. In this essay, Nietzsche
argues that history needs to have instructive quality for one's present life, rather than
suggest objectivity or a true rendering of how things originally came to pass.[123] Anal-
ogously, the happenings at the tree trunks serve a purpose of gaining insight into
one's own life. Neither the technicalities behind communication nor any naturalistic
explanations are in the interest of the meditating person; any critique such as "trees
can't talk" misses the point. Just as Terry Pratchett's term *lie-to-children* describes,
teaching is aimed at creating a basic understanding of what is happening with regard
to the religious outlook. Such a comprehension is eventually sufficient, in turn, to ex-
plain the technique to others, without standing in the way of remaining receptive to
experiencing communication (Pratchett, Stewart, & Cohen, 2002).[124]

5.4.2 The double hermeneutic

Where does all this leave the problem of the double hermeneutic and the mutual in-
fluence between the researcher and the researched? In retrospect, I feel the double

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[123] Such a take on history as a discipline can be linked to the justification of poetic myth (see, e.g.,
Graves, 1966). As I mentioned in Section 4.5, some of my informants would talk about 'spiritual truths'
and distinguish them from 'literal truths.'

[124] The use of Pratchett's work to understand neo-Paganism in general, or trace some of its sentiments,
beliefs, and practices, has been noted earlier (see Harvey, 2000).

hermeneutic poses less of a threat than some might suggest. When studying religious groups in a Western context, the researcher and the researched have gone through comparable enculturation processes. Even if they do not share all cultural values, rules, and tacit knowledge, their sensitivity to these is arguably similar. These commonalities are often seen as a methodological threat to proper ethnographic observation, in that one is likely to miss potentially important details that are too easily taken for granted (Wolcott, 1994, pp. 177–178). However, the very embeddedness in a common culture of both researcher and informant makes different subcultural characteristics and contexts all the more notable, especially when these contexts are elaborately set apart from mundane life. That is, both the participating researcher and the adherents are going through the same phase of transformation each time one partakes in ritual activity. Reservations, reluctance, and perhaps even concentration problems are part and parcel of the stubborn nature of the postmodern person, so overcoming these are not uncommon tasks for any high priest or priestess. The double hermeneutic, then, may be a tension between social roles, which is theoretically present in both researcher and adherent, rather than primarily between them.

Tanya Luhrmann (1989b) was the first to observe this tension when she asked herself why rational Westerners would believe in magic. To answer the question, she used Leon Festinger's (1956) cognitive dissonance theory. This theory states that people seek to reduce the incompatibilities between one's attitude and one's behaviour. Even if she appreciates the fact that adherents seem to offer different explanations of the experiences and magical results depending on their audience (Luhrmann, 1989b, pp. 270–271), she misses the point that these people, on the whole, will not always look upon themselves as magicians. By exclusively relying here on data in which Wiccans are talking among themselves about the borders between the mundane and the magical, she introduced a level of self-consciousness that is the exception rather than the rule. She thereby muddled the intrinsic heterogeneity of individuals as in differences in cognitive styles, beliefs, motives, and so forth, depending on the demand characteristics of the social setting in which they are embedded.[125] The only place where the double hermeneutic may rear its ugly head is when the suspension of disbelief extends to the world outside, where others do not agree with the belief system. The clashing worldviews there, it should be noted, need not be those of the researcher and the researched. That is, as long as the scholar is neither aimed at reductionism to explain away the system of belief—nor is going native and turning the research process into an apologetic exercise. The only way to avoid these dangers is to adopt a stance of methodological agnosticism, which might be considered the 'deskwork' version of the suspension of disbelief and submission to the as-if world that is required during fieldwork (see also 2.1.1).

[125] It should be noted that some social settings require more than one role being played at a time. This is sometimes referred to as 'divided consciousness,' which, for instance, allegedly occurs in trance states, where there seems to be an inner self that remains vigilant. This subject is treated more fully in Section 8.3.

SECRECY AND RITUAL HYGIENE

The 'mask', which many consider sign and proof
of an aristocratic personality that is turned away from the multitude,
on the contrary proves the importance of the multitude to the wearer of the mask.
The 'mask' of the truly noble person is that even when he shows himself without disguise,
the many do not understand him, do not even see him, so to speak.

Georg Simmel, *The Secret and the Secret Society*

Drawing on a theoretical sample from my ongoing fieldwork on religious creativity, I offer a psychological perspective on the issue of secrecy in contemporary initiatory Wicca. Secrecy is understood here to exist in those relationships where a supposed inequality of knowledge is actively maintained by managing access to the surplus of that knowledge. First, a descriptive account of the various emic narratives of secrecy is given, successively relating the topic to mythistory, oath-keeping, magical practice, and mysteries. Second, moving from the manifest level to the latent level of these narratives, I will then offer an explanation and interpretation of the functions of secrecy, such as the maintenance of ownership, appeal, and association. The latter is explained as ritual hygiene and shown to be the functional opposite of secrecy. In the concluding part, two implications of the institutionalization of secrecy are discussed: misrepresentation of knowledge and stalled religious development are shown to be detrimental side-effects of upholding secrecy in neo-Paganism.
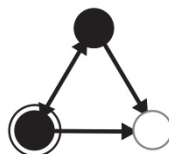
6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 Secrecy, what are we talking about?

Although the impact of secrecy on a vast array of human interactions cannot be underestimated, this social strategy of concealment has not yet been the subject of a great many studies in the social sciences.[126] The reasons for this relative neglect are very diverse. For one, the connotation of the very words 'secret' and 'secrecy' invoke images of mystery and wonder that many scholars might deem unworthy of serious scientific enquiry. Also, the apparently restricted meaning of these words make them only seem to fit a minority of the topics under study in the social sciences. However, the most obvious reason for neglect, perhaps, lies in the truism that what is kept secret can by definition never be the subject of study, because it is unknowable. Secrecy has in the past led many a researcher into wild-goose chases, aiming for disclosure for the sole sake of learning its contents.

In a few recent publications, these assumed problems with the study of secrecy have been scrutinized and shown to be amiss. Rather than being on the fringe of society, secrecy plays a rather central—albeit often implicit—role when we come to understand it as a system for managing the transmission of knowledge. To emphasize this point, I will define secrecy in this article as a condition existing in those social relations where a supposed inequality of knowledge is actively maintained by managing access to the surplus of that knowledge. When trying to understand secrecy in this manner, we have to distinguish between the kinds of knowledge, the ways in which these are secured, and the reasons for these restrictions. This approach is sympathetic towards what Gary Marx and Glenn Muschert (2009), following the early work by Georg Simmel on secrecy, call a *sociology of information*, where the structures and contexts that constrain, alter, enable, and transform the flows of information are stressed.

Implicit in this approach are two things. First, secrets have an inside and an outside, and any sound explanation of their nature and function needs to take into account both sides of the secret. Is there a secret as opposed to the belief there is none? Who is in possession of the secret? Who is doing without? Does doing without entail a craving for the knowledge, does it merely fuel suspicion, or couldn't one care less (see Barkun, 2006)? Also, we must remain aware that etic and emic understandings of the reasons for secrecy may differ considerably. Second, when we talk about management and strategies we are implying that secrecy is intentional, which is in line with most studies on the subject (see, e.g., Barkun, 2006; Bok, 1989; Simmel, 1950; Urban, 1998, 2006). Intentionality goes together with human motivation, and thus I argue that the study of secrecy requires a level of analysis that includes antecedent mentalities. It is also important here to note that much undisclosed information will

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[126] For a fairly recent overview, see Duncan (2006).

never be the subject of attempts at uncovering in the first place, and thus only becomes secret when the possessor of such knowledge feels he or she is provoked to conceal. Strictly, only when this line is drawn pre-emptively, are we talking about secrecy, which therefore can only be understood as an institution. Yet, if secrecy by definition entails the observance of a set of rules, or at least implies some inflexibility, we also need to take into account the unanticipated consequences of this system to get a full understanding of its effects.

Religion has always been a fruitful field with regard to secrecy, especially when we look at sectarian and minority groups that deal with religious knowledge out of the ordinary. Where knowledge is considered arcane or occult (literally 'covered') and can only be disclosed after dedicated study or carefully observing specific techniques of enquiry, how-to information typically would be claimed by a group and thus sealed off from non-adepts (Luhrmann, 1989a, p. 145). Just like there is no direct way to the knowledge, the route to the techniques of uncovering that knowledge becomes regulated through initiations and oaths. This results in what I would like to call the *doubleness of secrecy*: the way to the knowledge becomes a body of hidden information while the knowledge itself (or the object, which can also constitute the secret) becomes an experience, a mystery. Here the scarcity of secrets turns them into social capital and renders them more valuable (Urban, 1998). Consequently, their self-appointed guardians become their owners. Simmel argues in this respect that the feeling of possession is further enhanced not only by the personal access to the information but also by knowing that others will have to do without it (Simmel, 1950, p. 332).

The value of hidden knowledge notwithstanding, secrecy presents an ever-receding horizon, in that the concealed information becomes available over time, be it through accidental discovery, betrayal, or socially sanctioned disclosure for whatever reason, while new information will be transformed into novel hidden content. This fluidity of secrecy seems to reverberate from the changing nature of neo-Paganism as a broad movement, suggesting that neo-Paganism held its ground by adapting to the altered knowledge of its history and the changing character of the society in which it is embedded (see Chapter 3, *The Pagan Parallax*).

6.1.2 Developing a question

Therefore, a further investigation of the case of initiatory Wicca is most opportune when trying to understand the form, function, and consequence of the practice of secrecy. Drawing on a small theoretical sample of interviews, I aim to examine the multiform narratives surrounding secrecy as well as the heterogeneity of its employment and locate both within the larger context including outsiders and stakeholders.

I will proceed in the next part from descriptive accounts found in both the emic literature and the interviews and offer a brief overview of the narratives of secrecy I have observed, interspersed with quotes. Moving towards a methodological objectification in the third part, I will analyse this material for the intentions of secrecy, link-

ing it up to the existing literature where appropriate, to offer an explanation of secrecy in terms of its functions, and whether these are acknowledged by the guardians of the secrets or not.[127] In the fourth part, I will reassess secrecy for its consequences with regard to the outside world and specifically the relation between Wiccans and the field of Pagan studies.

6.2 Description: Manifestations of secrecy

6.2.1 The need for secrecy as mythistory

Perhaps the best-known reason which adherents originally have put forth for maintaining secrecy is the mythistory of Wicca as a resurfaced tradition that went underground during the witch craze of early modern Europe. Since witchcraft was supposed by the Christian church to be the devil's work, it was dangerous to be known as a witch (Hutton, 1999, pp. 132-150). This long-held belief was used as a rationale for using Craft names in covens,[128] and swearing an oath to keep silent about everything that could reveal oneself and others as 'witches' (e.g., Kelly, 2007, pp. 57-93). Generally speaking, this reason virtually lost its meaning after most Wiccans eventually accepted the conclusion of historians that there is no unbroken link between modern day Wicca and a universal pre-Christian fertility cult.

Still, keeping silent about, or at least not placing too much attention to, one's identity as a Wiccan is by many considered a sensible thing to do. Even in the most liberal of societies, Wicca can sometimes be frowned upon by conservative sectors. Wiccans do get discriminated from time to time, and in rare occasions even demonized. Even if the image of the 'witch' and its associations of deviancy are paradoxically sometimes cultivated from within, many Wiccans like to be treated without any reservations (see 3.4). Egil, a 57-year old high priest from a Greencraft coven in Belgium, told me (q. 31):

> 31 I don't want to pass for a weirdo. Perhaps when you're young, you care less about that, but I live the normal life, I love the normal life—I got my family contacts and all, I have my friends. ... That's why ... I won't dress up like some Wiccans; I do not continually adorn myself with pentacles and that sort of thing (12: 164-165).

In this case, an aspect of the identity is kept from view, but Egil was clear that this concealment was a personal choice, just as others would perhaps choose to emphasize their identity as a Wiccan. He also told me that his neighbour was in the know about his and his wife's coven activity, whereas the rest of the street was ignorant

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[127] Note that with 'the guardians of the secrets' I refer to the gatekeepers of the field as described in Csikszentmihalyi's system perspective (see Subsection 1.4.2).

[128] Craft names are discussed in-depth in Chapter 7, *Coining Names, Casting Selves*.

about their adherence because it "would not impart anything useful to them." One may also assume that the neighbour can best be granted an explanation for all the activity that comes with the regular coven meetings, as to prevent gossip or perhaps awkward questions being asked. The explanation of a coven meeting would also lend dignity to a regular gathering of people that undoubtedly would result in some noise as if they were throwing yet another party.

All in all, then, privacy rather than secrecy may be the hallmark of the non-disclosure of one's Wiccan identity when we consider the practice of Wicca in a non-Pagan environment. However, in stark contrast, the 'witch'-as-underdog reappropriation also persists, and sometimes images from this narrative are invoked to sufficient effect when Wiccans find themselves opposed by fundamentalist Christians or other intolerant forces in contemporary culture. Rather than blending in, the Wiccans sometimes are confrontational, and secrecy then is used to draw the line between culture and counterculture.

6.2.2 Oath-keeping and alliance

Secrecy in Wicca nowadays is managed through the obligation of taking an oath of silence at one's initiation. Since this oath was installed before the debunking of the belief that the victims of the witchcraft prosecutions in early modern history were those who we have come to call Wiccans nowadays, it materialized in a rather rigid format, and still tends to be sternly expressed. In addition, the intimate link between oath-taking and pledging one's allegiance to one's coven and the religious system as a whole prevented the development of a critical stance towards what exactly the oath of secrecy implied. Up until this day, one can find adherents explaining that the oath of secrecy is part of being in a tradition, even if they do not agree with all the concealment. Andrea, for instance, a former member of a Gardnerian coven in the Netherlands, and now an eclectic Wiccan, told me (32):

> 32 I know that I won't be discussing some stuff with you, because I've sworn an oath... [Not] that I keep that oath for 100%, but it's ... like [a] "that's-a part-of-it-thing." I mean, even the question into what grade a person is initiated is pushing the limit, for example, because I learnt that it is not okay [to disclose that.] So I wouldn't, whether I agree with it or not (41: 577-581).

Some would even keep particular material secret that already is in the public domain, just because one is under oath not to disclose anything. In a discussion in the e-mail list of the Pagan Studies Yahoo Group, an academic who is also an inactive member of a tradition that has oath-bound material wrote (q. 33):[129]

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[129] Since the Pagan Studies Yahoo Group is restricted, I left out the name to protect the privacy of this scholar.

33   I just figure that … scholars can easily get access to [the material] anyway, as it has been
     published here and there, so I don't feel that I need to tell them anything or compromise
     myself in regards to breaking oaths, because they can find out themselves anyway (mes-
     sage sent on 15 January 2012).

Of particular interest here is the paradoxical idea that one has all the more reasons to
stick to secrecy because the hidden information is already out in the open. This quote
represents a classic example of cognitive dissonance reduction, where the futility of a
particular instance of practising secrecy only serves to enhance that very practice, by
putting emphasis on the seekers of knowledge. The shift of emphasis towards those
scholars becomes even more striking in a follow-up message (q. 34):

34   I wouldn't … simply blab it out if asked, but I don't think I can particularly protect that
     material from an investigator who is determined to find it out. I mean, they could even
     join the group, do the oaths, and then publish it if they wanted— if they didn't believe in
     the dire consequences of breaking their oaths (message sent on 15 January 2012).

Rather than stressing the issue of honour in relation to oath-breaking, an emphasis is
laid on its "dire consequences." One cannot but speculate what these are in this con-
text, to what extend the investigator believes in them, and if these consequences are
the prime reasons for keeping the oath, even if secrecy here is no longer serving any
purpose. In Wicca, however, the consequences of oath-breaking go beyond banish-
ing. Morgana, the supervising coordinator of the Pagan Federation International and
Gardnerian high priestess, explained (q. 35):

35   What surprises me every time is that people keep forgetting what [oath-keeping] means,
     [that it] not only [concerns] the group you're a part of—which obviously is a part of
     secrecy as well—but [it] means also that you really [have promised to] honour the Gods
     by keeping your word, literally (22: 9).

Implied here is that you take the oath before the gods, and are held accountable by
them, should you break your promise.[130] We may conclude that the oath-taking prac-
tice, then, has sustained itself as a vehicle to institutionalize secrecy, because of its
dogmatic character which is sometimes complemented by pre-conventional (pun-
ishment-orientated) moral reasoning. However, more advanced reasons for uphold-
ing secrecy as an institutionalized form of privacy were also given. Access to what is
considered a privileged, deeper knowledge of the world comes with responsibilities.
The most common context to which secrecy applies here is magical practice.

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[130] Other Wiccans, however, have questioned this divinely inspired morality. Indeed, one could argue
that any oath on religious conduct taken before the gods of that very religion amounts to a circular ar-
gument analogous to Plato's Euthyphro dilemma: "Is the pious being loved by the gods because it is pi-
ous, or is it pious because it is being loved by the gods?"

6.2.3 Magical safety and efficacy

When considering secrecy as related to magic, one can distinguish between secrecy that is installed for the purpose of safety and secrecy for the purpose of efficacy. Pertaining to the former, Selena, a 37-year-old Polish eclectic Wiccan living in the Netherlands and who was at the time of the interview a member of a coven in Germany, stated (q. 36):

> 36 If someone starts experimenting by himself, he can run into a lot of trouble. You have to be very careful, because if you start invoking [deities] and you don't know how to send them away, start drawing pentagrams in the wrong order, or forget to close the channels [you've opened]. I've heard from people who'd forgotten something, that they'd run into all kinds of trouble at home (38: 577).

Voiced here is the alleged danger of keeping open a connection between the Otherworld and the mundane world outside the circle. Magical techniques, then, are considered dangerous and should be kept out of reach as people do with medicines when there are children in the house, as one practitioner put it. However, I need to add that others stated that effects only occur when one is already knowledgeable, and that therefore magic is quite harmless when wielded by the uneducated. Egil's response again best captures this conviction (q. 37):

> 37 [You can't use] something that is beyond you, anyway, so as far as I am concerned everything [in Wicca] can be published. … Any deep secrets … are only informative to those who are ready for them, and to others it will look like nonsense. … Specific material protects itself [in a way]: "I am not ready for it, so I can't do anything with it." [This whole idea of 'dangerous magic'] represents a bit of this paternalistic vision, like: "I can deal with it, but another can't." I am not impressed by [ideas] like that (42: 200-201).

This position has also been identified in studies of Western esotericism. Antoine Faivre for instance, argues rather cryptically that "a secret needs no one to protect it. … None of the [mysteries of religion] lend[s] itself to … a univocal understanding but rather must be the object of progressive multileveled penetration" (Faivre, 1994, pp. 32-33). Therefore, he suggests that secrecy-as-concealment plays but a relatively minor role in most esoteric systems. Rufus Harrington, in turn, a well-known figure in neo-Pagan Circles, Alexandrian high priest and cognitive behavioural therapist, understands efficacy not so much as a function of the magical ceremony itself, but in terms of the relation between practitioner and practice (q. 38). He told me:

> 38 Certain materials are not released into the public domain, because [when] it's used by people not within the tradition [it] might be dangerous to them. And they wouldn't have the training to use [them] effectively [and] probably safely (35: 160).

Still, on a naturalistic level, Harrington (q. 39) added:

39   If you're experienced … those things will never affect [you] because the experience is too
     strong … But when you're not so far on in the game, that's different. You're much more
     vulnerable. And in any kind of process, having protection when you're starting is really
     important … because the process of growing and evolving consciousness is a delicate
     business, [analogous] to [psycho]therapy (35: 167-168).

Implied in his narrative seems a concern with creating a safe environment for any
practitioner to work on his own psyche, through magico-religious means. The danger
then could be understood as to not sufficiently or rightly resolve confrontations that
may emerge with profound, emotionally charged self-confrontations. The process of
making changes in the psyche, what somewhat simplistically can be called the hall-
mark of both ceremonial magic and psychotherapy—a link that Harrington made
more than once—needs to be conducted carefully and well-prepared.

All in all, narratives about the need for secrecy as pertaining to safety stretch from
stressing the dangers of magical efficacy, voiced in a supernatural discourse, to argu-
ing for safety nets to be installed and empasizing the reasons for those dangers, a
narrative which I observed more often in advanced Wiccans. In the latter discourse,
secrecy was often treated as a matter of confidentiality, much like in a therapist-client
relationship. Implied here, however, is the personal discretion of practitioners what
to disclose, and what to keep to themselves.[131] Remarkably, I found enormous differ-
ences among the various people I interviewed as to what exactly was concealed:
sometimes material, sometimes identities, and sometimes particularities of magical
rituals, even if the general structure of these ceremonies was then often happily dis-
closed.

The rationale for withholding information about the specific contents of rituals is
the widely accepted belief that magical efficacy wanes with disclosure. Gavin Bone (q.
40), the partner of Janet Farrar and one of my expert informants, stated:

40   When you do a magical ritual, it's like sending a letter. … You put it in the postbox, and
     it's gone. You do a magical ritual; you walk away, you don't talk about it, you don't think
     about it, because what you do is, you draw the energy back to yourself. So if you go away
     and then somebody starts talking to other people, "We did this ritual for this, this and
     this, the other day," it starts potentially to interfere with the process. … Which is why,
     when you do magic, it's not discussed outside the group doing it (34: 301).

Magical efficacy, then, could be seen as a tire that is being pumped and that anyone
uninvolved but in the know would equal a puncture in it. Quite remarkably, we may

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[131] Discretion is a rather ambiguous term in that the word both may refer to the freedom to act based on
one's personal preference and judgment (hence "personal discretion"), or acting in a way that prevents
embarrassment, distress, sometimes implying withholding specific information. Often one finds the lat-
ter meaning, which amounts to upholding institutionalized secrecy, concealed as personal discretion,
which would suggest a choice in what to say and not to say. This stratagem not only leads to a misrepre-
sentation of the social structure of a religion, but also falsely suggests a tolerance towards others who do
not share the belief in a need for secrecy.

conclude, then, that the most pertinent purposes of magical secrecy, those of safety and those of efficacy, seem at odds with each other: safety can only be an issue when efficacy is not undermined by disclosure. In addition, we have established that magical efficacy does not have to be explained in equally magical terms, even by the insiders, and that especially naturalist explanations go hand in hand with an appeal for personal discretion regarding confidentiality.

6.2.4 A secret versus a mystery

Another aspect of secrecy, or rather a term that according to some Wiccans is often mistaken for it, is the notion of mystery. Arghuicha (q. 41) explained:

> 41   [Even] in the Eleusinian mysteries, people distinguished between *ta rheta*—things you can tell to a non-initiate; *ta aporrheta*—things that are forbidden to tell to a non-initiate; but the most important category is the third: *ta arrheta*—that what you cannot tell, unless to someone who has experienced the same. So it is no use telling someone else, because only when you have experienced it yourself does it have the significance we all give it after we have experienced it (13: 390).[132]

This example not only goes to show that insiders may inform themselves about secrecy by drawing on sources well outside their own tradition, but more importantly, the distinction between a secret and a mystery has been made throughout history and is widely acknowledged across different persuasions. In his book on ritual in the Western mystery tradition, John Michael Greer (1998, pp. 123-125), for instance, distinguishes between *knowing* and *knowing about*, where the latter refers to communicable factual knowledge, and the former to incommunicable experiential knowledge. Still, the difference between secrets and mysteries notwithstanding, factual knowledge may entail the possession of procedural information that may be needed to obtain the experiential knowledge, just like one needs to cook one's meal according to some recipe before one can taste it. When secrecy blocks the only route to experiencing the mystery—the mystery itself becomes part of the secret too.

Yet, strangely enough, secrecy may also be a requirement to be able to experience the mystery eventually. Arghuicha (q. 42) told me that therefore the right course of action with regard to secrecy is sometimes hard to determine.

> 42   We granted Jan de Zutter[133] our approval to publish [our] neophyte-initiation and Hera (Arghuicha's partner and high priestess) has regretted that ever since. … There is no harm in non-Wiccans reading it, [our regrets] mainly concern those who want to become

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[132] For a brief explanation of *ta aporrheta* (sometimes spelled 'apporheta' or 'aporreta') and *ta arrheta*, see Luck (2006, p. 495); for a discussion of the ambiguity of the term 'aporrheta,' see Stallsmith (1996). Note that in the literature, also the related triad of *drōmena* (things done), *deiknumena* (things shown), and *legomena* (things said) can be found (see e.g., Borella, 2004, pp. 209-210; Brisson, 2004, p. 60).

[133] Jan de Zutter is a Flemish journalist and politician and a former member of Greencraft. He published the text of the initiation ritual, among others, in his book *Eko Eko* (De Zutter, 2003, pp. 127-131).

> [Greencrafters]. It [would be] much better when they don't know how the initiation
> works; it would be better if they read it only after their initiation. … The secret lies in the
> experience and not so much in reading the text (37: 173-185).

Temporary secrecy, or sometimes merely the reluctance to offer information, apparently may be used as 'spoiler prevention.' Here concerns about concealment are U-shaped: whereas insiders have access, and uninvolved (but respected) outsiders also may be informed about the secrets, those with the highest involvement on the outside are granted the least knowledge. This kind of secrecy, then, is of course often associated with initiation. Since ritual material is a means to get to the mystery, sometimes the concealment of the material carriers of knowledge is emphasized. In this case, not only the specific content or purpose of the ritual is hidden, as with practical magic, but also generic forms and recurring ritual elements such as specific words and gestures, but most importantly creative material, like specific songs, mystery plays, or meditations are concealed.

6.3 Analysis and interpretation: Latencies of secrecy

When considering the interrelation of the different narratives of secrecy I discussed in Section 6.2, and appreciate their embeddedness in the developmental path of Wicca, we set the stage for an analytical and interpretative reassessment of the phenomenon. First, we need to appreciate that, although partly overlapping, there is a difference between the rationale of secrecy and the motives for its employment. These latencies of secrecy may exist as an asymmetry between insider and outsider in terms of stated and real reasons for secrecy, or—and we should not underestimate that—as a discrepancy within the guardian of the secret between believed and factual utilities of non-disclosure.[134] Second, these insiders may also fail to realize a potential difference between intended and unintended consequences (i.e., implications) of upholding institutionalized secrecy. These implications will be discussed in the concluding, fourth part, whereas the latencies of secrecy are the subject of the present part.

Shifting from content to form, we need to emphasize the functionalist basis of both secrecy formation and maintenance. I limit myself to three motives of concealment that will only reveal themselves, either after moving beyond the manifest content of the interviews or interpreting other research topics from the sociological perspective of knowledge management: *maintenance of ownership*, *maintenance of appeal*, and *maintenance of association*. Interestingly, some Wiccans in my sample either partly or fully utilize the naturalist metalanguage in which most of the academic approaches to the perceived need for secrecy are phrased. Note however that I could

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[134] See Subsection 5.1.2 for a discussion on this kind of discrepancy that I have called the strong version of the double hermeneutic, where the scholar offers an explanation for the layperson's explanation of the latter's psychological functioning.

not find a clear relationship between seniority as a Wiccan and the employment of such etic understandings.

6.3.1 Maintenance of ownership

The information gathered in my interview suggests that acts of concealment also take place within Wicca between its various strands, as well as within neo-Paganism as a whole. For instance, according to Morgana, in the Netherlands Alexandrians were not allowed to speak with Gardnerians for a long time. Rufus Harrington (q. 43) admitted:

> 43 There's competition between [the] traditions, and that's…all about [things like], "we know more than you, we've got a better initiation system than you." It's a little bit like, "I know something you don't." … There's no two ways about it, [there] will always be … what I consider [a bit] of good old fashioned healthy competition; at its worst [they] become Secret Squirrel games of a ludicrous character (35: 159).

This aspect of exclusivity goes to show that religious groups may contain secrets for more than spiritual reasons: what was a private piece of information may become commodified as a trade secret. In this fashion, where the emergence of rituals, customs, and objects that are unique to one's tradition leads to self-appointed stewardship, the development of original material in one's group will lead to claimed ownership. The difference between the two regarding secrecy can be clearly illustrated by Egil (q. 44):

> 44 With the neophyte course…we will teach [our specific] runic system…; on that topic, there are no books. If you leave, then you [are not allowed] to teach that material to outsiders [because] that's Greencraft material. It's a sort of agreement. But look, I wouldn't have any objections showing to someone, a serious researcher, my book of shadows, but I wouldn't lend it (42: 181).

The distinction that is made here between 'traditional' (i.e., his book of shadows) and 'original' material (i.e., Greencraft's additions to Wicca) shows that, when stripped from its religious and supernatural connotations, secrecy often just implies copyright. However, infringements of copyright, in turn, may be re-enchanted in terms of their consequences, which is proved by a Facebook announcement of Zsuzsanna Budapest (q. 45), which caused quite a stir.

> 45 I would like you to help me spread the words that singing *We All Come From the Goddess* should NOT BE rewritten. It is my intellectual property. It is NOT a folk song, which by the way is the fate of many composers whose songs are stolen. You steal my song from now will have consequences. You put men into the song, like God, a hex will be activated (Posted on 17 April 2012).

We All Come from the Goddess is a popular chant used in Wiccan circles, but typically also available to non-initiates; in legal copyright terminology, one could call this *non-excludability* (Toynbee, 2010, p. 90). The song has been recorded by various artists and has also been adapted to include a reference to the male deity *the Horned God*, which seems like a fair bit of social authorship that obviously sits uneasily with Budapest, who is one of the best-known American feminist Wiccans. Her problem, of course, is that the chant soon became a staple at various festivals, so no institutionalized secrecy could have prevented her chant in becoming so successful after it became so widely dispersed.

Oddly enough, I have encountered two examples of the exact opposite: rather than the author restricting access or use of his or her intellectual property, the audience attempted to prevent the author from making available his and her respective rituals to outsiders. After my interview with Gavin Bone and Janet Farrar, the latter recounted that she once led an open ritual in which she used some material she had written and also used in her closed groups. After the ritual had ended, she was approached by a few high priestesses whom she did not know who confronted her about disclosing secret ritual material. Who was she to do that? Janet replied dryly, "Well, I wrote them."[135] I need to add, however, that the priestesses in question were not aware that Farrar was the author.[136]

In the case of an intended publishing of a number of moon rituals, which he developed with his wife and high priestess, things turned out very different for Ko Lankester(q. 46), a Dutch Gardnerian high priest.

> 46 We wrote the book *Witches Come From the Moon*,[137] and in it, there are some things from a few moon rituals. I would've liked to give a few more, but there were a few covens that said: "Ko, those rituals may be yours, but they are also ours now, because we have done all of [these rituals] in our covens."[138]

What is striking here is that with the initial dispersal of the ritual text to the groups that hived off from the mother coven of the Lankesters, a specific rule to the institutionalized secrecy emerged, one that restricted access to the scenarios. Here we find the exact point where issues of copyright turn into concerns about the appeal of religious knowledge.

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[135] I could only paraphrase this story, as it was not recorded. Therefore, I have not added a quote number here.

[136] About this story, Farrar and Bone (2004, p. 47) wrote themselves: "Janet and Stewart [Farrar] found it interesting to be accused of breaking oaths by writing about rituals they had researched and created themselves. One reason for this was that some individuals didn't want to be perceived as ignorant about this material."

[137] The book is only available in Dutch, see Lankester and Lankester (2005).

[138] This quote was taken from an interview conducted by one of my students, Sophie Thunnissen, for her bachelor thesis.

6.3.2 Maintenance of appeal

As I have already noted, the value of social capital rises with its scarcity and, consequently, so does the status of its guardians. Institutionalized secrecy, then, serves to support both the tendency to cast secrets as "adorning possessions," and to support the managed identities of the keepers of the knowledge (Simmel, 1950, pp. 337-338). Especially relevant here is the interesting fact that the fluidity of secrecy not only pertains to what concealed information becomes revealed over time, as I mentioned earlier, but also to what new originally freely assessable material is appropriated and consequently hidden from view. Albert Einstein's famous phrase "The secret to creativity is knowing how to hide your sources," is right on the mark here. Wicca has always been an enterprise of *bricoleur*s, and although institutionalized secrecy cements the various bits and pieces, the concealment of its sources also contributes to the perceived authenticity of the leading artists, writers, and visionaries of the Craft.

However, huge differences can be observed in how appropriated material is presented. The specific configuration of the material may be stressed, in that a rationale is provided for the acknowledged and thus literally eclectic compilation. In Greencraft, for instance, after apprentices are initiated as neophytes, they are offered an explanatory text that opens with a note stating:

> These opinions and the text and the scenario of the initiation ritual all are part of the 'secret' and discussion of these can only take place between people of the Greencraft Wicca Tradition and should not be revealed to non-initiates in this tradition.

In the text itself, clear references to both the origins and the meaning of each of the episodes and symbols of the ritual are given. The reader of the document will understand that Greencraft's main contribution in this specific example lies in the idiosyncratic synthesis of the various sources, rather than in presenting genuinely new ritual elements. Interestingly, the need to keep silent is only expressed after the ritual, in this very document.

Contrastingly, elsewhere[139] in what can best be labelled as a semi-open event, I have encountered a demand for secrecy that was made prior to the meeting taking place, and in the same context again a warning in each presentation that the shown material was strictly for distribution among participants only.[140] The presentations, however, largely consisted of pictures taken from the Internet (most notably autumn impressions that were published on a newspaper's website), some equally available chants, and quotes. Lacking something like the explanatory narrative of the Greencraft text, the act of appropriation in this slide show presentation becomes even more visible. Intriguing in this example is the fact that where the copyrights of, for in-

[139] To protect privacy, I have not disclosed any specific information with regard to this meeting and its presenters.

[140] The semi-open event sits in the middle between the open and closed events, a triad described by Balfer (2009), see also Subsection 2.3.1.

stance, the newspaper were infringed upon on the one hand, another copyright was demanded on the other.

Since the meeting had to be paid for well before the exact subject was chosen, we can assume that the participants were especially interested in the presenters, rather than in what specific material they would come up with. The appeal of the speakers would radiate into their presentations, and, in turn, the perceived authenticity of both was safeguarded by making the material, however mundane in its projected form, scarce.

There is an intriguing paradox attached to this strategy of secrecy: one needs to be vocal about what one cannot be vocal about at all. One needs to say what one cannot say. As secrecy may be an enhancer of the status of the concealed knowledge, there always is an incentive to talk more about the secret than its contents would warrant. Paul Johnson calls this exploitive narrative *secretism* (Johnson, 2002, pp. 97, p. 181). Insider-outsider relations may be shaped by it, and like Johnson, I have had the occasional informant teasing me with the promise of genuine insights should I wish to convert or exploiting the idea they were in possession of something I was after. Much more widespread, however, are the instances where informants would distance themselves from similar tendencies they observed in their own encounters inside their group.

6.3.3 Maintenance of association

The last motive for secrecy I will discuss is the maintenance of association or what one could call *ritual hygiene*. My study suggests that often secrecy is installed to perpetuate the aesthetic qualities that embody the experience of the mystery, or at least grant informed responses to the symbolism.

> 47   We would never invite a non-initiate to a sabbat. Why not? Because…the heart of the sabbat is a mystery play, but that play can only give an experience to those present when they have grown into those symbols [we teach]… When you haven't grown into those symbols…, then it will all be [just] bad acting, because we are all bad actors (42: 210-211).

In this quote (q. 47) from Egil, we find a rather implicit reference to secrecy as an institution, with an ad hoc rationalization of its usage. This tension particularly stands out when we contrast it with an earlier quote from that interview (see q. 44). In that previous quote, there are no qualms in sharing material. So here (q. 47) in terms of what knowledge is shielded off from outsiders, it is not so much the content of the play, but details of its idiosyncratic materialization. Different to the theological rationale of practical privacy that comes with magical practice, in this particular quote the implied need to safeguard the learnt associations of the initiates surfaces, since the 'bad acting' would generate responses in non-initiates that would possibly inhibit the free flow of emotions and thus thwart the experiences of the in-crowd.

In the literature, the impact of outsiders in a close-knit group is called the *chilling effect*, which refers to excessive caution exercised by the participants (Barkun, 2006). In the end, both the initiates and non-initiates alike would then get a wrong impression of the ritual: the former with regard to its efficacy and the latter in terms of the proceedings as a sound depiction of ritual action in a broader sense. I have, therefore, labelled this motive for secrecy the need for the maintenance of associations, and this may be the primary reason for secrecy.

Safekeeping rituals and material by means of secrecy is closely related to acts of sanctification. When secrecy is used as a means of drawing a line between the people who have internalized and lived through the basics of Wicca, we can also draw a line within a person when we think of the different social roles he has taken on, or his context-dependent perspective and affective make-up. I have come across this disengagement with specific positions of the self in everyday life in a cleansing act of a Flemish Greencraft coven that involved touching a statuette of a Buddhist yogi as participants passed it on their way to the temple room. All daily hassles and problems needed to be left with the statue at the start of the ritual, so all minds would be empty, ready to be filled by whatever experience the ritual activity would generate. I feel the significance of this little cleansing act is not so much the hope that the statuette will absorb and thereby solve the problems, but that the positions of the self that are associated with negative life events are excluded from the ritual in order to re-appraise any of life's challenges in a more constructive, 'mindful' way.

The most relevant observation here is that cleansing equals inversed secrecy. Rather than shielding allegedly useful and shared inside information from outsiders, here, insiders are shielded from allegedly harmful and personal 'outside' information.[141] The gestural nature of the act of transmission, together with the spatial peculiarity that the statuette is not even in the temple, make the significance of mental cleansing as alternative knowledge management between two social worlds stand out. The maintenance of association, then, is perhaps the most personal of secrecies. Strictly speaking, the ritual attendant is concealing painful information from himself, as to maintain experiential integrity of the self, thereby improving his relationship with his co-practitioners, his deities, and himself.

6.4 Discussion: Conclusion and implications

To conclude, we can make a few general observations about the nature of secrecy in Wicca. First, pertaining to form, secrecy is both temporally and spatially diverse: the institution is invoked on very different occasions, for equally different reasons, with its rationale developing over time. Second, regarding content, with institutionalized secrecy, people continually release and absorb hidden information. Third, the self-

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[141] Cf. Galanter's (1999, p. 105) notion of *boundary control.*

understanding of Wiccans about their use of secrecy is also remarkably diverse, with some sticking to the emic, theologically inspired rationales, and others utilizing etic, naturalistic explanations for its existence. One last observation, from which I will develop two implications of secrecy, is that of the inconsistent highlighting and downplaying of secrecy as an institution. Some of my interviewees insisted on privacy and personal discretion as the terms to use, rather than secrecy. Still, they would typically state upfront what the things are they could not talk about, even before I asked anything about these. This unprovoked opacity goes to show that even when words like privacy are used, the underlying message in the interviews is that institutionalized secrecy has silently stood its ground. One might conjecture here that 'privacy' sometimes equals having been socialized into secrecy, and in turn having developed an overt rationale that stresses personal autonomy.

A corresponding belief that I often found was the assumption that secrecy (as privacy) was required to maintain a close-knit group, whereas, in fact, the opposite is equally true: people become close-knit because they share a secret (as an institution). Secrecy leads to a certain level of isolation and therefore increases one's dependency on others who are in the know, both regarding compensation and mutual reliance to safeguard the material (Simmel, 1950, p. 356). In this light, perhaps, we can understand why the confidentiality that researchers always seek to guarantee was almost unanimously waived by my informants. Their insistence to be mentioned in my research by their public Craft name would render them in many cases quite easily linkable with their true identity by fellow insiders (see 2.1.2). Many of these, contrastingly, refrained from disclosing even the most general of ritual material under the very guise of 'confidentiality.'

As a researcher, then, one may wonder to what extent the informants perceived their fellow Wiccans as the intended audience for the interview quotes. This possibility represents both a promise and a threat for social scientists dealing with interviews as a method. On the upside, I have encountered so many similar narratives, that we need not to be too concerned about the relativist idea of the co-construction of knowledge between interviewer and interviewee, and therefore can safely move beyond mere description.[142] However tentative, I attempted to contribute to that vision here, by drawing a distinction between the manifest and latent levels of observation to analyse my data, and intersperse these with theoretically sampled interview quotes, and emphasizing the importance of the social structure of secrecy, beyond the boundaries of Wicca.

The downside, in turn, has to do with the threat of the misrepresentation of knowledge, which is the first implication of institutionalized secrecy. Although Egil asked himself the question numerous times if the knowledge he could disclose would help the person who is asking, thereby emphasizing the will to do good, I have also come across the refusal to offer any information on the basis of the opposing idea that dis-

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[142] The catch is that on a larger timescale, there is an exchange between the discourses of academia and Wicca, as I have explained in 5.1.2.

closure "does not help the movement." This particular reaction is very useful as it illustrates an active identity management of Wicca as a whole that we can observe in some of its key members. Rather than emphasizing a fear that any disclosure might harm the movement, here we find a tendency to seek out opportunities to promote the interests of Wicca. The danger of this kind of reasoning lies in its circularity: since the movement has secrets—revealing secrets is not helpful to the movement. What is often forgotten is the ever-changing sociocultural context in which the movement is situated: the gap between what is still hidden and what is still supposed to be hidden.

The relationship with academia becomes easily strained here, because such sentiments may coincide with attempts to engage in scholarly debate for apologetic reasons rather than trying to advance theory and build a body of knowledge. Narratives of academic colonialism are never far away due to the considerable overlap between scholars of neo-Paganism and Pagan scholars, together with institutionalized secrecy in Wicca and the weak academic position of Pagan studies. However, there is a threat that this sadly marginalized academic niche may turn into a learned handmaiden for the movement. This 'counter-colonization' is the second implication of institutionalized secrecy— both in Wicca in the strict sense, but perhaps to a lesser degree also in other neo-Pagan and magical movements. Since much of Wicca's material has always been appropriated from independent scholarly enquiry (most notably from the fields of anthropology, history, and religious studies), the increasing overlap arguably has a detrimental effect on its religious development in both scope and depth. In addition, a self-critical stance would perhaps aid in the further emancipation of the movement.

However, scholars who are not considered insiders may encounter hostility, even if they sympathize with the neo-Pagan movement, as I recently found out. At the last minute, I was refused permission to conduct participatory fieldwork at a two-day workshop by its presenter, even though I had told both this presenter and the local organizer about my research project months before the seminar would take place. In fact, the latter even suggested the workshop on the basis of our talk. Although this deeply insulted me as a private person, as a scholar the incident proved very fruitful for developing my thoughts on secrecy. All in all, the incident with the presenter, who, I should add, is wearing the hats of both scholar and neo-Pagan, illustrates the dangers that specific traditions like Wicca become fully dislodged from mainstream scholarly enquiry while some insiders simultaneously feed off the latter's body of knowledge and uncontestedly promote their own theologically flavoured theories inside academia. Nevertheless, I feel that the neo-Pagan movements have so much to offer to advance religious or even cultural theory. By being the dynamic and complex phenomena that they are and being populated by this heterogeneous group of people, neo-Paganism deserves a balanced and critical treatment for the mutual benefit of both the academy and the movement itself. Like Gandhi said, "Truth never damages a cause that is just."

COINING NAMES, CASTING SELVES

Isis, Astarte, Diana, Hecate, Demeter, Kali, Inanna
We are the old people; we are the new people
We are the same people, stronger than before

Deena Metzger, *Goddess Chant*

To find out how contemporary religion affects the self-understanding of its adherents and may contribute to the construction of their personal identity, in this chapter I explore the Wiccan practice of adopting a 'Craft name.' All people tell stories to maintain a coherent personal history and stories about their names help create a sense of identity. My interpretative phenomenological analysis of the interviews showed that names and their referents may be either passively accepted or recognized as one's own and that such impressions contrast with expressive and active understandings in which a name implies one's potency and helps to frame one's aspirations. These processes show how religious creativity can be understood as a virtually autonomous process of incremental change, sustained by many social interactions. I conclude with some suggestions for future investigation of personal mythology, the religious pluralistic self, and how the Wiccan imagination eventually comes to impact on their religious system. I take this last point up in Chapter 8.
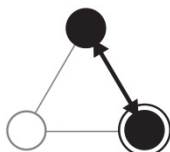
7.1 Introduction

Religion may contribute to a sense of personal belonging and meaning in life, and studies of conversion show exactly how such attachments come about and develop over time. Related to such matters is the double-barrelled question how the self becomes infused with religious images and symbols, and how these start to have an impact on a person's self-understanding and life-narrative.[143]

To make a start with answering these sweeping questions, I have singled out as my topic of enquiry a very self-evident act of religious self-identification: the practice of taking on a so-called 'Craft name' when a person becomes involved in Wicca. I have chosen Wicca, because it represents a delicate balance between traditionalism and religious convention on the one hand, and expressive individualism on the other. In addition, because Wicca requires serious commitment, its naming practice demonstrates how religious self-identification may pervade many aspects of life, and impact on the different social roles and situated selves that come with life in contemporary Western society.

Before I can proceed to discuss the relationship between self-understanding, name adoption and Wiccan symbolism, however, I need to consider the idea that a person has different *situated selves*, which are each related to specific others, groups, and particular contexts. This idea is as old as psychology. William James (1890/1981, pp. 291-293) already suggested that what he called the 'empirical self' is actually a composite of material, social and spiritual selves; much later others spoke about a 'colony of possible selves' (Markus and Nurius, 1986, in Bruner, 1990); a 'self-other system' (Van Uden, 1985); and most recently a 'multiplicity of selves' (See, e.g., Hermans & Gieser, 2012). People will have to unify all these situated selves to participate in society and reflect on their agency (Bruner, 1990, p. 100).[144]

But how do people arrive at such singularity? Research into autobiographical memory has shown that their self-understanding is based on narrative constructions of ephemeral recollections that are tailored to fit particular current needs (Fivush, 2012). Therefore, the function of their memory—as well as their consciousness—does not lie in a high fidelity reproduction of the past, but rather in a motivational scripting of the self with an eye to their self-navigation (Baumeister & Masicampo, 2010; see also Freeman, 1993). From repeatedly telling stories about themselves eventually

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[143] Interestingly, the book *Relating God and the Self* (Henriksen, 2013), though independently conceived and theological in nature, holds some interesting parallels to the present article with specific regard to the coupling of the individual to the realm of the divine.

[144] One could make an analysis of how each epoch creates other demands and challenges that a unified self must meet (e.g., in some times, self-reflection is less important, in others the material me is repressed), how each me is differently affected by postmodernity (i.e., a bloated social me—which also sucked in much of the material me—but an atrophied spiritual me) and how each self is addressed by the Wiccan cosmology (how are all the self-aspects represented by its cosmology), but all these explorations are beyond the purpose of the present chapter (See also Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 104).

a narrative centre of gravity will emerge. This *conceptual self* is a storied self; one that prefers versatility over veracity.[145]

Since the capacity to envision future possibilities is psychologically analogous to the capability to remember past events (D'Argembeau, 2012, p. 311), self-narratives may contain elements of both. Narratives introduce temporality and continuity—and perhaps a sense of urgency for dramatic effect. Past selves, on the one hand, pave ways to future selves. For example, a devout youth might argue, "I have always felt close to God, perhaps I should become a priest." On the other hand, after being invoked in a present situation, a future self may come to inform a past one. For example, a rejected lover asks herself, "I'll never get married. Why do I have such difficulties with intimacy? Perhaps my childhood wasn't as happy as I always thought." Although the conceptual self is constructed out of stories like these, just like its past and future constituents, it is merely an object. *The I* is the subject, its perceiver. Occupying but a point in time—*the eternal now*—the I is the acting consciousness, impervious to scrutiny. The process of *temporalized self-understanding* in its entirety, in contrast, may be analysed (see Figure 8).[146]

The conceptual self is referred to by one's name. That is, under the name all distinct aspects of the self come together as a unified whole. One's identity and name, in other words, are intimately linked. In addition, a person is marked out by name both socially and legally. As prime emblems of personhood, these names also encapsulate their 'essences,' evoking life-narratives, descriptions of character, and anecdotes on personal style and taste (Finch, 2008). No one likes to be called by the wrong name. Since one gradually acquires an identity through the repetitive use of a name, its blunt denial can be an affront to one's ego (Van Uden, 2014).

Apart from the mark of individuality—perhaps even uniqueness—an accepted name also can signify one's group membership or agreement to a social contract. Especially among oppressed or disadvantaged minorities, a name can indicate one's belonging, for better or for worse; outsiders may employ it as an insult, while insiders may choose it as a badge of honour (Palsson, 2014). Although naming practices at birth thus may offer insights in shared belief systems and group loyalties, many religious and cultural groups require changing one's name after conversion or initiation. Especially in Wicca, where a good deal of those names are chosen by the adherents themselves, such name-adoption represents a point where autobiographical and religious material touch and interpenetrate.

Wiccans think of Craft names as aptronyms—literally: 'apt names'—that evoke the personal significance of deities and mythological figures, the spiritual aspects of animals, plants and trees, and sometimes the elements, precious stones, or desirable characteristics (cf. Magliocco, 2004, pp. 65-69). Some examples of names I encoun-

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[145] The conceptual self serves a similar function to that of the 'spiritual truth' (see Section 4.5 and Subsection 5.4.1), albeit on an individual level.

[146] We find this temporal meaning-making model discussed in a slightly different form in Josephs (1998) where this dual process has been dubbed the "double loop of meaning-making."
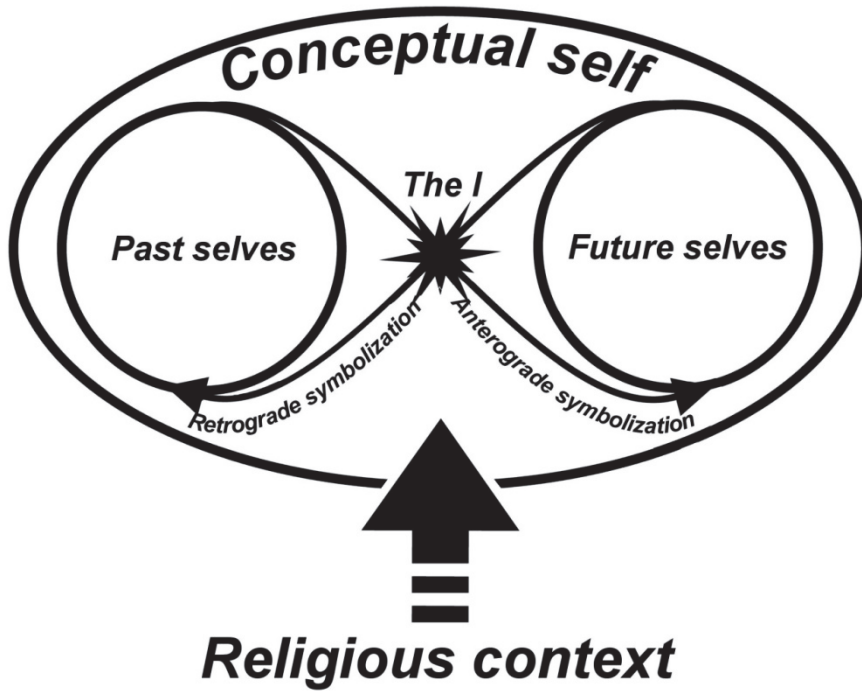
FIGURE 8: *The conceptual self*
The conceptual self has the I as its narrative centre of gravity. Self-understanding is produced as a re-sult of the continuous stream of self-narratives made from memories of the past and thoughts about the future, which also influence each other through retrograde and anterograde symbolization. Apart from the representations of the past and the future, the I is impacted by the present: the religious con-text may provide symbols, ideas, and experiences, that may be meaningfully related to the conceptual self.

tered are 'Bran,' referring to Bran the Blessed, a giant from Welsh mythology; 'Willow'; 'Nymphaea,' Latin for 'water lily'; and 'Lupus,' Latin for 'wolf.' Sometimes combinations of referents are chosen, such as Silver Ravenwolf, author of many books on neo-Paganism and Wicca.[147]

The potentially conflicting functions of name adoption—group designation versus personal distinction—complicate its proper usage. Even though virtually all Wiccans have an open Craft name, and eclectic Wiccans use it with sympathetic outsiders as well as insiders (Lewis, 1999b, p. 68), some traditionalist groups also use a secret—or rather sacred—Craft name. Only fellow initiates know this name, and its use is limited to closed rituals. In Gardnerian Wicca, for instance, this sacred name expresses one's highest ideal and embodies a personal and therefore private connection to the divine (see also q. 93 in 8.7).[148]

I shall concern myself here with open Craft names, not only because sacred names are hard to study because of their secrecy, but also because most of my informants use their adopted names both inside and outside of ritual. In addition, the sacred name may be changed as well by its bearer after particular initiations or when it is seen as no longer fitting (Guiley, 1989b). Given such instrumentality, limited usage, secrecy, and openness to change, the sacred name likely has less of an impact on self-identification than the open Craft name. I will start off with explaining the notion of the Craft name in Section 7.2. In Section 7.3 and 7.4 I will develop my argument that with the adopted name the gradual internalization of the Wiccan imagery and symbolism comes to bear on an emergent spiritual self-understanding through processes of impression and expression of the situated selves that emerge with the adopted name. Section 7.5 concludes the article and offers a novel perspectives evoked by the present study for further pursuit.

7.2 A name in point

The complex interrelations of motives and meanings that come with name adoption can best be introduced by examining the well-rounded narrative of one of my informants, a 50-year-old Dutch Gardnerian high priestess. Although she did not disclose her sacred name, she is known among most Wiccans by her open Craft name, Jana Hollesdochter. The mythic referents are apparent: her surname is the Dutch matronym for '[Mother] Hulda's daughter'; her first name is a feminized version of the Roman God Janus (q. 48). She explains:

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[147] See e.g. Sheard (2011), for a recent emic source on the choosing of names, as well as for a comprehensive list.

[148] For an emic source describing Wiccan naming practice in more detail, see Hollesdochter (2012).

48 I have the name Jana for a reason. I chose it on other grounds, but it is a part of the name … that my parents gave me. I went looking for a name that would fit me and I wanted a pseudonym because that's customary in [Wicca]. And I arrived at 'Jana' … [derived] from Janus, the God of portals. … [The name] also is a sort of shorthand of Diana—one of the names of the Goddess. But Janus … really means something to me. I also call myself Hollesdochter, I don't exactly know yet what that all signifies for me, but I do know that it's something that I have been occupied with for a long time—and will be for a long time [as well] (8: 101).

A name, then, may be arrived at on the basis of more than one reason. I write *arrived at*, rather than *chosen*, because even when Wiccans are free to choose their name, often they will create their own limitations by keeping the link with their secular name, as did Jana. In addition, she distinguished between her reasons for choosing the name and certain external powers that brought her to the name. Jana's overall narrative, however, suggests the prominence of her name's aptness: "Janus really means something to me." She continues (q. 49):

49 [The choice of this name] has to do with giving meaning [to my life]. What's the purpose I have in my life? … It's helping people on the [Wiccan] path. Standing at the gates and helping them in on the one hand, or—that's also a function of the gatekeeper—keeping people out—that's all interwoven with how I see myself. And [seeing the gate as] the doorway to the Otherworld, relates to me as a funeral officiant. Which I also see as a job of a priestess: to conduct rituals at death. [In Wicca,] it can even take the form of accompanying people to the doorway [to the Otherworld] (8: 119-120).

Jana's nominal self-identification stretches beyond a single context to encompass both her religious and professional lives: Janus is a psychopomp and acts as a gatekeeper for both new Wiccans on the threshold of the tradition and for the recently deceased, who are on the brink of what many Wiccans refer to as *the Summerland*.[149] In addition, Janus' obvious link with time—with one of his faces looking to the past and the other to the future—epitomizes how a Craft name may also help to establish one's past and future identity. In a similar vein, whereas Jana recognizes herself in Janus, she also has to explore another aspect of herself by relating to 'Hollesdochter,' who, points to the unchartered territory of the self (see q. 48).

All these dichotomies—choosing versus getting a name, personal versus professional contexts, past versus future identities, and known versus unknown aspects of the self—can be merged into a single one: *impression* versus *expression*. Impression refers to the passive, 'undergoing,' affirmative, and acknowledging manner in which name adopters come to terms with their new identity; expression signifies the active, generative, and declamatory manner in which name adopters employ their newfound

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[149] Many Wiccans believe in the Summerland as a place where their souls rest in the period between incarnations.

identity.[150] I will discuss the motives around Craft name adoption by distinguishing between the two. Before we advance, however, we need to see where both meet.

Note how the impression-expression dichotomy is quite explicitly phrased in Jana's narrative (q. 50):

> 50   Often things are already in you, but only later you realize that that's the key. I have a certain personality that I've had since I was a child, some aspects of which I've developed earlier, and others later. That may mean that you first have the awareness, and only later get the association with a symbol or [a] God or whatever. Sometimes, [however,] the encounter with [the] God or the symbol is the trigger that opens up that what's also in yourself and only then you'll start to develop it. It's something that's already there. These are sides to my personality. Whether I had already recognized them or not, at a certain point they will surface. And sometimes it's the symbol that comes first, and with it, the realization of your potency and sometimes you discover [this aspect of yourself first, and later] you find out that there's a God associated with it (8: 110).

The crux of the matter can be found in the words: "It is something that is already there." Jana apparently refers to an aspect of one's personality, but her words also capture the gist of the last few lines of *The Charge of the Goddess*—a ritual text, appreciated by many practitioners as "the unique and definitive statement of Wiccan philosophy" (Farrar & Farrar, 1981a, p. 15):

> And thou who thinkest to seek for me, know that thy seeking and yearning shall avail thee not, unless thou know this mystery, that if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee. For behold, I have been with thee from the beginning, and I am that which is attained at the end of desire (Valiente, 2000, p. 55).[151]

More than anything else, *The Charge* embodies immanent divinity as understood in Wicca: the Goddess resides in the person. In a similar vein, Farrar and Farrar (1987, p. 67) argue, "Not every woman is a witch. But every woman is a face of the Goddess." We should read *The Charge* as an *obligation of authenticity*; the first step towards a spiritual self-realization is the quest for finding one's core self, appreciating it as inherently Wiccan and therefore inherently sacred. However, whether one first recognizes oneself in a deity or the other way around, depends on the person. A trusted manoeuvre to set off a narrative in either direction is the so-called *homecoming*.

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[150] Incidentally, this dichotomy bears some resemblance to the distinction made by some French philosophers between *constance à soi* ('fidelity to oneself') and *maintien de soi* ('maintenance of one's identity'), as described by Richard Sennett (1998, pp. 145-146).

[151] Oddly, this piece of scripture is openly attributed to a verifiable person: Doreen Valiente. Still, Valiente merely—but thoroughly—revised an older text, the "Leviter Veslis," which was comprised of various other sources. These, in turn, were alleged to be of traditional or inspirational origin (Hutton, 1999, p. 247). For an emic source arguing along similar lines, see Morgana Sythove (2010).

7.3 Impression

7.3.1 Homecoming

To understand the plot of impression-based self-narratives of those who recently have embraced Wicca, it helps to briefly address conversion. Although conversion may be gradual, the change in the self-understanding is substantial, and the born-again self is perceived as better or more matured (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009, p. 211). Paradoxically, many conversions are framed as *homecoming experiences.* In a text on embodiment and conversion Rebecca Norris (2003) has suggested that converts may talk about homecoming because their newly adopted belief can only be understood from their existing system of meaning and felt through their ingrained practices.

Interestingly, although homecoming is not limited to Wicca—Norris offers examples from Hinduism, Christianity and Sufism—both within the field of Pagan studies (e.g., Harrington, 2002) and the emic literature (e.g., Adler, 2006, pp. 13-21), it is often accepted as a uniquely neo-Pagan narrative. Wiccans even acknowledge homecoming as an *alternative to*—rather than a mode of—conversion (Anczyk & Vencálek, 2013; Gallagher, 1994; Reid, 2009). With regard to self-narratives, homecoming stories serve to authenticate one's becoming a member of the newfound religion (see also 3.1). Aligning one's past to one's present can be done either by the acceptance of an inherent difference from others or coming to terms with oneself. Any expressive tendencies among Wiccans contribute to a sense of self-continuity through linking emancipatory narratives with emphatic practices that promote spiritual development or suggest an inborn talent for religiosity. I will discuss this expressive rendering of homecoming later.

7.3.2 Acceptance

Of all the homecoming narratives that seek to reconcile a personal pre-Wiccan past with the present, tales of gradual self-acceptance are the most subtle. Having to accept *who* and *what* you are is a personal reflection of an ascribed and acquired social identity created by others (Jenkins, 2004, pp. 145-159). In a story about overcoming verbal abuse, Aleesha, a 40-year-old Flemish eclectic Wiccan, explained how her detractors brought her to Wicca (q. 51).

51 [That] I really became fixated on witchcraft was simply because … people have always called me a witch since I was little. … I've [always been] very slender, I always had long hair, and I could tell about dreams, and sometimes these [dreams] came true, and [people] would be startled. And then they started calling me a witch. And then … seven or eight years ago, there was someone at my work that just began to call me a witch [again]. And then I thought, "Now I want to find out what they mean by that" (5: 238-246).

There is an implied normality in the way Aleesha speaks about her 'witchhood.' The same applies to her family's involvement in what she described in the interview as "the world of the paranormal." She told me her grandmother was able to accurately predict who was calling on the telephone, while both her mother and one of her mother's nephews read fortune cards. These abilities were seen as second nature in the family, she argued, and therefore they were hardly mentioned.

This 'business-as-usual' sentiment offers the key insight into how she came to embrace the very image she was accused of. Her detractor's abuse not so much imposed upon her an *ascribed identity* as a 'witch,' but confirmed the genuineness of her latent self-identification as one. Aleesha's narrative reveals how, through adversity, she *acquired her identity* as a Wiccan and can now voice it in all modesty as self-acceptance.

In addition to social identification, self-acceptance creates personal identification, like we find in the narrative of Selena, a 36-year-old Polish eclectic Wiccan living in the Netherlands (q. 52).

> 52 For fourteen years [I] only worked with men. There were days, weeks and I think even months that I only exchanged very few words with a woman. [At the end of] that period, when I got pregnant … [They didn't] like it very much at my work. And I know that that was the time that I got a need for women—just feminine energy (38: 380).

Much of Selena's homecoming experience is related to coming to terms with her womanhood. However, she did not think that her spiritual emancipation was her intention or motivation, but was the inevitable outcome of an independent process. The growing need for feminine energy was the catalyst for Selena's spiritual emancipation; during a guided meditation, she was presented with an image of herself in fully blossomed womanhood (q. 53).

> 53 [One day,] there was a workshop on self-power, and I was up to [my neck] in work, very bad, and I had a feeling like I could do with some self-power. … We did a guided meditation … at the end of which we had to imagine ourselves in our self-power. … And suddenly I saw myself with wild loose hair in a medieval dark green dress, and I was standing above myself as it were, with my hands [open] like something was radiating from them. And I knew … "I am a witch," and at that same time I thought, "What a load of crap." No kidding (38: 369).

At an earlier workshop, Selena had acquired her Craft name in a meditation focused on feminine spirituality. Her story shows that some names are not chosen, but are either given or revealed. In these cases acceptance plays an important role (q. 54):

> 54 We had a meditation in which we met the Goddess. That was my first encounter. Before that, I always thought of a force, never of a gender: God/Goddess. … We had a meditation in which we encountered the Goddess in a crystal palace and then we had to present

ourselves [to the Goddess], and I went to introduce myself [as] Vysoká. And … the god-
dess said to me, "You're not Vysoká, you are Selena." I thought, "Okay, fine, I won't argue
with my Goddess" (38: 336).

The last line of the quote sums up the process of gradual acceptance of who she was—
or was becoming. The delivery of her first child—a female experience if ever there was
one—added to that implied passivity. The delivery of her second child, however,
proved a resolution. The very moment of birth designated the point where passive
acceptance turned into a full embrace of herself as a woman with all its spiritual sig-
nificance. I enquired whether she had understood the process as going through a 're-
birth as a woman,' and that appeared exactly to be the case (q. 55).

55 A first childbirth, that is just something that happens to you; the second childbirth is
much more conscious … During delivery, I had a feeling like "I'm also giving birth to my-
self." That was a very strange feeling, and I was aware of it at that very moment. And
indeed, you're occupied with all sorts of things during delivery, and it's not the most
pleasurable thing in your life, but it [all was happening] on two levels, like you're actually
standing beside yourself and exactly at the same moment you're giving birth to yourself.
[It's] like closing a book and starting another. … You know that it's a very important mo-
ment in your life. You don't know why in the least because all those clues weren't there
back then. Well, yes. I heard a strange name [Selena] during a meditation, but for the
rest, I didn't have any clue what was to come within a month [or so]. But what I did know
something very important is going to happen. … [Yet] you're so busy with the [coming]
baby, that you really won't be thinking, "now my new spiritual life is beginning." Not in
the least. But at the same time, you're [somehow] conscious of it, without thinking being
involved—only feeling. You don't look for it [but it just had to happen] (38: 392-399).

Whereas Selena's self-acceptance had to do with her general identification as a wom-
an, and—like Aleesha—with becoming a Wiccan, some narratives rely much more on
myth and accordingly deal with specific qualities of one's personal identity. Wanda, a
64-year-old Flemish Greencraft Wiccan, for instance, found that a particular mytho-
logical figure helped her accept the negative impact of her righteousness (q. 56).

56 I've an affinity for Cassandra, … who does not want to marry Apollo.[152] She makes a
choice, and the consequence is that Apollo tells her … "You don't want to marry me, so
from now on all that you say [will] not be believed." [So it's not only the implication of
doing something but also when] I don't [do] something that will have consequences for
me; that I'll have to accept. But [it means] also: standing alone sometimes [like Cassandra
who says something] and nobody believes it; she knows for herself: still it's the truth. I
find that in my life: a bit of loneliness. That feeling with Cassandra … is a very concrete
example [of an affinity with a deity] with whom I feel myself at home (43: 175-176).

Implied in the narrative are two points. First, recasting oneself in a dramatic role
may help a person cope with the negative consequences of one's character. Second,

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[152] Wanda here refers to Aeschylus' tragedy *Agamemnon* (see, e.g., "Cassandra," n.d.).

part of the efficacy of the story lies in the narrative point of view—the third-person omniscient perspective grants the emulated life-narrative, or self-understanding, a sense of truth. Note that Cassandra is not Wanda's Craft name, but it still acts as an expression of her ethical self. Affinity with the character, therefore, is as much a matter of acceptance as of recognition.

7.3.3 Recognition

Let us stay with Wanda for a moment. Regardless of her affinity for Cassandra, she accepted the Craft name 'Wanda,' given to her by the leaders of a coven she was a member of before she joined Greencraft (q. 57).

> 57 I got the name Wanda. I only knew *A fish called Wanda* at the time, so I started looking for the name and the first meaning I found is 'a Wendish [woman],' so [derived] from a certain tribe, but also 'wanderer.' And I am a bit of a wanderer, also in my thinking, [moving] from one [thought] to the next. When I look at my life I find that I wandered quite a bit, if only to ask the same question: "What I think and feel now, does it still add up?" So I kept the name. Why? We took an oath on the sword[153] with that very name at the initiation in [our] first Coven, and I [always think], "We (also speaking for her husband Renco) once have been given this name. It is upon us now; take it with you." I didn't have the need like, "throw it away," [which is] similar to my Christian name. As a child, I thought my name was terrible. My real name is Angele, and I hated that name, but eventually I found: It's simply my name. If you have that name, then you should do something with it (43: 216-218).

Wanda acquiesced in the ruling that her name be given: "It is upon us now." In the narrative, however, we also see how acceptance may give way to recognition. Paradoxically, the given name 'Wanda' appeared to offer connections with autonomy, whereas 'Cassandra'—the character she freely associated with—relates to fate. These intricacies are subtle reminders of the obligation of authenticity we encountered with Jana. Still, the image of the wanderer points to indeterminacy—a life full of new impulses and, judging from Wanda's interpretation, the continuous generation of thoughts; a future only burdened by freedom.

I found another example of such indeterminacy in Raven, who was also a member of Lyonesse, the now defunct Greencraft coven that Wanda also belonged to. Although Raven's name is seemingly related to the corvine bird with that name, in fact, she took it from a book (q. 58).

> 58 [The book] tells about a woman with the name Raven who never spoke. And because she never spoke—although she could speak, but just didn't—she'd built up an enormous mental power. And I always thought that was very clever. And only [when I got involved in Greencraft] I started reading more about her. … When you first start with the Roedi course, you know nothing about [Wicca]. You might have read a few books, [but that's it].

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[153] See Bado-Fralick (2005) for various descriptions of oaths on the sword.

… [And] then you need to choose a name … and only later will you start looking what [other] meanings are attached to it (20: 792-796).

The indeterminacy here is caused by Raven's inexperience when she first became involved in Wicca; she had to choose a name on the basis of her limited knowledge of the myths that inform Wiccan cosmology. Eventually, she found out that the name 'Raven' has various meanings, and is associated with the Irish Goddess of war, Mórrígan.[154] Opposite to Wanda (q. 57), here the motive of recognition gives way to acceptance. Raven observed (q. 59):

59   When I started reading about the Goddess Raven, [I found] that we all have a dark side. And while you shouldn't explore it [and] you don't want to express it, you also shouldn't deny that it's present. … [We have to] acknowledge that everyone has their shadows—their dark sides (20: 812-816).

Ideally, when Wiccans are free to choose their name, its causal link to their developing spiritual selves makes getting the right name a significant undertaking. Adherents need to recognize themselves in the imagery and symbolism represented by their names. The belief that this name is out there, ready to be discovered, further adds to this sense of destiny. We find this motive in Phebe (q. 60) and Eostrel (q. 61) both Flemish Greencraft Wiccans.

60   Every time when I would look up something about the name (Phebe), I found a connection to myself, [also] with my zodiac sign, with the name I liked for my children, and with my own name, that also started with an *f* [sound], all those things pointed out to me: "This is your name" (44: 18).

61   At the end of [a] workshop, we had to draw a Goddess card [from a deck of divination cards]. And at that time I was already thinking very hard, like, "Okay, I have to do something, I want to really do something with that Wicca, but I don't know what path to look for." And I had seen a book on Greencraft [but was in doubt]. … [Then] I drew the card of Eostre, the Germanic fertility goddess. And that card signified that you're looking for something … but you don't really know how. [It taught me] that you shouldn't go on doubting, and that you just should go for it. And that really was the issue that was bothering me at that moment, so I thought, "Okay, that name fits me" (21: 333-334).

In these two quotes, we can observe that Wiccans may draw connections between themselves and their names in various ways. These reassurances notwithstanding, the associated identity still has to develop. Phebe, for instance, initially was uncertain about using her adopted name (q. 62).

62   Especially in the beginning, I had to get used to the name a bit. Does it fit me? … Then I tried the name like you'd try on a piece of clothing, and after a while, I noticed that the

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[154] See Section 8.2 for another example of an encounter with this Goddess.

name suited me better and better. And now I often feel myself more 'Phebe' than what I am called in everyday life (44: 22).

These narratives suggest that even if someone chooses a name on the basis of a specific self-understanding, the name also generates its own agency. Apart from acknowledging the motivations, tendencies and outlooks leading to the adoption, one also has to accept any surplus of meaning that comes with a name, integrating all into the new spiritual identity. Some Wiccans value these wild cards more than others, seeing them as potentialities or expressions of their aspirations.

7.4 Expression

7.4.1 Proto-religiosity

Even though self-acceptance may entail the surrender of one's initial worldview to that of a newfound religion, self-expressive life-narratives often reveal a stick-to-your-guns mentality in which the encounter with the religion is seen as a late payoff. That is, the devotee understands the newfound faith as the confirmation of long-standing private or unacknowledged *proto-religious* convictions that may now resurface and will be approved by fellow believers. These self-narratives may take the form of articulate reminiscences of childhood quirks, as the case of 49-year-old Merlyn, a Greencraft high priest from Flanders, illustrates (q. 63, 64).

> 63 I must have been twelve or thirteen when I found a missal at the Slegte (a second-hand bookshop) in Antwerp, and then I would hold my own masses at home, in my room … like I was a priest. … I would be intensely involved. I just had an urge to do it (25: 68-76).

> 64 I also leant towards the mystical. When I was … around eleven, perhaps twelve years old, I started a secret club—the Death's Head Club. And you were required to do all kinds of stuff if you wanted to become a member. You [even] needed to do some sort of initiation to become involved, and then you would get a [certificate of membership]; it all was steeped in secrecy (25: 77).

Merlyn's mention of initiation and secrecy hinted that his proto-religiosity already had a Wiccan character. Such already-present knowledge of Wiccan practice also can be found in the narrative of Magus (q. 65).

> 65 I would go out to the heath, where on a sand drift I would draw circles around me (…), [do] rituals and evocations (…) without knowing why. That's how it all started (6: 72).

Although drawing circles and doing invocations point to an acquired knowledge of Wiccan ritual practice, Magus' experience may also imply an inherited Wiccan outlook. Looking back on his aberrant understanding of fairy tales characters in child-

hood, he echoed the Wiccan embrace of the witch as a misrepresented figure in European folklore (q. 66):

> 66   It all started when I was a very young child and when my mother (…) would read fairy tales to me. In those fairy tales, it was [all about] the evil wizard and the evil witch. And I had an unconscious feeling that wasn't right. Wizards aren't evil; they're extraordinarily high-minded people, and witches are in fact very sweet. The whole evil stuff, I just didn't buy that—the dragon was the most wonderful sweet animal I [could] imagine (6: 71).

There are a number of recurring elements in Merlyn's and Magus' self-expressive pre-conversion narratives: first, a stated ignorance about the origin or reason of the behaviour; second, an emphasis on ritual method; third, a going against convention in one way or the other; fourth, an implied susceptibility to the aesthetic quality of ritual events, objects, or performances. Also, the stories reveal no hesitation or second thoughts. I have chosen quotes from Magus and Merlyn because they exemplify *all* these elements. We should note, however, that reminiscences such as these have a family resemblance: they may share some of these elements, without necessarily possessing all of them.

The self-expressive narratives indicate an intricate reciprocal relationship between person and religion: adherence to the group is exchanged for recognition of the relevance of the (childhood) idiosyncrasy. This balance becomes increasingly delicate over time, when the domain of personal preferences, experiences and understandings—increasingly but not exclusively tapped from more recent affairs—will begin to fuse with the domain of the religious canon, challenging any trade-off between self-enhancement and the search for collectivity. At this point shared religious material will start to get challenged and altered by the person (Van Gulik, 2011b).[155]

Indeed, the narratives of Merlyn and Magus illustrate how many Wiccans gladly meet the obligation of authenticity. They give a self-expressive twist to homecoming, seeing it as a return to what they believe is an older (i.e., *ancient*) and more authentic and inherently religious version of the self. Such Wiccans may assume that the natural form of religion is found by going back to who one truly is, rather than stretching beyond one's present self. For our psychological understanding, in contrast, we need to be reminded of the fact that the *interpretation* of this old self may be novel and a resultant of a profound shift of one's self-understanding. Here, homecoming is an active rather than passive repositioning of one's self vis-à-vis Wicca. Paradoxically, this biographical reinterpretation of the self finds its natural allies in future-aimed narratives about potency, aptitude, entitlement, and aspiration.

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[155] Yet, the self-expressive narrative might be explained differently. Conversion to what is perceived by the outside world as a suspect religion cannot but be cast in a justificatory narrative that is as grand as the lay response is dismissive. While entertaining a deviant self-image makes one more susceptible to become a member of a sectarian movement (see, e.g., Bader & Demaris, 1996). For a similar discussion, see also note 89 in Section 3.2.

7.4.2 Potency and aspirations

Some self-narratives contain a hint of indeterminacy. A name is chosen or under-stood to refer to both past and present, but may also be interpreted as leaving open possibilities for the future. Craft names that connote an inquisitive nature or hidden potentialities are particularly meaningful in that regard. We saw that already hinted at in Wanda's narrative (q. 57), but the story of the 40-year-old Dutch Gardnerian turned eclectic Wiccan Flierefluiter provides a particularly clear example (q. 67).

> 67 I've gotten [my name] from a book: *Merijntje Gijzens Jonge Jaren*,[156] which was written in Brabantine dialect, and I could read that. One of the characters is a vagabond, and his name is Flierefluiter (a sobriquet meaning 'loafer' or 'debauchee'). He's a sort of trickster. He pulls people's legs to show them their shortcomings. And he also does that to himself. He also [is] a faith healer [and] herbalist. I found him an appealing figure, and to me he corresponds with the Fool of the tarot. The Fool is the card that appeals most to me. It's a spiritual wanderer; a seeker who from the very start does not know where his path is leading. It's not entirely determined, [and] he makes many detours. He actually has all kinds of possibilities, everything is in him in potency, and he just looks for whatever he needs and what he can develop, and what [he doesn't need]. And he's actually very much alive; he very much lets his path be determined by the divine or chance (28: 287).

In contrast to Wanda, whose understanding of her given Craft name was phrased *a posteriori*, Flierefluiter explained his self-chosen name with an eye to a future preg-nant with potential. In Wicca, the trickster is a recurring figure that embodies both the playfulness and neutrality of the spirit world. Many Wiccans would also point out that through cunning and trickery sometimes truths may be revealed or lessons will be learnt that otherwise would not have been missed. This aspect thus added a bit of the unconventionality and deviancy we also found in Magus and Merlyn.

One other and very subtle difference between Wanda's and Flierefluiter's self-narratives is the perspective of the storyteller. Flierefluiter, like many other Wiccans, mostly reflects through a practitioner's voice, whereas Wanda mainly uses her every-day self. Although these perspectives are hard to catch in an interview quote, they are important in that they partly overlap with the impression-expression dichotomy. Phebe gives us a rare example of an everyday self that looks to the Wiccan self and argues for the potency of the latter (q. 68).

> 68 Phebe is someone who has more freedom than I do in my normal life. ... By using the name, I can do a lot more than I would do in my everyday life. The name symbolizes that (44: 21).

When people get a concrete idea of their future, or their name has a referent with a personal meaning, their potency motive turns to an aspirational one. And yet, there is a hint of aspiration in all the narratives—even those related to the past. For instance,

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[156] In English: *The childhood years of Merijntje Gijzen*. The book was written by A.M. De Jong (1926).

Aleesha's embrace of her innate 'otherness' may also be interpreted as a latent aspiration to be a Wiccan. Memories, we may recall, prefer utility over truthfulness. Aspirations may also relate to explicit beliefs about one's calling. We saw this in Jana's reference to her job as a professional and as a priestess (q. 49), and we find the same in Albijon, a 51-year old Flemish Greencraft Wiccan who chose his name so it could be linked to his role as a *lightworker* (q. 69).

> 69   When you look at the name 'Albijon,' you'll find ... that it contains the name of Alba [as] in 'alabaster' from 'white,' and that appealed to me because I engage in sacred dancing. ... Those ... dancers they call lightworkers. Light, white, white magic, yes? So Albijon, alabaster, white—all in all, that does correspond with my philosophy of life (24: 350).

With the donning of a name, in other words, one may seek to ordain one's future as a practitioner of a certain bent, such as a herbalist, ritualist, or diviner.

In contrast, a latent aspect of the aspiration motive might be the wish to propel a *counter-personality*. Phebe already hinted at the difference between her everyday self and the Wiccan self, but when we juxtapose some Craft name and narratives to the jobs of their bearers, we find some interesting contrasts. Wanda, a banker, under the moniker Cassandra (q. 56), is concerned with ethics and honesty; Flierefluiter, the trickster (q. 67), has his own business as a tax advisor; and Selena, a subdued information technology professional, pictures herself as an untamed female with wild free-flowing hair (q. 53), while her name refers to the mother-aspect of the Great Goddess. Aspirational narratives, then, might be as much about moving away from one's current status, as moving towards the desired end.

Again, the idea of one's sacred nature or sacred calling, as expressed in the *Charge of the Goddess*, silently plays its role. Also, if a name is *specific* enough to embody one's aspiration, the very donning of the name may be the first step towards fulfilment of its referent. I turn to that now.

7.4.3 Magical names

With an eye to magical practice, names may have to be specified to create deeper links between name, name-bearer, and referent. Wiccans may tinker with the letters of their Craft names to incorporate new sounds or correspondences.

We have already seen that a number of my informants favoured a connection between their everyday names and their Craft names. Phebe, for instance, appreciated the similarity between the *f* sound in both her names (q. 60), while Albijon added a *j* to his name, which, although silent in 'Albijon,' links back to his given name. Jana's name shares both the *j* sound and the letter with her given name (q. 48).

I found the most marked example of this connected in Brighid Marlitha, a 55-year-old Dutch eclectic high priestess residing in Kranenburg, Germany (q. 70).

> 70   I have [the name] Brighid Marlitha. 'Brighid' is from the Goddess Brighid; everything she stands for—I got something with that. And Marlitha is simply [derived] from 'Mar' in

'Marlène.' Because [that] name was given by my grandmother, I thought it was nice to have that come back [in my Craft name], and Litha is Midsummer. So Marlitha … [I] just brewed it up, really (40: 450-454).

The loosely created links in these various Craft names show that both the everyday self and the Wiccan self originate from the same identity. Such continuity is useful to maintain a coherent self-understanding.

For some Wiccans, magical purposes require a more exact procedure to a more explicit end.[157] For Albijon—who unlike Jana uses his Craft name for magical purposes in ritual—the presence of the added letter has an additional significance. In some magic-inclined traditions such as Greencraft Wicca, the spelling of a Craft name may need to be adapted to render the name 'sympathetic' to the essence of its bearer. Using numerology, for instance, my Greencraft informants tried to find spellings that made their names match their *birth number*. This is a single digit calculated from the numbers that make up the date of birth and hence is believed by some to hold the key to their identity.[158]

Raymond Buckland, a popular emic source, has offered a rationale for this requirement (note the subtle distinction between recurrent and one-off choices):

Why does the name have to match your birth number? Because your birth number is unchanging. People can change their names, addresses, etc., but they cannot change their date of birth. By choosing a new name that matches that birth number, you are then aligning yourself with that same vibration; the vibration of the moment you chose to be born (Buckland, 2002, p. 56).

After establishing the birth number, the letters of the chosen name are converted to numbers, which are then transformed into a single digit: the name number. The name numbers must eventually match the birth numbers. Consequently, a new name may be wrought by choosing letters that add up to the correct number, whereas an already existing name may be rendered fitting by the addition of a letter with the required value.

Magical and personal purposes, however, need not be mutually exclusive, as Eostrel's narrative implies (q. 71).

71   I added an *l* [to my Craft name], so it would correspond numerologically with my date of birth … and because *l* points to higher spiritual beings … like angels, like Azrael and Michael. … I also wanted to make it something personal. I didn't want to grab the name as it was; I wanted something unique (21: 334-346).

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[157] For an emic source on magical names, see Andrews (1991).

[158] The calculation works as follows. First each of the single digits of one's day of birth are added up. Then the single digits of the sum are added up until a single digit remains: the birth number. Thus 5 April 1967 becomes 5 + 4 + 1 + 9 + 6 + 7, which adds up to 32. 32 consists of 3 and 2, and 3 + 2 = birth number 5.

Eostrel's name contains many connections: it encompasses the name of the Goddess Eostre, corresponds with her birth number, includes a reference to angels, and as a whole, also offers 'something unique.'[159] These links serve as concurrent confirmations of the rightness of the name to the Wiccan, not unlike how triangulation works for the social scientist.

All in all, the magical Craft name is very different from the secret or sacred name I discussed before. Whereas in the former the exact spelling is crucial, in the latter it is the conviction behind the intention. What they have in common, though, is a specific *religious function* that supersedes mere labelling and interpersonal identification. These two implicit *cultural functions* are what ultimately make these names *proper names*. Also, they are the clearest displays of the expressive function of Craft name adoption.

7.5 Conclusion

In this study, I have shown how Wiccans can recreate their personal identities through their religion. I have expounded on the relationship between Wiccan symbolism and self-narratives by exploring the practices of Craft name adoption. The adoption of a Craft name provided my informants with a means to establish, develop, and share a new spiritual self-understanding and enabled them to internalize and appropriate Wiccan symbolism.

Even if each of them views and uses the names differently, distinct narrative patterns can be singled out. On the passive side, aspects of my informants' perceived selves became impressed with the denotations of their acquired Craft names, and their acceptance of the new names thus may have equalled their acknowledgement of adherence. Some even recognized the appropriateness of their Craft names and willingly surrendered to all the consequences—for better and for worse. The mythic referent of the name might even lend lustre to their ordeals. Ultimately, name-impressions may affect how Wiccans come to terms with their past and with who they are.

On the active side, my informants took up Craft names to express who they wanted to be, or be granted respect for who they felt they ultimately were. Rather than merely accepting their pasts for themselves, they expressed a need for others to acknowledge these as well. Their Craft names also might have been expressions of potency and aspirations, lending focus on what they want to achieve or perhaps even set them apart from what they were in everyday life. In addition, Craft names may be turned into ritual instruments for focused meditation and magical practice.

All in all, the spiritual self-narratives surrounding adopted Craft names in my informants indicated concerns related to expressive individualists in postmodern socie-

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[159] These connections make the rationale of a Craft name bear a resemblance to the bridal rhyme: "something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue."

ty. Their self-conscious quests for authenticity, uniqueness, and self-realization suggest a psychological significance to Wicca apart from its social, cultural, and religious functions. Scholarly enquiry should follow suit: psychology may complement sociological, anthropological, and even theological approaches in religious studies. Let me, therefore, conclude with some important issues raised by my research.

First, analogous to the name adoption, sustained exposure to cosmological material may lead Wiccans to construct *personal mythologies*, in which the interrelationships between elements of the religious material are explicated, and subsequently coupled to their lives. Wiccans can thus rephrase any petty troubles into grand trials and tribulations while shuffling authorship and ownership of the problems they have come across. While the creation of personal mythologies has been advocated by some storytellers and psychotherapists (see, e.g., Begg, 1984; Feinstein & Krippner, 1988; Larsen, 1996; Meade, 2006) and is noted among neo-Pagans (see, e.g., Rees, 1996), research on their prevalence, employment, and effects among these and other religious groups in contemporary society is needed.

Second, closely related to the issue of personal mythology, is the effect that prolonged exposure to Wiccan cosmology has on its adherents. In the introduction, I argued that the self-system is constituted by a multiplicity of past and future selves whose perspectives are taken on and cast off by an intentional consciousness. Cosmologically inspired narratives do not necessarily converge these positions to a single conceptual self, but may also serve to recreate, reinforce or break links between each of them. But how are we to know if a Wiccan self-identity would turn out as one of the many situated selves, or as an overarching conceptual self?

Third and last, appreciating the myriad manners and great extent in which religious imagery and symbolism impact on Wiccans should not make us forget that sooner or later the tables will be turned. That is, by their permanent and recurrent appropriations of Wiccan symbols, name-adopters eventually come to endow the whole corpus with novel and perhaps more precise and relevant meanings, which, in turn, may become transmitted to later generations of adherents.

chapter eight

DOMESTICATING THE IMAGINATION

Set ten thousand children talking at once,
and telling tarradiddles about what they did in the wood,
and it will not be hard to find parallels suggesting sun-worship or animal worship.
Some of the stories may be pretty and some silly and some perhaps dirty;
but they can only be judged as stories.

G. K. Chesterton, *The Everlasting Man*

Originally conceived as an article to demonstrate the pertinence of the notion of the imagination for religious studies, this chapter explains the acquisition, exposition, and validation of so-called otherworldly experiences. First, the acquisition of these encounters is explained, situating them in the context of the autonomous imagination and divided consciousness. Then, by discussing both the challenges and charismatic authority that come with the role of coven leaders, the chapter explains the way the imagination first becomes tutored through specific ritual techniques like guided meditation and then is transformed and exposited as an exegetic story within the setting of a Wiccan working group. After detailing how the self-validation of belief that comes with the sanctification of direct experiences of the Otherworld impacts on Wicca, the chapter concludes with an elaboration on the ways in which the imagination is put to use to orchestrate religious renewal.
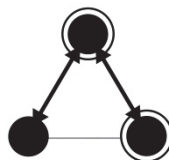
8.1 Introduction

Religiosity and imagination are intimately linked. Only through verbal and pictorial expressions—in fact, the stimulation of any of their senses—through their attempts at ideation and representation, can religious people hope to grasp, or at least relate to, the ethereal realm of the divine. The differences concerning what is believed that can be expressed, what is allowed to become expressed, and the flair with which ultimate reality utterly is expressed, are vast. However, all share the need to bridge the gap between the mundane and the sacred; all do this by utilizing the imagination. Maybe, the more modest and doctrinal of practitioners merely want to cognize and understand the connection from afar, whereas the bold, imagistic ones create practices to traverse the crossing, wanting to experience the otherness of the divine realm first-hand.

Still, in the field of religious studies, the imagination seems to have gotten a raw deal. Why is this so? Perhaps it is because the term, having been around for so long, has therefore grown too unwieldy to put to use, or possibly because the *concept* of imagination cannot be observed directly and is, therefore, prone to subjectivity, or maybe the *act* of imagining just sits too uneasily between believing and practising. Quite conceivably, however, the limited attention the imagination has received is merely indicative of the absence of psychological theorizing in religious studies, apart from the slowly growing interest in a cognitive approach in the last two decades (see, e.g., Atran, 2002; Boyer, 2001; Guthrie, 1993; Pyysiäinen, 2001; Sørensen, 2006; Whitehouse, 2004).

With the present article, then, I wish to offer a psychological contribution to the exploration and understanding of the religious imagination. In its broadest sense, imagination can be defined as (1) a repository of mental representations or brain states of sensorial, propositional or experiential origin; (2) the ability or aptitude to invoke or trigger this material; and (3) the either conscious or unconscious process of manipulating this material and the interrelations of its elements (see, e.g., Gaut, 2003, pp. 148-173; Modell, 2003, pp. 125-129; Nichols, 2006, pp. 1-10; Pruyser, 1983, pp. 1-12).[160]

To complement the cognitive turn in the study of religion—the proponents of which mainly use, or at least presuppose, symbolic representationalism to understand the imagination, and explain religion from its suggested evolutionary origin—I will emphasize *experiential imagination*, the *act of imagining*, and the social process in which these are manipulated and developed. The interplay between the inner world of experience and the outer world of the social context takes place in what Paul

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[160] The imagination is truth-neutral: one can imagine a genuine past as well as a myth, and imaginations of a future may turn out to be right, or be literally fantastic (cf. note 92 on qualia). This take on the imagination ties in with my methodological agnosticism (see Subsection 2.2.1).

Pruyser following Donald Winnicott (1971) has called the *transitional sphere*—the stamping ground of all things artistic and religious (see also 1.2.6).

> Just as art … is not a representation of reality, but a thoroughgoing transformation of stimuli from inner and outer worlds into a unique illusionistic novelty, so religion transforms human experience into an imaginative, illusionistic conception that is sui generis. As creations of the imagination, both religion and the arts … have to be distinguished on the one hand from reality in the ordinary, natural sense, and on the other hand from solipsistic subjectivity. … Everything depends on using the imagination in such a way as to keep its products linked with, but formally different from, the realities of the outer world and the *common* human stratum of the inner world (Pruyser, 1983, pp. 165-166, italics in original).

The best place to look for the religious imagination would be in a movement where first-hand experiences play a central role and where the transitional sphere has been extensively incorporated into its practices as well as in its objects. I found Wicca the perfect showcase to demonstrate the potential importance, versatility, and ubiquity of the religious imagination. Not only does Wicca offer an array of religious experiences, from the raw and untutored, to the cultivated and rehearsed, but the movement also represents a delicate balance between tradition and renewal, and between self-centred and nature-centred religiosity (see also 1.2 and 1.3). In general, Wicca is characterized as both a mystery tradition—especially its initiatory form—and a nature religion (Harvey, 1997, p. 35). But what do these two qualifications refer to? And what makes Wicca fit them?

Strictly speaking, a religious movement can be considered a mystery tradition if it has a particular concern for the unknown nature of the essence of reality. When Wiccans use the notion of mystery, or rather *the mysteries*, they often imply that the essence of reality is beyond the grasp of the unenlightened. Only with proper training, dedication, and perhaps initiation of the adept into a coven, the hidden truth may gradually become unveiled and understood. From this perspective, the mysteries amount to a communicable body of knowledge that is kept secret from non-initiates. Other Wiccans, however, explain the mysteries as things that cannot be said, but can only be shown, and experienced.[161] As a mystery tradition, then, Wicca is an experiential or imagistic religion par excellence.

Wicca is also considered to be a nature religion, because of its veneration of the living earth and its celebration of eight seasonal festivals that embody key moments in the cycle of life and death. Since the whole of nature is seen as the expression of an immanent divinity, however, the self is considered sacred as well. Therefore, rather than only looking to the natural world outside, Wicca also deals with the exploration, enhancement, and realization of the natural world within.[162]

This inner nature is subsequently seen as an integral part of the mystery by practitioners themselves. Starhawk (1987, p. 6), a leading figure in the *Reclaiming tradi-*

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[161] See, e.g., Burkert (1987, p. 9); see also 6.2.4 (q.41 and note 132).

[162] See e.g. the ritual text *The Charge of the Goddess* (discussed in Section 7.2).

tion (i.e., an eclectic feminist branch of Wicca), links the mysteries and imagination to using magic, which she sees as "wielding the power from within." According to her, the mysteries are untamed nature—both inside us and outside. The Alexandrian and Gardnerian writer Vivianne Crowley (2003, pp. 2-3) suggests that as a mystery tradition, Wicca teaches self-knowledge. She popularized aspects of Carl Jung's analyical psychology to a Wiccan audience to the extent that Jung's ideas of archetypes and the collective unconscious have become mainstays of the rationale of Wiccan practice. Self-styled *progressive Wiccans* Farrar and Bone (2004, pp. 61-76) add that Wicca is much indebted to shamanism; utilizing Freudian theory, they argue that violent episodes of imagistic dissociation in Wiccan ritual may be related to the resolution of conflicts between the ego and the id.

With divinity stretching out from the self to the cosmos, Wiccan self-exploration implies the need to partake in the mysteries. That is, experiential knowledge of the sacred self can only be obtained by learning the proper place of one's self in the cosmological order. Wiccans, then, need a means to communicate with the sacred aspect of nature—what they have called the *Otherworld* or the *Astral Plane*. This is a hidden dimension of reality that is thought to silently coexist with our everyday world but can be accessed through ritual and meditation. By engaging with its supernatural inhabitants who act as intermediaries, contact may be established with ultimate reality. Any divine knowledge gleaned in these spiritual planes can consequently be taken back to the everyday world (Greenwood, 2000, pp. 1, 30; Lewis, 1999a, pp. 18-19).

In naturalistic terms, the Otherworld belongs to the transitional sphere of Wicca: it is the playground for the Wiccan imagination and the symbols and imagery that flesh out religious—context-sensitively henceforth called *otherworldly*—experiences. This imagination not only breathes life into the otherworldly experiences themselves, but it also plays a central role in their interpretation. All these functions, however, require the imagination to be tamed and tutored. With an eye to opening up the notion to religious studies, my objective in this article, then, is to explore the Wiccan imagination and explain how it becomes domesticated through Wiccan practice.

To do so, I will be moving from the personal via the ritual to the social contexts of the imagination, maintaining attention to the Otherworld as an emic concept. I selected mostly interviews with experienced Wiccans and coven leaders and augmented these with field notes and the odd emic source to cover as much of the diversity in the interactions between each of these aspects of the Wiccan imagination and give each enough depth. Although all the data is presented in the form of verbatim interview quotes, I have embedded these in brief case stories to elaborate on their specific contexts and discursive interrelations.

For reasons of clarity, I have chosen to present the material by following an associative trail, in which the imagination gradually becomes more and more embedded in Wiccan practice. After starting with the nature of the imagination (in 8.2) and how to cope with its challenges (in 8.3), I move on to discuss how the coven leader may use the imagination to maintain charismatic authority (in 8.4) and utilizes techniques to channel and develop the imagination of novice Wiccans (in 8.5). The sub-

sequent sharing and interpreting of otherworldly experiences is the subject of the section on the so-called talking stick (8.6), in which I also deal with the problem of self-validation. The imagination may also contribute to religious renewal, as I discuss in the last section (8.7) before the conclusion (8.8).

8.2 Autonomous imagination

An obvious starting point for an enquiry into the Wiccan imagination would be its raw material. All in all, both the motives for engagement with the mysteries and the required state of mind make the associated experiences profound and potentially overwhelming. When unchecked, unsuppressed, and untutored, the imagination can powerfully and evocatively express irrational thought, which may intensify to boundless terror, unfettered lust or ethereal visions. The associated imagery mostly surfaces in dreams, trance states, and reveries, yet also during fits of rage, conditions of psychosis, or even through psychotherapeutic intervention.

In the anthropological literature such fancies or modalities of thought (see 1.4.3) are subsumed under the label *autonomous imagination* (see, e.g., Magliocco, 2004, pp. 177-178, following Stephen, 1997, p. 337). Stephen goes on to explain that even though the autonomous imagination is experienced as acting outside conscious control—hence its name—people can be trained to purposely access and even control it (p. 338).[163]

Early in my research, Phaedrus, the high priest of a Gardnerian coven in Amsterdam, gave me a textbook example of such a sought-out otherworldly experience. He showed some restraint when talking about his experience as if to show respect for what he felt had come over him. Yet he also presented me with an illustration of the event from the visual log he keeps for all his religious activities (see Figure 9).

Phaedrus reminisced about an encounter with the Norse Gods he had had when he, his wife and their young child were on holiday in Denmark (q. 72). They recently received news of a grave illness in the family, which had dominated their stay. One day they visited Bolund in the Roskilde Fjord, a peninsular moraine hill, which was only connected to the mainland by a natural causeway.

72 We walked around [nearby], and the wind blew like crazy. What was odd, [was] that a lot of heavy weather was coming in from the sea and passed us by left and right. Really, we remained in the good weather. That was truly impressive: you really saw the wedge [between] that black weather. And when you (looking at his wife) went back with [our daughter] … I went up the [very top of the] hill … and I tried with a few invocations to contact some Norse Gods. … And then I got such an unbelievable pressure on my head

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[163] Note that the term 'autonomous' has also been used in the opposing meaning. Cornelius Castoriades (1997), for instance, uses the phrase 'autonomization of the imagination' to refer to the culturally acquired independence of the imagination from its natural, instinctual function.

FIGURE 9: *Phaedrus' impression of his Bolund experience*
This watercolour painting is in the same style as Phaedrus' impression of an Ostara sabbat (see Figure 4), and is also part of the graphic diary of his religious activities.

> and on my body and all. And from the moment I looked up, the sky opened up, and there came a rainbow—really—from the mainland straight towards me. ("It's all on photo," his wife Lida added.) It really was a few minutes, and then it was gone. But it was really an absolute sign of "I have contact" [so much] that—although that sounds banal—you'd drop down to your bare, Catholic knees (7: 246).

When I asked him what the encounter meant, he explained that he immediately understood that he had been given the knowledge that "All will be well" (7: 272).

Despite Phaedrus apparently training how to invoke deity, he still experienced the manifestation of the divine order as something that came over him, utterly beyond his grasp. The autonomy of the imagination here equates the perceived reality of the event—an objectivity which Phaedrus stressed by explicitly referring to his bodily sensations, and by his repetitive use of 'really.' To the same end, he later attested to Bolund being a well-established place of power, and he observed meaningful signs—omens—in the area (q. 73).

> 73 I felt such a tremendous power. Yes, and I was very much on the lookout for a genuine place [of power], because we had been looking at stuff at burial mounds, but this place just had it. And in fact, we already knew that when we walked up there. At one point there were also omens and birds—and that also creeps in—specific seagulls and swans.

> You pay close attention to those. We came towards that [hill], and the [causeway] was full of white swans—and they all flew off simultaneously. [This was like a sign that] you are allowed to go there (7: 276-277).

Phaedrus' sudden outburst of the autonomous imagination can be contrasted to the gentle waxing and waning of otherworldly imagery that may occur during repetitive, highly circumscribed actions like ritual enactments, but also while one is engaged in inspired craftsmanship in the service of Wicca. The latter was the case with Mandragora, incidentally a member of Phaedrus' coven (q. 74).

Mandragora was commissioned to make masks for the four 2006 issues of the Dutch Magazine *Wiccan Rede*. She chose four Celtic deities, and went to make a mask of Brigid, the Goddess of inspiration and creativity, for the Imbolc issue, one of the sun god Belenos for Beltaine, John Barleycorn, the personification of the harvest for Lammas, and the 'phantom queen' Mórrígan for Samhain (see Figure 10).

> 74 Initially, I didn't think much of those masks or mask-making in particular, so I said: "I'll just do it." ... But while I was occupied with these masks, in fact, I got really strong—call it messages of the personas or the personalities of these deities, even if I had never done anything with them regarding ritual work. And I found that very striking, and I was like: "this is very odd that I am apparently opening this channel of communication while doing this work." ... I was just tinkering—Yeah, when you say it most dryly, I was, in fact, tinkering—putting these things together. But what I in fact do: I do tune into my work ... so I am working with an altered state of consciousness. Because I know: "This is work for the *Wiccan Rede*," ... so being in a particular mindset ... helps to improve my work. Inspiration doesn't come easy (16: 674-676; 712-713).

In Mandragora's story, the autonomous imagination initially took the form of a flow state that came with surrendering to what eventually turned out to be the painstaking work of fabricating the masks. In contrast to Phaedrus, who got an otherworldly experience because he was seeking one (q. 73), Mandragora was only concerned with getting a job done and got hers as a by-product (q. 75). Mandragora's case, then, represents a merger of goal-oriented creativity and experiential creativity (cf. 1.4.5)

> 75 When I was making [the Mórrígan,] things came up. ... With her, I almost had like a verbal [encounter]. ... I had trouble tuning into her. And then something got through to me like: "If you really want this, then you'll have to please me because I am one of those old school Goddesses." Like, you really have to give up something. ... "I demand sacrifice," it was something like that. [It] could be that I put something like a drop of blood in the paint [and] that it succeeded because of that (16:725-741).

Like with Phaedrus' experience (q. 72), Mandragora's encounter had an almost sensorial quality: he *felt* a presence, and she *heard* it. In the narrative of Magus, we find a third sense: *seeing* (q. 76).

FIGURE 10: *The mask of Mórrígan*
The mask was photographed and imbedded in the cover illustration of the Wiccan Rede magazine.
Displayed here is the image before the lettering was added.

76 The God [looked like] the Horned One, really a bearded person with antlers, which is one
    of the possible forms of the God, also known in the literature. That may play a part, to be
    honest. And [I saw] the Goddess as a young woman wearing her very long hair loose, yet
    with a tiara with a radiating half-moon on her forehead (6: 352, quoted in Van Gulik,
    2011b, p. 132).

Magus explained that he had encountered the God and Goddess several times, each
time outside a ritual setting, like in a forest, and unrelated to his intentions. Interest-
ingly, though, he admitted that his knowledge of the Wiccan literature had had an
impact on the particular images in his visions. On the other hand, he noted (q. 77):

77 When you represent something on paper you'll get serious limitations, regardless how
    good your intentions, [and] how beautiful, and how sensitive the illustration may be—[a
    manifestation] in real life is something else. I may need to add, however, that the God
    and the Goddess—or divinity in general—come to me in many guises, both personal and
    impersonal. … [With that I mean that divinity] is both a person and a power, it is form as
    well as formless (6: 362-370).[164]

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[164] Cf. Subsection 1.3.2 on how Wiccans envision and represent deity.

The autonomous imagination of deity in both Mandragora and Magus can be juxtaposed to their attempts at domesticating their experiences. Magus draws a distinction between the impersonal, formless guises of the God and Goddess, and the form—very similar to their figurative depictions in neo-Pagan artwork—in which he encountered them, whereas Mandragora's representation of the deities in the shape of masks even preceded her encounter with them (q. 74). To be able to make such distinctions between experience and interpretation Wiccans need to be able to move in and out of a receptive mindset. As I have discussed in Subsection 5.4.1, such attunement is always the basic requirement to open up the religious imagination, and thus the core business of any dedicated technique, regardless their aims.

8.3 Divided consciousness

The need for attunement implies a difference between the active mental mode of everyday life and a receptive, mind-wandering state that supports and accompanies the experiential episode. In the neuropsychological literature, these two modes are referred to as the task-positive and task-negative network, respectively. Perhaps confusingly, the mind-wandering mode, though apparently passive, needs to be brought under control to enable a person to purposefully shift attention.

Although Wiccans train themselves to reap the maximum benefits of their imaginations and therefore spend quite some time in the mind-wandering mode, they are also wary of the invasive nature of the autonomous imagination that may come with it, as is suggested by Morgana. She told me how she would use her dreams to visit the Otherworld, but always does a salutation for the morning—not just to start the day, but to 'shut down' the night (q. 78).

> 78 [At] the end of the day, I [might] have specific problems, [and] I just want some information about them. So I will enter the night with a [plan, like:] "I just want some information about [these problems]." And we call that lucid dreaming. … [I'd] just go to the astral world with a particular purpose. … The odd thing is, when you wake up, you then just notice: "Okay, it's morning now—the beginning of the day, so I'll enter the waking consciousness." The night has been shut down—I really make a point of that. … I've gotten specific images, specific dreams. I'll write them down somewhere … but now I'll enter the day. But during the day there will also be specific issues … and I'll write these down too. However, these are of an entirely different order than those of the night. … I'll be very strict about that; I won't let my night consciousness take over my day (22: 172-175).

In Morgana's narrative we see that although she keeps her 'night consciousness' and 'waking consciousness' separated, otherworldly imagery might pop up during the day (q. 78). She makes notes of these and designates a right time to deal with them—in effect *to domesticate* them. The same holds for persistent oneiric memories (q. 79).

79 What I encounter [during the day] might have something to do with what happened to me in a dream, and I will take note of it, but then … I would [only] get back to it later, during the night. … Through experience, I learnt what to write down and what not to write down. Otherwise, you'll go absolutely crazy. You'll then be so open—that really is annoying when you're on a bus, for instance. Sometimes I would have to shield myself totally. Then I don't want to open up to all kinds of outside influences. You'll go mad completely, and you will take in [issues] of other people who are pathological, or whatever. … That's the problem when people start mixing up [night and day consciousness,] … they'd see everything as a message [from the Otherworld] and get flooded with all kinds of imagery (22: 177-178; 184).

In the context of ritual, though, the mind-wandering mode of consciousness that Morgana related to the night, and the task-positive network that is required for everyday functioning, may be required simultaneously. Ronald Grimes' distinction between the 'ritual diviner' and 'ritual plumber' is a useful elaboration here. Despite the fact that the ritual diviner is the appointed officiant to make contact with the Otherworld and the chief interpreter or enactor of the engagement, the ritual plumber acts as the caretaker of the ritual, and thus embodies the relationship between the practitioners and the ritual (Grimes, 2000, pp. 12-13). When working in concert, these roles bring together the Otherworld and the profane world, through the introduction of a transitional, *ritual* world.

Ideally, the roles of the diviner and the plumber are either performed by different people, or at least not assumed at the same time. However, often both personal and circumstantial factors may hinder such a neat division of labour, as I found out. Take, for instance, the case of Willow, a Flemish Greencraft high priestess, now residing in the Unites States. When I first met Willow at Greencraft's annual barbecue, she was quick to accept my invitation to interview her, when I told her about the difficulties that some coven leaders reported to have had with tuning in to the rituals they were conducting (q. 80).

80 I am so happy to hear that! I often doubt myself, because every so often I don't get to the point of joining in the experience myself so that I start to think "Guys, what the heck am I doing?" Am I merely posturing for my group or—what am I doing? Because that is not what it's supposed to be about. … [Is it] just pretending with the proper texts or a ritual? I mean, because you are so engaged and also because part of you is there to teach the people in your group (15: 189; 192).

Quite remarkably, however, one time, when the pressure was particularly high, she fluently alternated between her roles and did not encounter any problems with 'drawing down the Moon' (q. 81; cf. 1.3.2).

81 Every now and then it actually all runs smooth and easy—like the last sabbat that I held with my coven here—and that does make up [for the lack of experience on other occasions]. The last time I really felt [having the Goddess invoked inside me] there was harmony in the circle and unity, and that was all wonderful. In fact, [in that ritual] I had not

enough women in the group, [and] I had to perform two tasks simultaneously: [on the one hand there] was acting out the Goddess … and on the other hand I had to oversee [the whole ritual]: the texts, everybody at their proper place, now this, then that, conducting as it were. And in one way or the other, I succeeded perfectly, without any trouble, to go from the conductor, back to the Goddess, and back to the conductor, and back to the Goddess, and it flowed so well—in and out without any effort. That was sheer bliss (15: 190-191).

Interestingly, Willow's case story illustrates that a double role may be the cause of the breakdown of a ritual, but the incessant switching may also contribute to a heightened sense of control and empowerment as a coven leader. In contrast to Morgana, who was concerned of being overwhelmed by otherworldly imagery (q. 79), Willow first described being *underwhelmed* (q. 81), failing to enter the mode of mind-wandering consciousness, a condition *sine qua non* for the autonomous imagination that comes with the performance as a ritual diviner.[165] Buried in the first part of Willow's narrative, however, is also the idea that she has to carry the entire load of the ritual, rather than merely facilitating the connection with the Otherworld, so the participants would have their autonomous imaginations tutored.

Contrary to what one might expect, in her second example, Willow rose to the occasion and fluently performed both as the ritual diviner and plumber when she had no assistance whatsoever. Since the entire ritual was her sole responsibility, she was able to do things her way both before and during the ceremony. Although a tad speculative, this ego-investment would support a vision of being the mother of the coven, which is, after all, also connoted in the office of high priestess. Such a perspective enables Willow to look upon the ritual tasks of the plumber through the eyes of the diviner (cf. Grimes, 2000, p. 84).

By assimilating the plumber into the diviner, Willow succeeded in reaching a robust flow state. She allowed her mind-wandering consciousness to take over the neatly arranged ritual, while she put her task-positive network on the back burner. In the context of possession and shamanic trance states, Ernest Hilgard (1992; see also Goldingray, 2010) has named this simultaneity without mutual interference of the two modes of awareness *divided consciousness*, with his *hidden observer* arguably corresponding with the receded task-positive network.[166] In non-pathological conditions, this 'observer' remains vigilant to take the reins if required. The observer's most important task, though, lies in inconspicuously orchestrating the autonomous imagination, directing its flow, and embedding its whims with an eye to its ritual significance.

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[165] This overwhelm-underwhelm dichotomy is consistent with the two opposing reasons my informants gave for upholding secrecy (see Subsection 6.2.3). Some would argue that wielding magic would be too dangerous to the outsiders (e.g., q. 36, 38) while others thought that the magic would not come off the ground if its procedures were not properly understood (e.g., q. 37, 40).

[166] Another striking example of divided consciousness can be found in Selena's recount of her child labour (see Subsection 7.3.2, q. 55).

Divided consciousness, then, is the outcome of a successful balancing act between keeping the autonomous imagination at bay, while simultaneously keeping the task-positive network mode to a workable minimum. Perhaps, then, not so much the autonomous imagination itself as the ability to control it, is the hallmark of Wiccan high priesthood.

8.4 Charismatic authority

In Weberian terms, charismatic authority that is vested in the positions of high priest and high priestess can, therefore, be said to be routinized (Weber, 1925/1947, pp. 363-386). True as this may be during ritual, I found charisma as an implied personal quality in less structured settings like workshops, cake-and-wines, and other social gatherings. There, the coven leaders would often teach by example, rather than by decree, as if their roles as gatekeepers of collective knowledge and as experts in the workings of the imagination evinced an especially great internal divine potency.[167] Story-telling practices are a striking example of this personal charisma.

That is, high priesthood does not only consist of the chief ritual diviners, but also of the chief *interpreters* of otherworldly material. Some myths and legends have been spun with these imaginations and may serve as sources to elaborate on the Wiccan canon, or help substantiate claims of the movement's ancient origins, whereas other stories are created *ex nihilo*. Yet all are explained *ex cathedra*, with the exegete taking center stage. I found the—what I will call—*interpretational* and the *improvisational* styles of story-telling represented in the respective narratives of Egil (q. 82, 83) and Merlyn (q. 84).

In one of the interviews I had with Egil, whose name is incidentally derived from the Icelandic *skæld* (poet) and rune interpreter Egill Skallagrímsson (c. 904-995), he told me how he tends to experience a flow-state, much like Mandragora (q. 74), when he spontaneously starts to interpret fairy tales he sometimes reads to his coven (q. 82).

> 82   I like to work with fairy tales in my lessons, especially [those] of Grimm and the like. And I
>   would read those [out loud]—or my wife—and then I'll start explaining the fairy tale. I
>   don't have a plan as to what I'll say, so I will not know at all what I am about to explain.
>   But … I'll explain the fairy tale, and that will take me half an hour … and then someone
>   from the group [typically] will say: "Where did you get the explanation from?" And yes,
>   where did I get it from? Yeah, read [it] somewhere, yes—perhaps certain bits, but the
>   whole … flows through me as it were, and I like to think I've got the lively contact with
>   the Otherworld to thank for that (12: 229).

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[167] Cf. Oakes' (1997, pp. 176-184) distinction between charismatic and messianic types of religious leadership.

Egil typically uses existing stories and often seeks to ground Wicca in European folk-lore by interpreting the material from a magical perspective of reality. His imaginative act clearly resides in the interpretations, rather than in the storytelling. Moreover, Egil charismatically serves as a gatekeeper who may elect what material will be accepted as authentic (q. 83).

> 83 When I read … specific fairy tales or myth, instinctively I almost feel [if the author] has had a genuine esoteric experience—or he didn't, and he's merely constructing [it]. From the imagery, you can intuit when you read them somewhere: "Those are real." … [Even if the] images that that person has used in that fairy tale, are images of his making, but they have been chosen thus—so you feel: "the Otherworld speaks through them." … Take for instance the images that are present in a tarot deck, in the Major Arcana. You'd really notice: "These have been filtered out through the ages, [so] they've become genuine visual images, through which an other world speaks." Those are real; those are real archetypes. And through this fact … when you immerse yourself in them, for instance through [visualization], these [images] provide an opening to the Otherworld. [On the other hand] other images that might have been drawn by someone … and still be picture[s] about witchcraft, … [could] merely be an image. Nothing speaks through it, and those [drawings] are therefore not a gateway to the Otherworld (12: 121-125).

Merlyn, in contrast, makes up his own stories as he goes along, and uses mostly the input from the group for his improvisation. In his case, the authenticity of the story is emphatically suggested by the dramatics that come with the narration. Each full moon, or as close as possible to a full moon for practical reasons, Merlyn offers his aptly called *moon walk*. One recurring element of this walk is the Merlin story (q. 84). Merlyn copiously explained its nature:

> 84 [It] simply comes from the people themselves. … I earth myself, empty my mind, and attune to the energy of the group. From the moment that I can feel the energy is flowing well, I'll always start with the same line: "A long time ago," … that somehow triggers my alpha state and most of the time … I hear myself start the sentence and [after] the first or the second sentence, I'm off … as if I fall asleep. … At a particular moment, I become aware that I'm sitting with my eyes closed, and everything is silent. … Whoops! And then I'm like, "did I say anything? I don't know." … And then I open my eyes and sing the *Moon Song*. Afterwards, I ask the people: … "Please tell the story to me, because I'm curious myself!" [The story] often does contain messages for the individual participants. … It often happens, when we walk back to the car, people would come next to me and ask: "That was especially for me, right?" (25: 493-498).

Merlyn's method of 'auto-telling' a story puts the religious experience of the participants central. His narrative points to what he perceives as the essence of togetherness; how a unique constellation of individuals leave their equally unique mark on the otherworldly story. Still, Merlyn's apparent modesty in wanting to hear the story himself hints at a great expression of personal charisma. By giving prominence to the utter otherness of his story teller's mode, Merlyn suggests his role as a mouth-

piece of the Otherworld per excellence. The authenticity of the story is, in effect, *Merlyn's* authenticity.

Both Egil's (q. 82) and Merlyn's interpretations resemble Harvey Whitehouse's (2004, pp. 70-74) notion of *spontaneous exegetical reflection*. In fact, both the improvisational and interpretational aspects of their story-telling are precisely spontaneous and aimed at exegesis, with their lively recounts equating vigorous and meaningful reflections. On the other hand, there is a subtle difference between the impact of the revelation as expressed in the exegesis and the singularity of having the exegesis in the first place. Egil and Merlyn did not expect or aim for their experiences. Although Whitehouse argues that spontaneous exegetical reflections come with the imagistic mode of rarely enacted rituals, one can just as easily maintain that rituals—or the merely ritualized settings I am referring to here—only become imagistic when they, accidentally or not, succeed to generate revelatory experiences. This holds for both coven leaders as well as lower-grade practitioners.

Since Wiccans generally believe that divinity is immanently present in everyone—albeit sometimes as yet unrecognized or perhaps not as strong in some as it is in others—charisma is inalienably personal too.[168] Therefore, even though the coven leaders are paramount in generating, enacting, and interpreting otherworldly material, as a principle all adherents have access to such direct experiences. Another task of the coven leader, therefore, is creating and maintaining an environment in which others can be effectively exposed to the otherworldly imagery.

8.5 Guided meditation

To the extent that Wiccan ritual is devised to generate otherworldly experiences and yield novel interpretations of these, such imaginations are often neatly channelled. The role of the participant is implicitly, if irrevocably, circumscribed, with special tasks laid out, and all musings on the imagination assigned to their appropriate places. Rufus Harrington used the paradoxical term 'disciplines of freedom' to refer to such restrictions (q. 85).

> 85   I look at good initiatory traditions as disciplines of freedom. ... You can have all the music of the world going through your soul, but if you can't play a tune, it doesn't go anywhere. A ritual in a sense is a little bit like a musical instrument. ... If someone's coming along to learn basic Wicca from me, I'm going to teach them basic Wicca. I'm going to teach them the traditions, mindful that that's the beginning of a journey, but I'm not going to try and complicate it for them at that stage by banging on about where I'm at (35: 51; 58; 86).

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[168] See the discussion of the *Charge of the Goddess* in 7.2 for an elaboration on the immanent divinity of the self in Wicca.

According to Harrington, true freedom of thought can only arise after mastering the techniques of reliably and safely accessing the Otherworld and bending its imagery to one's needs. Such mastering required not only knowledge of the religious system, he argued, but also a sufficiently routinized employment of the techniques of ecstasy. By imposing structure, the coven leaders can also maintain oversight and cushion members against any harrowing experiences that may come with rituals involving notions of death, ancestors, elemental energies, and so forth, or that may instil stark self-confrontations.

Although much more can be said about the spiritual development from an enthusiastic neophyte, to a dyed-in-the-wool coven leader the most evident and prevalent means of domesticating the imagination of the average Wiccan may be a combination of a technique called *guided meditation* or *guided visualization* followed by the episode of the *talking stick*. I will discuss the former here, whereas the latter is the subject of Section 8.6.[169]

Guided meditations can best be explained by describing their procedures step by step. In guided meditations, trances are induced in participants by asking them to close their eyes and concentrate on their breathing and loosening their muscles by tightening and then relaxing these, one-by-one, in every part of the body. Often the opening of a story is told in great detail, typically offering vivid descriptions of landscapes, special features, and describing the movements of the participant through this world.

Gradually the pace of the story slows down, and the narrator will describe less and less of the storied world, before eventually falling silent altogether. These moments of silence are used to allow participants to carry on a personalized version of the story in their own minds. The silences are often employed at the moment that the narrator led the participants to an otherworldly being, or when they are placed in a situation that requires action, or where they are granted a gift.

After a while, the narrator may continue with the story, as to guide the participant to another location or set up another encounter. These steps might be repeated a few times. In the end, the narrator sometimes gradually increases the level of detail again and talks the participant back to the waking world.[170]

An example of a guided meditation I have been subjected to during my fieldwork in Flanders is the *Goddess Pathworking* (Hera & Arghuicha, 2001, pp. 43-44). Greencraft included the text, which is used for training purposes, in their Neophyte extension course.

The meditation starts with instructions for relaxing the body, to enable the participant to enter a trance state:

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[169] Although sometimes the terms are used interchangeably, advanced guided mediations that are specifically aimed at deeper and ongoing spiritual development, and make use of particular magical correspondences are called *pathworkings* (See e.g. Greenwood, 2000, pp. 71-74). A rare emic source comparing guided meditations and pathworkings is Fennelly (2013).

[170] For a more thorough treatment with detailed examples, please see Luhrmann (1989b, pp. 191-202).

> Find a comfortable position, close your eyes, and begin breathing deeply from your dia-
> phragm. Become aware of all the parts of your body, starting with your toes. Tighten the
> muscles in your toes, tighter, tighter, tighter, and then—let go. Feel your toes relax. Next,
> tighten your calf muscles. Make the muscles as tight as you can—then let go and relax. (…).
> Feel your body sinking deeper and deeper into a comfortable state of relaxation.

Initially, the story is quite detailed:

> The silvery glow of the moon lights your slow descent, taking you down, down, down until
> you can see the ocean and a long stretch of beach below you. As you look, the dull, flat sand
> shapes itself into dunes. As you continue downward, you begin to feel the caress of an ocean
> breeze, smell its salty spray, and hear the far-off sound of the surf pounding on the shore.
> Your sphere glides down, down, slowly down until you are right above the beach. Descending
> lower still, your sphere glides so gently, so slowly onto the sandy shore that you are unaware
> of landing. You can hear the ocean clearly now. And, if you move your hands right now, you
> can reach out and hold a million tiny grains of sand.

After the protagonist—i.e., the meditating person—encounters the Goddess, which is
supposed to be the main event in the story, the narration subsides. Note that the nar-
rator is suggested to remain silent for 10 to 15 minutes:

> In the moonlight, barely visible fingers of mist swell and creep towards shore. Rags of clouds
> lace their way through the starlit sky, swirling, shifting with every roll of the waves. One
> thread weaves itself into the shape of a woman. Her floating form glides over the waves,
> coming closer and closer, her being radiant with the rays of the moon's mysterious silvery
> light.
>
> You called Her. She came. You came here so she could teach you. Although a veil of mist
> hides her face, you would know her anywhere. She speaks. Her voice echoes in the memories
> of your heart and mind as you listen… listen… listen… Her words are meant for you and you
> alone, for you to taste… and savor… and ponder as you will…
>
> (10 to 15 minutes)

Not all meditations are guided in the sense that they present an almost literal *walk-
through* of an imaginary landscape. Some techniques, for instance, require material
to be offered before, rather than during, the meditation. Not unlike how dreams
work, when ritual participants enter a trance state, their brain will try to make sense
of the various pieces of information that are deemed important. When these pieces
are distributed just before the meditation and granted they are mere building blocks
that allow for various ways to put them together, the imagination might construct a
coherent, if unique, narrative from them.[171]

Whatever the specific moment of exposure to the material, advanced guided med-
itations differ from those for novices with regard to how much the participants are

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[171] For an example of this kind of meditation see Subsection 5.2.2.

helped at the start to concentrate and the increased amount of symbolism that is woven into the story. Advanced meditations can also become more improvisational with coven leaders tuning in to the body language of the participants to see what elements resonate best and making up the story as they go, as Merlyn explained (q. 86).

> 86 To the extent people have evolved and are experienced, [a coven leader] can work with a number of symbols, and see how they react to those. Just by [observing] their body language [you] can check [if] everything is going well [in a meditation] … Those are techniques you use, pure technique. And you need that when you do it off the cuff—it has to be second nature to you—whereas, when you write it out, you can think about [the meditation] much more … adapt it, and you can't [do that] when you improvise. But I find [improvisation] much more interesting because you tune in to the energy of the people, and their experience will come to influence the meditation for a part (25: 485).

Interestingly, the accommodative ad-lib deliveries of the improvising coven leader are akin to the cold reading techniques that clairvoyants use. Both adapt their ongoing narration to the responses of their audience, yet the actions of the coven leaders lack the pious fraud or self-deceit that is associated with psychic readers.

However, even the established meditations have an element of improvisation in the sense that at one point they still had to be written.[172] Andrea likened the writing of a ritual or a guided meditation itself to an act of visualization—what we might call a *metameditation* (q. 87).

> 87 I always think that you write a ritual, [as if] you're really in it. Just like when you write visualizations. You don't write a visualization by thinking: "Gosh, what [will be] happening [next?]" While you write, you visualize [someone] and you'll see what happens next—with that someone in your [imagination]. … So, you experience the entire ritual, [even] before you perform it (41: 957).

Paradoxically, the autonomous imagination, then, also plays its part in the preparations of any ritual material that will be used to domesticate otherworldly experiences. In fact, we may also find that in Mandragora's mask-making (see q. 74, 75) if we assume that the masks would find their way into ritual. In contrast, all these original or free meditations may be used for wholly different purposes than personal development. One of them, like Andrea's narrative points to, is religious renewal, which I will discuss later. The guided mediations as I have presented them here, however, act first and foremost as scaffolds for spiritual self-understanding and development. These experiences need to be shared among ritual participants; they take stock of their imaginations with the 'talking stick.' I will turn to that ritual episode now.

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[172] Following my argument in Subsection 1.4.5 on experiential creativity, I consider the writing process to be a contingency-prone—and therefore *improvisory*—act, since it both relies on the *transformation* of thoughts to words and the *chaining* of consecutive choices about what to write and what to leave out.

8.6 The talking stick

Originating in north-west America, *talking sticks* or *speaker's staffs*, traditionally were ornamented ceremonial regalia of some Native American tribes, owned by the chiefs, but wielded by their spokesmen. The presence of the stick in formal meetings signified the approval of any proclamations made by the chief by his ancestry and his associated spirits (Wade, 1986, p. 31). Later the stick came to be used as a device to take turns in speaking during such gatherings (Shearar, 2000, pp. 103-104), as is the case in Wicca as well. There the talking stick also lent its name to a ritual episode where people can disclose their otherworldly experiences and interpretations with others.[173] Typically, during a talking stick, people sit in a circle, and pass on a possibly decorated staff or rod, which both indicates the right to speak for its holder, and demands silence from the others.

The Wiccan imagination is transmitted through a great variety of means—like books, meet-and-greets, online discussion boards, workshops, and chance encounters—but none have the immediacy and versatility of the talking stick. The episode, for instance, often has a clear-cut and shared ritual antecedent like a guided meditation, which enhances the potential impact of each shared interpretation. Merlyn explained to me why the talking stick is so important to Wiccans (q. 88):

88   When you meditate, it's a bit like dreaming. It's a communication between your subconscious and your consciousness, and sits in the wrong half of the brain to be remembered. … [So,] if you want to remember your dreams, then you'll have to write them down immediately after you wake. … That's because you then [have to use] your other half of the brain; you then really imprint it in your consciousness. And that is what the talking stick does as well, because [it] forces you to put your experience into words. … Otherwise, you'd have to meditate again to retrieve the memory (25: 113).

Rather than assuming that otherworldly experiences are ineffable, or should be kept secret, being encouraged to share one's interpretations would help these become more intelligible, or useful for practice. Merlyn continues (q. 89):

89   [On the one hand,] you do a meditation, and you'll have your experience. A part of that you'll still remember straight after the experience, and a part will get lost. … But then someone else tells his experience, and part of that experience may be similar to yours, and will help to recover some [lost memories]. … A bit of your experience will come back to you and enriches your memory. On the other hand, you'll have one experience, so you get one lesson—your lesson—that day. But when you hear [the recounts] of ten other people, you'll hear ten other lessons which also may be useful. … Those things show the importance of the talking stick (25: 121-122).

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[173] For a detailed ethnographic description of the talking stick, see Subsection 5.2.2.

Merlyn's emic description of the talking stick allows for an elaboration of three of its functions. First, its *mnemonic* function: as a means of sharing information in general, the talking stick requires an active engagement with the interpretations of the experiences, and thereby improves their recollection and articulation.[174] Second, its *preservative* function: the talking stick might help to confirm the 'correctness' of similar interpretations, thereby contributing to the transmission of the traditional meaning of specific otherworldly experiences. It may thereby also add to an acknowledgement of the efficacy of the preceding meditative technique or ritual episode. Third, its *immunizing* function: most often used in small and intimate settings where most participants know each other, the talking stick offers a safe environment to share disparate imaginations or interpretations. Indeed, such recounts, however outrageous or unlikely they may sound, are not to be criticized at all. As Rufus Harrington explained (q. 90):

> 90 People are willing to change, grow, try things out. And within a comfortable, nurturing, supportive environment; that works. But people are not going to take that kind of risks if they think everyone's going to laugh or throw bricks at them. Some of the things we do, at a certain level, are completely ludicrous. You know, you think that, if dressing up in robes, dancing around cauldrons, mutterings strange words, lighting old incense candles. … From a certain point of view, you look at that, and it's completely barking. But from the inside, if you've used those things and got the results that flow from them, it makes sense. The kinds of experiences that can be generated through these practices are wondrous (35: 169).

All three functions of the talking stick are indicative of the way Wiccan groups domesticate otherworldly experiences. Its immunizing function, however, also constitutes something like a *politics* of the imagination, and warrants some further discussion here. Rufus Harrington told me (q. 91):

> 91 [We're] given … the tools with which we can explore, expand consciousness, have experience of what is known, and, with a little bit of luck, perhaps explore things that we don't yet know with which we can genuinely enrich our own experience. … Our traditions put a strong emphasis on passing on what we have encountered to others; … seekers pass on to others a little bit of what they've experienced themselves. But we're encouraging people to become seekers themselves, that they will make that journey, discover new things and bring those gifts back and hopefully share with us as well. The [tradition] therefore develops and grows (35: 51-53).

Although the ready acceptance of novel interpretations of otherworldly experiences does not necessarily carry over to other (social) gatherings, the encouragement is a principle in Wicca. With its emphasis on personal development and its understanding of divinity as immanent I previously discussed, Wicca bestows the spiritual dignity on all its adherents to be their own diviners. Such openness may foster any

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[174] Cf. the brief discussion in Section 7.1 on the autobiographical memory.

needed self-assurance of their most timid members and even furnish religious renewal. On the other hand, it may equally cause Wiccans to perceive recounts of others as statements of self-aggrandizement and self-righteousness.

And indeed, the odd participant is prone to elaborate and embellish a recount. Theresa, a 22-year old former eclectic Wiccan, who considers herself a religious atheist, remembered overhearing a discussion that featured precisely such fandangle. Although that conversation did not happen at a talking stick, the supernatural claims it conveyed serve to illustrate an important motive of disclosure that is typical to such a gathering (q. 92).[175]

> 92 [A] motive [of sharing experiences] is, I think, getting attention, not necessarily to brag, but rather as a means to change the perception of awkward aspects of oneself. I remember a conversation I followed between a few women. One of them was afraid of water … which is, in fact, a bit of a negative quality. But then she told a story, that she went into regression therapy and that she [found out] that she was murdered in a former life chained to a stone, while the water level was rising, and that was the way she drowned. [She told] that she was asked to return to the earth to come to terms with her fears and with being murdered. It was a very dramatic, theatrical story. The other women listened open-mouthed … she got hugs, and yes, everybody thought it was so extraordinary … [Where it boils down to with this kind of stories] is that no-one dies in his sleep in a former life (3: 567, quoted in Van Gulik, 2011b, pp. 134-135).

All in all, the religiously sanctified autonomy of the self—its *charismatic authority*—opens the possibility of adopting private knowledge or revelations that resist subjection to peer commentary. During my fieldwork, I would typically hear critical remarks about ulterior motives and outrageous personal claims only much later and almost invariably in a one-to-one setting. Especially in close-knitted groups, or when used by elders, the self-validation of belief poses a potential threat to the implicitly negotiated consensus about what are still valid and viable interpretations of otherworldly experiences (Van Gulik, 2011b; see also 3.4).

8.7 Religious renewal

The self-validated Wiccan imagination is not necessarily detrimental, however; inspired deviancy may contribute to religious renewal. Rather than validating oneself as a great diviner, controlled exposure to otherworldly imagery can also instil modesty, increase one's self-understanding, and helps to come to grips with the given meaning of certain symbols. Merlin Sythove explained on the Silver Circle online discussion board (q. 93):

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[175] Cf. the notion of proto-religiosity, as discussed in Section 7.4.1

93 There is a difference between wishful thinking, ... and genuine insights or real imagery, whether these occur in dreams, in meditations, or that they come to you in ritual, or when you work with a black mirror, or even with the tarot. ... There is a technique to test this kind of imagery, which corresponds with the finding/forming of your persona [in the Otherworld], your name, possibly your attributes, and especially one special symbol that is very important to you. ... You are then concerned with finding and adopting your Craft name, ... a secret name, you use [when communicating] with your gods (...). The name and the symbol are things you do not botch together on a rainy Sunday (2: 716).

In his narrative, Merlin Sythove draws a distinction between the Otherworld itself and the imagery or symbols that an adherent can employ to contact it. He allows for the possibility of a genuine and faithful rendition of the Otherworld, the dedicated quest for which he contrasts with mere dabbling. Egil shares these thoughts (q. 94) and hints at how the imagery for this transitional sphere is constructed. Like Merlin Sythove, he leaves no doubt about his take on the ontological status of the Otherworld.

94 I see the images of visualization as an interface between my subjective world, and the objective divine-spiritual world. [I say 'objective,'] because I regard the divine-spiritual world, not as a purely fictitious world that only resides in oneself, but I regard it as a really existing, real world. But of course the images come from my subconscious, they come from things I've read, fairy tales and the like. Those images—of course, I realize that [these] are my constructions—... are, as it were, a possibility and a gateway for the Otherworld. ... In that sense, meditations are meant to silence the physical senses, while the visualizations are a tool for the Otherworld to speak through (12: 112).

Note how both narratives blur any distinction between mediating imagery, symbols or objects on the one hand, and the previously mentioned *intermediate beings* that, according to Wiccans, populate the Otherworld on the other. In Egil's narrative, we see this lumping together happening because the constructed images do not only mediate between himself and the believed Otherworld, they also mediate between the personal imagination and the culture at large of which the images are a part.[176] In naturalistic terms, the images both constitute the contested common ground between the personal and collective understanding of the Otherworld in Wicca and the elements of culture at large that the movement either reclaimed or appropriated. These tensions both accidentally and purposefully create a potential space for religious renewal.

Religious change in Wicca may occur gradually, and unintentionally, as a function of the continuous cyclical transformation of otherworldly imagery between symbol, experience, and interpretation. These changes work on different levels. First, individually, even if nascent experiences are pre-structured through both routinized exposure to religious imagery and forced in the appropriate direction through the use of meditative techniques, there is no telling what the personal input is of each partici-

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[176] For an elaboration on this 'double transitional sphere,' see Jongsma-Tieleman (1996, pp. 100-104).

pant. Their different needs, different intentions, and different assumptions lead to unpredictable outcomes. Second, narratively, the fleeting phantasms are transformed into communicable concepts, which subsequently become expressed as stories. Third, socially, even though these stories are valued primarily as personal, rather than collective lessons, by sharing them, the group will provide feedback, and may become inspired itself. Fourth, cognitively, our mind's architecture makes some imaginations—and stories—inherently more memorable than others, and may gradually alter recurrent imaginations to optimize mental processing.

In contrast, religious change can also be introduced purposefully. The Wiccan imagination may be put to use to establish both the efficacy of the techniques and the appropriateness of new material or to contemplate where both would fit in the current practice. My fieldwork with Greencraft yielded a striking example of such renewal.[177]

Over the years, Greencraft has devised an 'ensemble of metaphors' (see 1.4.3) in the form of a complex system of correspondences between deities, power animals, trees, and the tarot. Ever inspired by Celtic culture, a few years ago they decided that part of this system ought to be augmented with the *Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain*, a collection of magical objects that are featured in medieval Welsh literature. Arghuicha explained how his group went about incorporating these symbols in Greencraft's cosmological system (q. 95):

> 95 There are a number of ancient texts, where Merlin (i.e., King Arthur's magician from which Merlyn and Merlin Sythove took their names) is associated with thirteen treasures … There are even hypotheses that he's done a ritual with them to stop Christianity and restore the power of paganism. … I'd given the esbat group the following task: "Here is an inventory [of the magical items] according to the texts. … Go and find out what you can do with them" (13: 286-287).

After scrutinizing the source material, Arghuicha accepted four key items that were among the original treasures: a stone, a spear, a sword and a cauldron. He subsequently reinterpreted them as *the Four Jewels of the Tuatha Dé Danann*, after a medieval Irish story with that very title (see Hull, 1930, for a translation). The other items that were traditionally listed, however, fell short of their expectations. Either the rationale of the magical properties was missing, the object was too unwieldy, or the possessor of the object unknown. There was also much overlap between the types of items: among other things, the inventory consisted of three pieces of clothing, two weapons, and even four kinds of containers. Arghuicha continued (q. 96):

> 96 [Then] I said: "Throw that list away and start from scratch. Everyone should make a list of [new] magic objects." What could be a magic item? For example a mirror. You even find a

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[177] For other creative efforts by Greencraft, see Chapter 4, *Sticks and Stones*.

mirror in *The King Drinks* from *Spike and Suzy*.[178] A magic mirror: they jump through it and find themselves in another world. Thus we arrived at a list of thirteen items. Strangely enough, [although] there were some ten of us and each with a different background, … we found that we all came up with a similar list (13: 293-294).

The next step in the process was to establish what item would go with what cosmological configuration of deity, animal, tree and tarot card. The esbat group used two complementary methods to establish what the correct correspondences were. First, rationally, they used myth, etymology and logical reasoning to find the proper place for each item. Second, experientially, they used free meditation with only a suggested connection to ruminate on, to find out if the link made sense (q. 97).[179]

> 97 We went into the woods to meditate there. And then we all drew a tarot card. On each of these cards is a deity. [The point is] then to find out … whether if that deity appreciates the [particularly chosen] object, or that he says: "I've got no use for this." … It's a check. Are we on the right track? So we tried to verify [the items and their associations] both rationally and ritual-magically, meditatively (13: 299-303).

Although the inventory has been transformed into something very different to what had originally been the *Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain*, the group remained loyal to the literary character of the magical items. Once compiled, the members started to write stories that each featured one of the magical items together with its correspondences. Eventually, but well before all the stories were written in their definitive form, the newly developed material was introduced in dedicated rituals to serve as a new generation of mediating symbols for supporting explorations of the Otherworld, and tutoring their exegesis.

The Greencrafters seem to understand their experiences and their interpretations in tandem, which is in line with the observation of Wicca in general as being an orthopractic movement.[180] By emphasizing ritual conduct and technique over beliefs, Wiccans try to create an effective environment for generating otherworldly experiences, regardless whether these are to be accepted as self-validating encounters or to be means of appraising novel imagery. Wicca, then, is geared towards the creative renewal of either the self or *itself*.

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[178] *Spike and Suzy* is a classic comic book series that originates from Belgium, and is known in the Low Countries under the original name *Suske en Wiske*. See Vandersteen (1949) for the original edition.

[179] Greencraft's procedure of assessing new material by combining the results of two distinct means of gathering information thus bears an interesting resemblance to methodological triangulation as used in the social sciences. See also the overinclusiveness that comes with the choosing of a Craft name as discussed in Subsection 7.4.3.

[180] Cf. Hutton (1999, pp. 397-398), who talks about propitiation versus consecration; see, e.g., TSivia Rabinovitch (1996, pp. 84-85).

8.8 Conclusion

In this article, I sought to explore the Wiccan imagination and to explain its domestication by showing how personal, ritual, and social processes impact on the reported otherworldly experiences of followers of the movement. The analysis of the material from my fieldwork suggests that the domestication can best be understood from the interplay between three actions towards the imagination: acquisition, exposition and validation.

First, given the belief that the source of a genuine otherworldly experience lies outside the person, Wiccans appreciate that 'true' imagination is autonomous by nature. That is, its content is believed to be externally acquired, rather than internally generated. The *acquisition* of experiences often poses a challenge to practitioners, since they have to orchestrate both their autonomous imagination and their active mental mode of everyday life, especially as to allow the former to inform the latter, without overwhelming it.

The autonomy of the imagination thus leads to the second observation: given their assumed origin, experiences are difficult to attain, and also the knowledge they convey may be hard to grasp, let alone wield. Improving one's imaginative faculty and obtaining ritual fluency are therefore seen as indispensable as means to *exposit* the experiences. In Wicca, the imagination becomes trained through guided meditation, whereas the talking stick offers a way to share the experiences and render them communicable.

Third, following both the assumption of the otherworldly origin of the experiences and the challenge of their fruitful and meaningful rendition, any claims of authenticity and efficacy will have to be *validated*. Because Wicca understands divinity as immanent to the self, its adherents are granted the inalienable right to have their own understandings of the Otherworld. This self-validation of belief may contribute to the vitality and versatility of the religion, but it also encourages charismatic self-authentication and may lead to elitism and rivalry. Validation is also used vice versa: rather than accommodating spiritual development, Wiccan imaginations may generate novel elements in the transitional sphere.

chapter nine

DISCUSSION

9.1 Introduction

In this dissertation, I asked the question: *How does religious creativity work in Wicca?* As I explained in 1.5.1, in order to address it, I posed two secondary research questions: one about the structure and one about the process of religious creativity in Wicca. I also formulated a subsidiary question aimed at understanding the relationship between such creativity and cultural change. The answers to these, which together form a coherent response to the main question, will be addressed here in three consecutive paragraphs.

One note is in order, given the close relationship between the answers. Although the adapted systems model of creativity as developed in Section 1.4 is helpful in distinguishing between its subsystems as *structures* and their reciprocal transactions as *processes*, the differences between them are not clear-cut. Processes lead to structures and vice versa, and even within each subsystem processes take place. The domain, for instance, is a dynamic outcome of efforts of persons and groups to introduce new material to the Wiccan canon, whereas in the field, various gatekeepers may compete for the upper hand in their shared tradition.

For the sake of simplicity, I will discuss each structure and each interaction separately, but I will point out any relevant configurations of greater complexity. To highlight the grounded concepts I developed during my study as theoretical codes (see 2.4.2), they are italicized in this chapter; to show their interrelationships, I have plotted them on the graphic display of Csikszentmihalyi's Systems model (see Figure 11, cf. Figure 3).

9.2 Structure

The first of my two secondary research questions—*What are the contents and structures of the subsystems of the domain, the field, and the person with regard to religious creativity in Wicca?*—which was gradually answered in the consecutive studies of the core chapters, is mostly descriptive and points to the given elements of change I found in the Wiccan environment.[181] Through inductively analysing my data, I reached the conclusion that in each subsystem in Wicca two opposing motives are active. In fact, when envisioning the subsystems as layers, each duality can be understood as similar to the other two but manifesting itself on a different level. On a related note, Csikszentmihalyi's original adapted systems model (see Figure 3) conceived of the subsystems as being embedded in the broader contexts of culture, society, and personal backgrounds. Throughout my thesis, I have addressed the top-down impact

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[181] Note that the research questions of each individual study in the core chapters are not reiterated here, since each chapter was originally created as an independent article. For an overview these questions, see Appendix A.
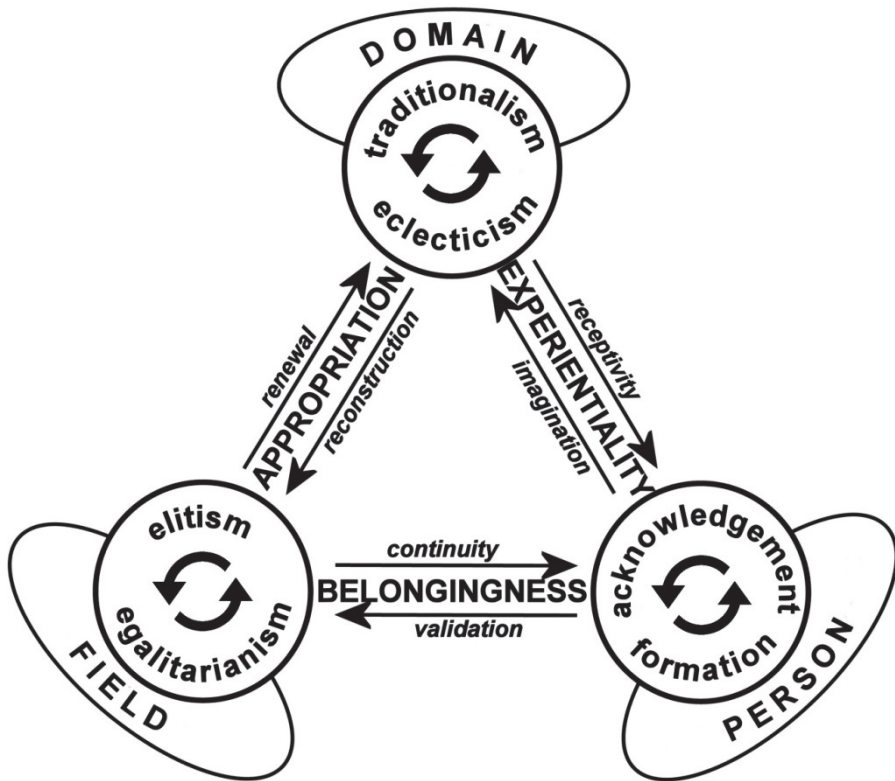
FIGURE 11: *The adapted systems model as applied to Wicca*

In contrast to the original model (see Figure 3), in the adapted version (developed in 1.4) attention is paid to both the clockwise and anti-clockwise moving arrows. Here, this adapted version is applied to the Wiccan context. Note that to display the internal tension in each of the subsystems, their labels are now attached to the three ellipses, removing references to the contexts background, society, and culture that were displayed in the ellipses of Figure 3.

of these contexts on Wicca and will reiterate them here. In contrast, Wiccan self-presentations, as well as the movement's impact on the sociocultural context, fall beyond the scope of the subject of religious creativity and therefore are not treated here. Note, however, that these bottom-up influences (e.g., upholding an image of deviancy (in 3.4), proto-professionalization (in 5.1.2), and apologetic research (in 6.4) are relevant to some of the research questions posed in the various chapters.

In what follows, I will discuss each subsystem in the context of Wicca. After enumerating the elements each component consist of, I will relate each to the relevant passages in the thesis. Then I will move on to the conflicting motives and again point out relevant aspects of these as addressed in the preceding chapters.

9.2.1 The domain

The *domain* of Wicca is a cultural repository of *objects* like athames (see q. 02), wands, taper candles, pentacles, cords, and so forth; *symbols*, e.g., the typical way in which the God and Goddess are represented (see 1.3.2), but also the phases of the Moon, the four elements, and sigils; *rituals*, e.g., the sabbats (see 1.3.3), the esbats, and initiations (both see 1.3.4); various *techniques*, e.g., pathworking and guided meditation (see, e.g. 8.5) and the talking stick (see, e.g., in 8.6), but also trance inducing group activities, such as stone singing, (see 5.2.2); *cosmological elements*, such as particular deities, trees, animals, planets, stones, and so forth (see 1.3.1 for a general discussion and 4.3 for a particular example of a cosmological structure); and *general characteristics and practices* that belong to the belief system, such as the use of magic, the employment of secrecy as an institutionalized feature of concealment (see Chapter 6), the custom of copying the *Book of Shadows*[182] by hand, preferably on the lap of the high priest or high priestess, the notion of mystery (see, e.g., 1.2), and ethical considerations around exchanges with the divine order (see again 1.3.1).

This vast array of elements that the Wiccan domain consists of can be characterized by the two potentially conflicting motives *traditionalism* and *pluralism*, or rather: *eclecticism* (these tensions are mentioned in Subsection 1.2.1 and featured in Chapter 3 and 4).

Traditionalism as a base attitude perhaps most fundamentally represents the charismatic mission to restore a lost world in which mankind lives in harmony with nature (see 3.2). This attitude is played out through the association with ancient cultures that are emphatically displayed as purer and closer to the 'source of life' than disenchanted contemporary society. Authenticity is strongly desired in traditionalism; the pedigree of its objects, rituals, and symbols all but equals the value and respectability of this branch of Wicca. Still, existing traditions are rarely accepted as mere givens; their appropriation implies their alteration, as I will discuss in 9.3.

Paradoxically, traditionalism understood as authenticity simultaneously opens the doors to many old religions, practices, teachings, and cultures, and thereby gives rise to *pluralism*. Just as in neo-Paganism in general, Wicca accepts many paths as valid, and the generic way in which, for instance, the God and Goddess are represented, leaves open the possibility for a personalized version taken from a pantheon of one's liking (see 1.3.2, especially q. 04). Since the development of a spiritual self is so important, both individual adherents and groups are empowered to put the cultural repository of Wicca to use for their particular ends. I have called this *eclecticism* (see Subsection 1.2.4, and Chapter 3, *The Pagan Parallax*).

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[182] The *Book of Shadows* (sometimes abbreviated as BoS) is defined by Rosemary Guiley (1989a, p. 5) as "a book of beliefs, rituals, witchcraft laws and ethics, herbal and healing lore, incantations, chants, dances, spells, divination methods, sabbat rites and miscellaneous topics, which serves as a guide for witches in practising their Craft and religion."

If pluralism is the acceptance of different elements in themselves, then *eclecticism* is the motive and practice of combining these elements as one sees fit. In individual eclecticism, artefacts, symbols, and concepts take on new layers of meaning, as they become the mediators between the religious and the personal. Such personal usage of cultural material can be contrasted with a second take on eclecticism, in which groups that recombine images and techniques from the repository, to build new rituals or even a new cosmological structure (see, e.g., 4.3 and 8.7). The embodiments and impact of both personal and collective eclecticism are discussed in 9.3.

Yet individual and collective eclecticism are not mutually exclusive, as the case of Gerald Gardner, the grandfather of Wicca, demonstrates (see 1.2.3). Although he cannot but be described as an individual eclectic *par excellence*, he ultimately gave rise to a movement that embraced eclecticism on a collective scale. Yet in the overlapping of the two, traditionalism and eclecticism may come into conflict. Problems mount when unrelated material is combined in ritual, when canonical elements are altered, replaced, or removed on the mere basis of personal preferences, or when a new tradition is started up by self-claimed Wiccans without any initiatory credentials (see 1.2.4).

For these reasons, many traditionalists frown upon the term 'eclecticism' or at least point out that the meaning initiatory Wiccans attach to it differs from that which is implied in the practice of non-initiatory Wiccans and outsiders. Traditionalists, especially Gardnerians, look upon 'proper' eclecticism as an inspired improvisatory attitude— the willingness of "working with what is available," as some would put it). In Subsection 3.3.1 I referred to one Wiccan who argued that eclecticism is only "suitable for the far-far-advanced." This statement is an illustration of the widely-held attitude of traditionalists that renewal, although not ruled out, should proceed in small steps, each subject to vehement scrutiny.

This understanding of eclecticism is wholly different from that which is associated with the haphazard tinkering with misunderstood techniques and symbols traditionalists suspect non-initiatory Wiccans engage in (see 3.3.3). In addition, even well thought-out, but pervasive attempts at reform are suspect. Because of their constant strife for creative renewal even Greencraft, a well-established group led by initiated Alexandrian Wiccans, is sometimes dismissed by traditionalists as not being a proper branch in the lineage of Traditional Craft Wicca (see 1.2.5, note 13).

9.2.2 The field

The Wiccan *field* is made up of the community of practitioners acting as gatekeepers that accept, reject, modify, and (re)distribute the individual input and maintain the cultural repository of the religion. Depending on the context, a gatekeeper may be a

peer who one may meet in a pub moot,[183] who participates in the same workshop, or who might be a part of one's coven. Various Wiccans in my sample (see Table 1) shared the same coven. However, gatekeepers are often the *elite* of the movement. *High priests and high priestesses* belong to that class, which includes informants like Merlyn, Egil, Willow, Amor and Aria. Obviously, also the initiators of specific branches of Wicca, act as gatekeepers. While not founding any new tradition, Morgana Sythove, who brought Wicca to the Netherlands, may be counted as one, as does Arghuicha, being the spiritual father of the Greencraft tradition. Other famous founders include Gerald Gardner, Alex Sanders (both see 1.2.3) and to a lesser extent people like Robert Cochrane and Victor and Cora Anderson (see 1.2.4). Other gatekeepers are *authors* (in my sample, think of people like Janet Farrar and Gavin Bone, but also others like Vivianne Crowley (see 8.1) and Raymond Buckland (mentioned in 1.2.4), or even *scholars* like Ronald Hutton and a host of other Pagan researchers. In Subsection 5.1.2 I outlined the complex relationship between academia and Wicca, revisiting the topic in 6.4, where I discussed the related consequence of misrepresentation of data and the dangers of apologetic scholarship.

Like with the Wiccan domain, the field is comprised of two leading motives that are at loggerheads with each other and to which adherents both subscribe: in this case *egalitarianism* and *elitism*.

As can best be observed in narratives about the religion itself and in ritual contexts, Wicca sees itself as *egalitarian* (Van Gulik, 2011a, see also 4.1). This idea is clearly related to Wiccans looking upon themselves as active practitioners rather than passive believers—an outlook not unlike the Protestant doctrine of universal priesthood. For example, much of Chapter 8, *Domesticating the Imagination*, is about being trained as a priest or priestess in Wicca, and there I show how this induction process comes with the gradual acceptance of the personal dignity as one's own ritual diviner (see 8.6). In this context of learning, the coven leader is no more than a 'first among equals'—a teacher whose aim is to let neophytes develop until they can hold their own. The learning involves a side-by-side relationship as much as a face-to-face one, in that the coven leader participates in the same rituals as the junior Wiccans, and joins in the interpretation of meaningful experiences.

During my fieldwork with Greencraft, I noticed how occasionally less experienced coven members were asked to assume key roles in rituals, sometimes effectively leading them, and outside of the sacred context, they were just as likely as a senior member to hold an office in the Greencraft organization. Moreover, initiated Greencrafters have contributed to the development of their rendition of the *Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain* (see 8.7), which means that, in effect, regular members, as well as coven leaders, had a hand in adding to the Greencraft cosmology. Egalitarianism was also obvious in the way many high priests and high priestesses talked about Wic-

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[183] A pub moot is an informal and regular meeting of neo-Pagans or Wiccans, that typically takes place on a set day in the month (e.g., on the third Friday) in a pub, either at a reserved table or by occupying a room upstairs (see, e.g., Harrington, 2014, July 26).

cans in general: although coven members were group participants, ultimately they were each working towards greater self-understanding, perhaps even self-actualization and religious activities had to cater to those needs (see 1.3.1 and 8.3, q. 80).

In contrast to the principle of egalitarianism, which is openly and actively communicated to outsiders, Wicca also has its fair share of *elitism* (see 3.3 and 8.8) which is not so much swept under the carpet, but rather used as an accusation to put dominant members of the movement in their place. Many Wiccans seem to relate elitism either to the abuse of power by coven leaders or to the haughty way well-established initiatory groups voice their disapproval of others that show incompetence or ignorance with regard to Wiccan orthodoxy (i.e., misunderstanding symbols, doing away with proper sequences of opening and closing rituals, or breaking oaths of silence; see, e.g., 6.2).

While these takes on elitism all rely on an emic understanding, an implicit, and altogether different attitude can be observed from an etic perspective. Often very subtle and without the negativity that surrounds elitism-as-accusation, authority-sustaining-elitism, as used by elders, is present in many contexts. Among other places, I found it in narratives about traditionalism, where the elitist acts as a defender of the faith (see 3.3.3); in controversies regarding intellectual ownership (see 6.3.1); and in accounts that imply personal entitlement (see 7.4.1) or charisma (see 8.4). Nonetheless, even this 'accepted' elitism has caused many Wiccans to start their own groups, rather than become initiated (see 1.2.4).

9.2.3 The person

The third and last aspect of the system's approach to creativity is that of the *person*. Important in this subsystem are elements like motives, beliefs, emotions, cognitions, but also one's background, style, and character. Ultimately, individuals are the only *agents* in the adapted systems model, so we need to keep in mind that the domain of the person overlaps with both the domain and the field: in the first, the individual is a wielder of culture, and in the second he may be either a peer or a gatekeeper. In the subsystem of the person, it should be noted, he is exactly that: a person—an individual. Although we need to understand the drives of the person in each of these guises, we can only begin to do so by taking into account the sociocultural context that created the postmodern self-identity. I did so in various places throughout the thesis.

In Subsection 1.3.1, to give an example, I juxtaposed ethical and existential orientations and argued that contemporary Wiccans, in addition to seeking to maintain a fair relationship with the natural world, want to come to understand themselves through a cosmological lens. This reflectivity constitutes the self-styled mystery aspect of the religion. In contrast to the ancient mysteries, where the hidden workings of nature were revealed and ritualized, Wiccans also relate the mysteries to their inalienable personal place in the universe, i.e., the imagining and celebrating their inner selves as expressions of the divine order (see 8.1). The existential orientation ultimately demonstrates to what extent the Wiccan movement is a child of its time.

In Section 3.2, I described that era: the cultural revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Wicca's coming of age coincided with the emergence of societal changes like emancipation and democratization in art, education and sexuality, and an increase in standards of living (see 3.2). These processes supported the development of *expressive individualism*, a take on the self that implies creativity to be not so much as an ongoing cultural process, but something that was for the taking—if not a birthright; something that demanded development if one was to come to self-realization. This individualism obviously had a great impact on the personal sphere of each single person involved in Wicca.

In Section 7.1, I further developed the existential orientation, describing how religious imagery aided in making sense of one's identity. On the one hand, religious imagery is shown to help accept personal characteristics that are either ascribed by others or that one recognizes in oneself but has not yet come to terms with (see 7.3). On the other hand, certain symbols may help to visualize oneself in the future by pointing out tacit aspirations and hidden potential (see 7.4). These two functions that religious symbols may have for the self (further discussed in 9.3) can be argued to be actions derived from the conflicting motives of the subsystem of the person: formation and acknowledgement. Here *formation* refers to motives that seek to construct an identity *de novo* with the aid of religious imagery and symbols, whereas *acknowledgement* points to both the need to belong and the need for self-expression.

The dual nature of acknowledgement makes us run into an oddity: although the subsystem of the person overlaps with that of the other two, unlike these it also exists *outside the creative system*. That is, the conflicting motives of both the domain (i.e., traditionalism versus eclecticism) and the field (i.e., elitism versus egalitarianism) are, in fact, particular Wiccan manifestations of the tension between belonging and self-expression that typifies the postmodern individual.[184] The tension between these motives is irresolvable since they simultaneously require and counter each other. The expressive individual longs for recognition of his qualities, and therefore relies on a peer group that provides such feedback. However, the more enmeshed one becomes in such a group, the harder it gets to maintain autonomy for fear of rejection.

Perhaps in this most straightforward of tensions in the person, reiterated in greater complexity by those in the field and the domain, we can best observe how the conflicting motives that constitute the subsystems also animate them—that is: turn them into *processes*.

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[184] For an in-depth treatment of what in the psychological literature is referred to as 'the need to belong' as a basic human motive, see, e.g., Baumeister & Leary (1995); the motive of acknowledgement can be related to, e.g., Deci & Ryan's (2000), discussion of the self-determination of behaviour. The tension between the two is explored in various sources, but for the present discussion on expressive individualism, especially Greenwood, Long and Dal Cin's (2013) publication is worthwhile, in which they relate the motives to the appeal of fame.

9.3 Process

The secondary question— *Through what processes do these subsystems of religious creativity interact in the Wiccan context?* —aims to develop an understanding of religious creativity and dynamics on a small scale. Putting into motion the motivational structures of the adapted systems model requires the assessment of what Wiccans think, plan, strive for, or do. Between each subsystem, a complementary pair of processes exists: I have labelled the relationship between the person and the domain *experientiality*, the process between the person and the field is called *belongingness*, whereas I refer to the interactions between field and domain as *appropriation*. In each of these interactive pairs, I will start with a broad description, before identifying and explaining individual strands, and finishing by pointing out implicit relationships between these and other featured processes. Throughout the discussion of all these interactive patterns, I will offer ample references to the various (sub)sections of the core chapters, which featured any of the processes.

9.3.1 Experientiality

Wicca is foremost an *experiential* undertaking. Although much of the felt quality of being Wiccan derives from group membership, ultimately the movement is about the direct encounter of a single person with the Otherworld (see 8.1). The success of these experiences relies on the proficiency of the adherent—most notably his techniques for altering consciousness, his ritual fluency and his command of the symbolic vocabulary of Wicca (see, e.g., 8.3). Both these skills and this knowledge determine his *receptivity*: the extent to which he is able to engage with the presented material in his *imagination*. Nevertheless, the multiple engagements of the many experiencing adherents also breathe life into the Wiccan domain; the recurrent performances come to show the quality of ritual techniques, come to determine the meanings of its religious imagery, and perhaps sometimes even come to add to the cultural repository (Van Gulik, 2011b). In other words, the adherent's *projections* and *improvisations* are as crucial to the domain as the other way around.[185]

I found the openness to the material from the domain—another way to define receptivity—to be associated with two distinct kinds of action.

The first, *attunement* (see 5.4.1), is immediate, mostly happens in the appropriate setting of a ritual and deals with the preparations of entering a receptive state of mind (see, e.g., 3.4 and 8.3), or at least brings to attention the mystery-tradition aspect of Wicca. Attunement, in other words, is about trying to learn about the Wiccan imagery in its own terms. In my fieldwork, I encountered the most elaborate form of attunement during the tree walks with Greencraft. Although walking in the woods at

[185] The dichotomy of receptivity and imagination can be compared with centripetal versus centrifugal symbolization (Deri, 1984, pp. 75-76; Jongsma-Tieleman, 1996, pp. 57-58) and the formation versus recollection of pioneering experiences (Van Gulik, 2000, pp. 77-78).

night is, in itself, bound to turn the mind inwards, the instruction to participants to continue in silence after the first leg did even more to that end. This part was followed by an associative narrative that featured the religious imagery that the members were to attune to, which in turn, gave way to a tree meditation (for a full account, see 5.2.2). Attunement, in the end, is more than mere focusing: it is not only the how but also the what. In that sense, it comes close to techniques of divination, where concentration and interpretation take turns.

The second aspect of receptivity, in contrast, is geared towards *self-understanding*. Experiences of this kind are reflective, may happen outside the religious context, and are more deliberate, 'cold' cognitive affairs than the ones that are triggered by instantaneous attunement. Also, they might also be seen as the carefully bracketed outcomes of constant exposure to religious symbolism. Among other places, I came across that function of experientiality in Abigail's use of her labyrinth (see 1.1.1) and in the online discussion among traditionalists and eclectics about the need for repetition in religious praxis (see 3.3.2, especially q. 18-20; see also Van Gulik, 2011b, pp. 136-137). Even if self-understanding itself is not a part of ritual, some ceremonial episodes may strengthen the effect any religious material may have thereon. Abigail's labyrinth, for instance, has an organizing quality about it, making any experiences easier to interpret and relate to the cosmological system of a tradition. The mnemonic function of the talking stick (mentioned in 8.6), is another example. Through the interaction with others, it stabilizes the interpretations of recurrent imaginations and helps in formulating these meanings in a shared language.

Most of the impact of the Wiccan domain on the person, however, relies on the repository of imagery, symbols, and entities, not on its techniques. In Chapter 7, *Coining Names, Casting Selves*, I explained how deities and other entities in the Wiccan domain are adopted as Craft names and subsequently become focal points for the development of their bearers' spiritual selves. I distinguished between how the chosen name gave either an *impression* of the self or was its *expression* (see 7.2). The first dealt about the acceptance of negative or ascribed aspects of the self, and recognition of aspects of the self that thus far had not been subject to scrutiny or hard to understand for lack of words. Both *acceptance* (7.3.2) and *recognition* (7.3.3) represent the passive experience of surrendering to the meanings of the existing domain. Perhaps counterintuitively, the same holds for the expressive aspect of *aspiration* (7.4.2): adherents might become inspired by the myths and characteristics that are associated with the deities from whom they took their name.

Conversely, the person can also have an impact on the domain. The idiosyncratic fancies of the *autonomous imagination* (see 8.2), when repeated often enough, may catch on as collectively meaningful expressions of religiosity. Such *improvisational* experientiality gives room to the individual to *project* his fancy, his fears, his dreams, and even contributes to the raw emotions of his tainted self. Indeed, also the self-expressive aspect of *potency* (see 7.4.2) belongs here. In contrast to aspiration, where the person looks to deity to learn about the characteristics that he would like to make his own, with the expression of potency he looks for the Gods whose characteristics

best fit the assumptions about his abilities and qualities. Here his nature is leading, and the qualities of deities are reshaped accordingly.

9.3.2 Belongingness

I have called the second series of processes, those that take place between the person and the field, processes of *belonging*. These actions, derived from the personal motives of acknowledgement and expression (discussed in 9.2), lead to attempts to demonstrate eligibility for membership. I labelled such efforts *validations*, and argue that they stand opposite to the field-derived actions that seek *continuity*, i.e., maintain the status quo for the movement, the peer group, or the division of roles and offices. Interestingly and perhaps confusingly, both the person-derived and field-derived actions contain aspects of personal expression and submission to group standards.

Undoubtedly the most noticeable aspect of the process of validation is the *self-validation of belief*: the assumed entitlement to judge both the truthfulness and significance of personal encounters with the Otherworld—or any religious experiences for that matter (Van Gulik, 2011b; see also 3.1 and 3.4). A prospective Wiccan is likely to claim religious literacy and experiential proficiency, implying his entitlement to be accepted as a peer. Since Wicca endorses both pluralism and egalitarianism, all personal accounts have to be taken at face value. I came across this pattern many times during my fieldwork, but perhaps the immunizing function of the talking stick (see 8.6) demonstrates best how the set-up of social gathering may serve to strengthen the position of the experience-prone novice.

But there is more to the role of the field with regard to validation. Instead of merely cushioning the input of individual Wiccans against critique by other gatekeepers and different traditions, Wiccans demand genuineness in their peers. These attitudes clash. New practitioners have to handle the delicate business of meeting this *obligation of authenticity*—an outlook that even made it into a ritual text (see 7.2)—while preventing their self-expression from becoming too grotesque for sceptic peers to swallow. To complicate matters further, the *stakes in nonconformity* in Wicca are high (see 3.2, note 89). Since the image that Wicca entertains of itself is one of deviancy (see 3.4 and 6.2.1), one's involvement may require extensive (self-)legitimation.

An often successful way of gaining acceptance in the community is by reminiscing about one's *proto-religiosity* (see 7.4.1). Tales about religious activity in childhood imply the naturalness of one's spirituality to justify any ritual mistakes or lack of knowledge. Proto-religiosity therefore is like a *self-validation of practice*. Such narratives often accompany talk about *homecoming*—the way Wiccans prefer to express their conversion to Wicca (see 3.1 and 7.3.1). Homecoming suggests that Wicca is a natural mode of religiosity, and as a consequence implies that one has an unalienable right to partake in its tradition. In contrast, practitioners may also suggest that their ability to practice Wicca is ingrained in them, implying the inheritance of special powers.

Opposite to all these processes of validation are processes of *continuity*. Just like its counterpart, however, continuity both has aspects that seek to promote individual expression and those that try to preserve group power. The latter aspect is rather straightforward: by being accepted as a *sanctioning* body, the collective continually reasserts its power and preserves its *stewardship* of their branch within the Wiccan movement. Be that as it may, this preservative effort regularly turns into the conservatism of a single gatekeeper or coven. Here stewardship gives way to *ownership* (see 6.3.1, cf. 4.2). Religious material, access to it, or the etiquette towards it becomes guarded by introducing practices of secrecy and exclusion, which I dealt with throughout Chapter 6, *Secrecy and Ritual Hygiene*.

This conservatism brings me to the most intriguing aspect of the field-based process of continuity: the cultivation of *charisma*. Inasmuch as self-validation is about entitlement, charisma is about proficiency; the novice's eagerness to learn has been replaced by the expert's willingness to teach. That is, the elite do not have to bargain for their acceptance as members, but they perpetuate their particular position as coven leaders or luminaries by frequently assuming the role of diviner. Several informants told me about the way they entered a trance or flow state, and would then produce either inspired stories or interpretations (see 8.4, especially q. 82-84). These *spontaneous exegetical reflections* are central features of charisma. Surely, such improvisatory abilities may quench the thirst for self-expression in some, but in others, charisma is routinized as part of their office as high priest or high priestess (See, e.g., 8.3, especially q. 80).

Without the group, the charisma of some of the advanced Wiccans appeared as a profound ability to make contact with some aspect of the Otherworld. This can be observed, for instance, in Mandragora's encounter with Mórrígan (described in 8.2), which was the result of her work on a ritual mask. I also came across this motive in Arghuicha's recounting of his ecstatic dances at the stone circles of Scotland (discussed in 4.4). *Ethical* or *other-centred orientations* such as these, however, we were just as likely to be reported as the *existential* or *self-centred* ones. Examples of the latter include Phaedrus' Bolund experience (also discussed in 8.2), which was triggered by intense fear, or Morgana's narrative about her daily 'imagination management' (see 8.3), in which she explained how she deals with the intensified awareness that befalls practitioners. These two examples suggest that in the privacy of their personal lives, apart from the level of implied proficiency—Phaedrus routinely invoked deity, while Morgana displayed her skill of keeping her autonomous imaginations in check— the elite of the field are very similar to the individuals of the subsystem of the person.

9.3.3 Appropriation

The third pair of creative processes, taking place between the field and the domain can best be labelled *appropriation*, regardless of the fact that the term can also be used to denote processes between the individual and the domain (see 7.5). In my cur-

rent understanding of the concept (cf. 4.6), however, it labels the orchestrated efforts of preparing material to develop a particular branch. Even though the processes of experientiality and belongingness each embody complex interrelations between the subsystems they connect, the two sides of appropriation are perhaps the hardest to tell apart, because they both assume each other to a great extent. As a pair, *reconstruction* and *renewal* present a perfect example of the chicken-or-egg problem. I suggested in the opening paragraph of Section 3.1 that a religion cannot just be started from scratch; it needs a referent in the past or to point to some guise of 'truth.' The problem here is often that the "continuity with a suitable and pre-existing form" (p. 56), is lacking. Either the past is imaginary, forgotten, or its premises sit uneasily with contemporary life. Reconstruction and renewal are the means to overcome these problems, as they straighten the path between the past and the present.

Reconstruction represents efforts to adapt the existing elements of a religion, or their origins, to improve their truthfulness or practicality in usage. In its strictest sense, the term refers to actions that seek to 'repair' ancient rituals and religions, like one finds in neo-Pagan paths like Ásatrú and Druidry. In a similar vein, Gerald Gardner portrayed Wicca as a surviving pre-Christian fertility cult in dire need of re-construction, but eventually most Wiccans had to grudgingly accept that their religion was a recent invention (see 1.2.2). Refiguring the origins of Wicca as a *mythistory* (mentioned in 6.2.1) proved difficult since this discourse, romantic though it may seem, lacked any explanatory power about the often very specific requirements of its religious practice. As a consequence, Wiccans started to legitimize their practice in alternative ways, ranging from *emphasizing the efficacy* of ritual (see 3.3.2) and magic (6.2.3), to *shifting the attention* to the ecological relevance of the religion (see 3.4), and *downsizing reconstructive efforts*.

In this last stratagem, practitioners retain claims of authenticity, but instead of salvaging an entire tradition, they now make them about the various objects, customs, and images that were brought together in Wicca. This joint operation bears a resemblance to the narratives of proto-religiosity of the individual adherent. Section 4.3 features a striking example of the persuasive qualities of authenticity that comes from repetitively recombining downsized reconstructed material. There, I traced the development of the tree-of-life/tarot correspondences from the first attempt at combining them by French occultist Éliphas Lévi (1856). Then, through William Gray (1984) the complete reshuffling of the relations between the elements of each, to the slight alterations of R.J. Stewart (1992), I eventually arrived at Greencraft's rendition (see Delaere, 2010, 2013). They proceeded with the reconstruction by including novel correspondences with trees, deities, and power animals. Bit by bit, reconstructive endeavours turn to efforts of renewal.

Renewal mostly differs from reconstruction with regards to how much traditional material is retained, to what extent the efforts are judged as literally truthful to the existing traditions, and, in contrast, how much of the novelties eventually make it to the canon of Wicca. An example of the gradual transition between reconstruction and renewal is the difference between mythistory and *mythopoeia*. While the history-

turned-to-myth still has credibility as a series of ancient stories (rather than ancient truths), myths themselves can also be invented by liberally re-employing traditional material. A champion of poetic myth-making, Robert Graves (1966) created a Celtic tree calendar that Greencraft later incorporated in their cosmological system (see 4.3 and 5.2.1). His significance for Wicca, however, stretches well beyond this invention.

His work demonstrates how for practitioners religious efficacy beats historical accuracy (see 5.4.1), or, to put it even more directly: how literal truths are trumped by *spiritual truths*. These inspiring renditions of reality no doubt help the empowerment of liberal Wiccans, who feel restrained by what they perceive as a rigid system of tradition. It provides a respectable rationale to start envisaging Wicca as an *open-source religion* (see 3.5), and supports, among others, eclectic endeavours like Farrar and Bone's (2004) *Progressive Witchcraft* (see 2.3.3). In its mildest guise, utilizing spiritual truths allows idealism to be expressed; it enables practitioners to talk about 'oughts' and 'shoulds' as if they were the real thing. Stories and rituals can be judged on the meanings they convey. In addition, spiritual truths allow for the kind of collective eclecticism I observed in Greencraft's project of the wholesale reformulation of the *Thirteen Treasures of the Island of Britain* (see 8.7). The adherents of the movement picked an entirely new inventory to suit contemporary needs, only retaining the core idea of a collection of person-bound magical items.

Endeavours such as these point the way to the last aspect of the processes of renewal: *religious revaluation*. This action refers to the keeping in check the ethical mentality of the religion: to what extent does traditional practice live up to its standards? Here eclecticism, collectively expressed, holds the moral high ground. The most prominent example from my fieldwork is undoubtedly Greencraft: this tradition was established exactly because of concerns about to what extent traditional Wicca could still be counted as a nature religion (see 5.2.1, especially q. 30). This local development fits in with the greening of Wicca through the emergence of various ecologically sensitive eclectic groups, such as the Reclaiming tradition.

9.4 Change

The problem with the notion of creativity throughout the research project has been to what extent it is a purposeful act, like Howard Gruber envisions it (see 1.4.3), rather than the random outcome of a process of autonomous change—or differently put: mere evolution. The subsidiary question— *What is the relationship between religious creativity in Wicca and religious change?*—was aimed at solving this conundrum. I will answer this question by offering two substantive interpretations of the nature of the creative process in Wicca, before, finally, reaching my final conclusion.

Wiccan practitioners thrive on the novel, the exotic, and the uncertain—*the unknown*—in their religious imagination and practice. Hence, they have become sensitive to the qualities of fancy that I will call *atmospheres*, and they have become profi-

cient in evoking and embracing chance events, outcomes that I will refer to as *intentional non-intentionality*.

9.4.1 The nature of creativity in Wicca

Much of Wiccan practice is specifically designed to furnish Otherworldly experiences and altered states of consciousness (see Chapter 8, *Domesticating the Imagination*). Through their emphasis on the orthopraxy of their religion (see 3.3.2 (q. 21), 4.1, and 8.7), adherents have developed ways to talk about the qualia—the 'what-it-is-like' properties of experiencing being at a place, encountering a deity, performing a ceremony, and so forth (see 3.5, note 92). Thus they have, for example, enabled themselves to gauge ritual quality and personal likeability in terms of perceived 'energy.' In my fieldwork, I repeatedly came across this notion, which Wiccans often used as in a qualitative (all-or-nothing), rather than a quantitative (more-or-less) sense. Thus a person could have a 'dark' energy about himself, a ritual could sustain 'positive' energy, and a sacred place may feel 'charged.' I found their use similar to what I have called *atmospheres*: the often unacknowledged experiential envelopments that coincide with or are inherently present in an either acquired or developed conception of objects, be they places, people, or artefacts (Van Gulik, 2000, 2014). When asked if they thought the notion of 'atmosphere' was similar to 'energy,' they concurred.

As a technique for maintaining a desirable atmosphere in a ritual setting Wiccans tried to shield off their rituals from outsiders and took great care that all the ritual objects were consecrated (see 6.3.3). Apart from keeping a high standard of 'ritual hygiene,' I also noticed how they tried to charge their ritual space through the extensive use of sensory stimuli: incense for the nose, drumming for the ears, candles for the eyes, and nudity for the skin. In addition, the meaning of the gestures, images and symbols was often overdetermined, creating an image of the ritual as the only possible performance. This sense of urgency itself lent conviction to the ceremony, and contributed to a sense of efficacy and increased the felt atmosphere. All in all, *experience* itself seemed to become the focal point—a powerful motivator that thus impacted on the creative process.

9.4.2 Intentional non-intentionality

Chance events are plentiful. In the introduction (see 1.4.5) I argued that improvisation introduces contingency. Wicca, a very ritualistic and action-driven religion, is prone to become subject to unforeseeable results in its practice. This tendency is further enhanced by creative tensions that exist on the macro-level. Take for instance the factors elitism and egalitarianism I discussed in 9.2. In strange and complex ways, they may work together to sustain renewal. Secrecy, for example (discussed in Chapter 6, *Secrecy and Ritual Hygiene*), as an unequal distribution of knowledge—as opposed to differences in understanding and utility—may not only hamper creativity, but induce it as a way around prohibition, or by proposing new

structures or rituals to cater for the needs of the uninitiated. Here elitism brings about non-elitism (see, e.g., 1.2.4 and 3.5), and thereby fosters both creativity and change.

The most relevant kind of contingency, however, is found on the micro level. Although rituals in themselves present ample opportunity, certain parts in rituals seem designated for the purposeful generation of new material, such as mystery plays (see 6.3.3, q. 47), chanting and dancing (see, e.g., 5.2.2), and long-winded formulations to honour deity. Other episodes lack a script altogether, like the inspired declamations in which some participants act as mouthpieces for these deities (see, e.g., *The Charge*, as discussed in 7.2). In this ritual episode called 'drawing down the Moon'— in which the great Goddess is believed to enter the body of the high priestess and is supposed to speak through her—the high priestess traditionally has to surrender to divine inspiration and utter words as they come (See , e.g., 8.3, especially around q. 80 and 81).[186]

It would seem, then, that the defining characteristic of Wiccan practice does not lie in its proneness to contingency, but rather in the attempts at combining the intentional and the non-intentional. Wicca cultivates coincidence. By assigning the imagination an active and constitutive role in ritual, Wicca seeks to routinize the erratic, and incessantly works towards the creation of a generative cosmological system, that sustains endless rumination and reimagination.

The creative process is fed by both human motivation and the unpredictability that comes with action and improvisation. But there is more. Rather than a sudden burst of flames, intentional non-intentionality may also be a slow burner. In Chapter 7, *Coining Names, Casting Selves*, I discussed how Wiccans make sense of their personal identity in terms of their religious outlook, by choosing a Craft name. While some names and their original connotations are stumbled upon, people still may opt to take the name. Its unintended features get accepted as fate or embraced as potencies that may only become known or experienced after a long time.

9.4.3 Creative change

What, then, sums up the relationship between creativity and change? Although generativity does not equal functionality when creative actions get repeated over a long time, religious creativity eventually turns into persistent religious change: countless reiterations will eventually converge into a number of viable and persistent structures, symbols, techniques and think tools. Religious creativity, whether triggered by inner need, evoked by ritual techniques, or slowly developing through the gradual intake of symbolic meaning is a never-ending process. The complex interactions between the subjective and the objective, between people, between person and fancy

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[186] In my interview with Janet Farrar (34: 81-86), she argued that the *Charge of the Goddess* was only supposed to be used as a last resort, if the high priestess could not enter a proper trance state, and thus was not able to prophesize.

show how creativity and contingency go hand in hand, for the creative process not only intrinsically perpetuates unpredictability, its drives and limits are always a function of the wider context in which it takes place.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Research questions by chapter

Note. Most of these questions were originally formulated as objectives and with some operational aspects remaining implicit. For the general (overarching) research questions see subsection 1.5.1.

Chapter 3 (p. 66):	*How do practitioners cope with the difficulties of justifying their beliefs and their identity to their community and the world at large, within the changing context of historic knowledge and modern civilization?*
	What are the tensions between traditionalists and eclectics in Wicca on the level of the individual?
Chapter 4 (pp. 82-83):	*How can the tension between traditionalism and eclecticism be understood from the collective level in Greencraft?*
	How does the reclamation of a pan-European fertility cult relate to ethnicity-specific reconstructionism?
Chapter 5 (pp. 102-103):	*What is Greencraft Wicca?*
	What are Greencraft tree walks?
	How did I experience the mutual influence between the researcher and the researched from my perspective as a fieldworker?
Chapter 6 (p. 117-118):	*What different narratives of secrecy exist in Wicca?*
	How do the intentions and consequences of secrecy in Wicca interrelate?
Chapter 7 (p. 133):	*What is the meaning of Craft name adoption for the construction of a religious self-identity in Wicca?*
Chapter 8 (p. 154):	*What role does the religious imagination play in Wicca?*

Appendix B: Topic list

This topic list covers the introduction to each interview, as well as all the (sub)topics that were eventually presented to the informants. As an example, I have included one possible introductory question (underlined) and two possible follow-up questions for each (sub)topic. Note that since I engaged in lightly structured depth interviewing, the order of the topics was different for each conversation, as were the ways in which I phrased the questions I asked.

0. Introduction

Explanations to informant
● Interview about religious practice
● Every answer is correct
●You may stop at any point
● I will be making a sound recording
● Privacy is protected
● I will offer feedback, if requested

Consent
□ Is everything clear?
□ Do you have any objections?
□ Do you have a preference for a fictitious name?

Biographical questions
□ What's your age?
□ Do you have a partner?
□ How do you live together?
□ Do you have children?
□ What's the highest education level that you've achieved
□ What profession are you in or have you been in?
□ Do you have any hobbies?
□ What's your family background?
□ What was your religious upbringing?

1. Religious background

□ How would you describe your current faith?
□ How did you become involved in Wicca?
□ What's the impact of your conviction to your life in general?

2. Craft name

□ <u>What's your Craft name?</u>
□ Why did you choose this name?
□ How did you choose the name?

3. Secrecy

□ <u>What is the purpose of secrecy in Wicca?</u>
□ What is your opinion on secrecy?
□ How do you decide between what you will and what you won't tell?

4. Ritual

Participation
□ <u>How do you experience your participation in Wiccan ritual?</u>
□ Please explain, as good as you can, what you think and feel during a ritual.
□ What is the role of your imagination in ritual?

Significance
□ <u>What is, in your opinion, the significance of rituals in Wicca?</u>
□ Why do you engage in ritual personally?
□ To what extent does your ritual activity have an impact on the way you look to yourself?

5. Religious experiences

Personal experiences
□ <u>Have you ever had an encounter with the Otherworld?</u>
□ Please describe the experience you had.
□ What was the meaning of this experience to you?

Sharing experiences with others
□ <u>How do you share your religious experiences with others?</u>
□ What difference is there between the things you don't share (if any) and the ones you do share?
□ To what extent does the presence of certain others have an impact on how you tell your story?

Experiences of others
□ <u>How do others share their religious experiences with you?</u>
□ To what extent have you given a personal meaning to the experiences of others?
□ To what extent do personal experiences of others differ from each other?

6. Religious renewal

☐ <u>Have you or your group ever introduced new elements to your religious practice?</u>

☐ When you write a ritual, how do you proceed?

☐ How do you decide whether a novel element is suitable to include in your practice?

Appendix C: Summary

Where in the past religion was often depicted as immutable and its rituals as static performances of preconceived systems of belief, now more than ever, its dynamics need to be acknowledged. This requirement is prompted by processes like secularization and individualization, but also by the continually renewing ritualization around big life events. However, religious studies are still a largely descriptive undertaking stressing contextualized diversity. Conversely, general psychology, while sensitive to processes, mainly offers universalist explanations of religious behaviour. Seemingly, then, these disciplines are at odds, but their differences can also be understood as complementary in understanding religious change. The present research project therefore advocates an interdisciplinary approach. By emphasizing change rather than diversity, both context-sensitivity and universalism can be retained without their respective pitfalls, and with relationality rather than essentialism being the guiding principle.

To gain an understanding of processes of religious change, in this project creativity, that most quintessential of human traits, is researched. There are a number of reasons for this choice. First, most obviously, the creative process implies relationality: it coincides with the continuous and mutual adaptations between person and world. Second, somewhat related, a study of creativity informs us about the tension that necessarily exists between thinking and doing, belief and action, imagination and performance. Third, although the term creativity is receiving increased attention in religious studies, it is still lacking a clear conceptualization and is often arbitrarily employed as a heuristic device. A social scientific study in this field is therefore most welcome.

In psychology, creativity (discussed in 1.4) is mostly defined as the ability to generate novelty that is accepted by a group or is at least useful for its creator. For the purposes of the present project, especially creativity as a process is important. This focus is reflected by the use of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *systems perspective of creativity* as a template. His model describes creativity as the result of a tension between *individuals*, *domains* (i.e., repositories of culture) and *fields* (i.e., social environments). The systems perspective is augmented by introducing the notion of *exploratory creativity*, which consists of improvisation and imagination.

Improvisation refers to the performative character of some creative behaviour. Creations that are both performed and undergone in real time—like rituals—are closely linked with improvisation. Even if one has clear intentions and a certain talent or skill for the realization of a specific product, the creative process seems to develop through its own dynamics and as such is difficult to explain by merely relying on priorly available knowledge.

Creativity is also related to receptivity and fantasy, making it *imaginative*. Important here is the individual motivation for religious flights of fancy. In a religious setting, the world is approached on the basis of special rules that only apply in that

context, but that can be shared with others participating in the symbolic action. Not for nothing, rituals are often presented as serious play. By using his imagination, a person can generate experiences that otherwise would have remained out of reach. From this perspective, ritual can be fittingly conceived as a creative exercise in *receptivity*: gaining new experiences, learning to sample meanings, and sharing these with others.

A specific context needs to be explored to observe and explain the role and meaning of creativity. The new religious movement of Wicca (introduced in 1.2) is particularly suitable for this role. Being some seventy years old now, the movement has been around for long enough to have established a steady body of practices and beliefs, but is still young enough to be experimenting with novel forms of practice and developing new branches.

Wicca is a *bricolage* of romanticism, ceremonial magic, and 'cunning folk.' Originally a mystery tradition and nature religion that requires initiation, nowadays Wicca also encompasses non-initiatory groups that are inspired by the belief system. In the case of initiation one acquires the title of priest or priestess and is accepted into a small group. These so-called covens celebrate the sabbats (seasonal festivals of the Celtic calendar) and esbats (full moons). Central in the ritual activity of Wicca is the worship of the Goddess and her two alternating spouses who symbolise the waxing and waning life in the year cycle. Among the non-initiates the ritual activity is more diverse, but in each instant based on the veneration of nature with a decidedly magical flavour. Various aspects of the Wiccan belief system (three of which are addressed in 1.3) contribute to creativity and change: the juxtaposition of ethical versus existential orientations, the fluid concept of deity, and the emphasis on ritual. In the core chapters (3 to 8), these are revisited and developed while other facets, emerging from my fieldwork, are introduced.

With both the concept of creativity and the context of Wicca introduced, the main question of the thesis—*How does religious creativity work in Wicca?*—is then posed and broken down into three operational questions (in 1.5): (1) *What are the contents and structures of the subsystems of the domain, the field, and the person with regard to religious creativity in Wicca?*; (2) *Through what processes do these subsystems of religious creativity interact in the Wiccan context?;* and (3) *What is the relationship between religious creativity in Wicca and religious change?* Although the publications presented in the core chapters have their own aims, the link to the main questions of the research project as a whole is evident in each. Taken together, the core chapters represent all the different phases of the creative process, stringing together the structural subsystems of the domain, field, and person of the adapted version of Csikszentmihalyi's systems perspective and showing the interactions between each component.

Chapter 2 deals with the methodology of the research project. Three means of acquiring data were used. *Focused participatory observation* refers to the parts of the fieldwork that involved partaking in rituals, workshops, and training sessions, as opposed to a mere immersion in the community. Also, *lightly structured depth inter-*

views were conducted. These are primary means of research in this project, eventually yielding material of forty-one informants, ten of which were experts. As a means to augment the data of the other two methods, some *textual research* was carried out, studying various emic sources. Together, the three modes of data gathering enabled triangulation and served as the overarching dataset for each of the six studies this research project comprised of.

Chapter 3, *The Pagan Parallax*, a report of the first of the six studies, deals with the opposing motives of traditionalism and eclecticism in Wicca. The movement has to justify its body of ritual and theology in ever-changing ways, since progressing historical knowledge has made its etiological myths increasingly hard to sustain. In addition, the needs of would-be adherents have shifted. Wicca has now also been taken up by people that emphasize an existential over an ethical orientation, a process that causes Wiccan practice to be adapted to personal needs. By drawing on material from online discussion boards, the intricate ways are shown in which historical and personal arguments contribute to the different takes on Wiccan practices, each impacting on the motives of traditionalism and eclecticism. The study found changing practices of sanctioning, attempts to uphold an image of deviancy vis-à-vis society at large, and a penchant of both traditionalists and eclectics for imaginative religious experiences to contribute to the dynamics of Wicca, even if the movement is framed as based on an unchanging spiritual basis. In terms of the adapted systems model of creativity, the chapter concerns itself with the interplay between the Wiccan elites and gatekeepers that populate the field and the individuals seeking to become involved in Wicca. Apart from this contribution to creativity as a process, the chapter also questions what counts as purposeful creativity.

    Chapter 4, *Sticks and Stones*, ultimately complements the preceding one, even if the perspective shifts somewhat from sociology to anthropology. Where Chapter 3 mainly deals with self-legitimation on a personal level, the present one discusses the collective means to do so. Introducing the Greencraft branch of Wicca as a showcase for the development and diversification of the movement, the motives of traditionalism and eclecticism are demonstrated to sometimes merge. To show how Greencraft incorporates ethnic Celtic spirituality, their utilization of a tree calendar and an adaptation of a particular tarot set are discussed. In addition, the chapter deals with the development of novel practices around stone circles. Although all these renditions of ancient culture can be argued to be examples of neo-colonialism, the study shows that Greencraft's rationale for using and adapting the material has a different character. Their employment of Celtic and esoteric material does not suggest ownership or claim high-fidelity reconstructionism, but is aimed at revivalism, seeking spiritual truths, instead of literal ones. The link with the adapted systems model of creativity lies in the way Greencraft legitimizes itself as one of the groups that make up the Wiccan field, while at the same time it interacts with the cultural repository of the domain, both taking existing material from it and adding its own interpretations of that material, supplemented by novel ideas.

Chapter 5, *Scholar versus Pagan*, continues with the description of Greencraft's creative work. The heart of the chapter is an ethnography of a ritual tree walk as organized by the movement. As such, the chapter also offers a first-person perspective of how people simultaneously try to fit in the field and master the domain. Although Greencraft's tree walk as a creative product of sorts is of central concern, the understanding of creativity in the chapter includes exploration and imagination, as well as performance. The thick description of the walk is also employed to discuss the notions of reflexivity, reactivity, as-if worlds, and the double hermeneutic. Especially in the context of religious studies, these notions raise important issues about how to relate to the people that are being observed. As an impressionist tale that situates the author as a scholar caught between the academic and neo-Pagan world, the chapter shows the double hermeneutic to rather be a problem within a person than between different groups. The ritual tree walk illustrates that both scholar and adherents face the same transitions each time they move from the mundane to the sacred sphere and back. The author puts emphasis on his introspections, as these episodes have been the most informative about the relationship between the researcher and the researched. Comparing his work to that of other scholars of neo-Paganism, he discusses the notions of guesthood and becoming one's own informant. By learning to appreciate the first-hand experiences of the tree meditations, the conclusion is drawn that attunement and the suspension of disbelief are necessary requirements for both scholars and religious practitioners.

In contrast to the perspective of Chapter 5, which effectively is that of the introduction of a person to specific Wiccan material, Chapter 6, *Secrecy and Ritual Hygiene*, to an extent is about keeping outsiders out. Like *Scholar Versus Pagan*, this chapter also contains some reflective material of fieldwork experiences. Its main concern, however, is the role and meaning of secrecy in Wicca. Secrecy, it is argued, exists in those relationships where a supposed inequality of knowledge is actively maintained by managing access to the surplus of that knowledge. Envisaged as a technique that raises the cultural capital of the artefacts—perhaps even their perceived splendour—in the domain secrecy supports explorative creativity to those in the know and, again in terms of the systems approach, marks the border between the person and the field. The core of the chapter consists of two parts. First, a descriptive account of the various emic narratives of secrecy is given, successively relating the topic to mythistory, oath-keeping, magical practice, and mysteries. Second, moving from the manifest level to the latent level of these narratives, explanations, and interpretations are offered of the functions of secrecy, such as the maintenance of ownership, appeal, and association. The latter is explained as ritual hygiene and shown to be the functional opposite of secrecy. In the conclusion, two unintentional implications of the institutionalization of secrecy are discussed: misrepresentation of knowledge and stalled religious development are shown to be detrimental side-effects of upholding secrecy in neo-Paganism.

Chapter 7, *Coining Names, Casting Selves*, explores the Wiccan practice of adopting a Craft name, often taken from the symbols, deities or other imagery of the

movement. These names have self-defining qualities, and as such are instances of the interplay between the one's autobiography and aspirations and the religious canon. With regard to the systems perspective to creativity, the chapter can be said to deal with the impact of the subsystems of the domain on that of the person. Creativity is mainly understood as explorative and improvisatory: new names are in a sense performed, and only acquire their full meaning through practice and interpretative self-narratives. The result of the analysis of the interviews used for this study indicate that names and their referents may be either passively accepted or recognized as one's own and that such impressions contrast with expressive and active understandings in which a name implies one's potency and helps to frame one's aspirations. These actions show how religious creativity can be understood as a virtually autonomous process of incremental change, sustained by many social interactions. The chapter concludes with some suggestions for future investigation of personal mythology, the religious pluralistic self, and how the Wiccan imagination eventually comes to impact on their religious system, a point that is taken up in the next chapter.

Chapter 8, *Domesticating the Imagination*, deals with the individual Wiccan's imaginative creativity by elaborating on how so-called otherworldly experiences are evoked, canalized, and cultivated. With regard to the systems perspective to creativity, the chapter shows how the field distributes the artefacts of the domain to the creative individual, aiding his imagination. In contrast, it also considers the incremental impact of the tutored imaginations of the person on the religious system of the domain. The narrative of the chapter moves from the personal to the ritual to the social contexts of the imagination. First, the acquisition of these encounters is explained, situating them in the context of the autonomous imagination and divided consciousness. Then, by discussing both the challenges and charismatic authority that come with the role of coven leaders, the chapter explains the way the imagination first becomes tutored through specific ritual techniques like guided meditation and then is transformed and exposited as an exegetic story within the setting of a Wiccan working group. After detailing how the self-validation of belief that comes with the sanctification of direct experiences of the Otherworld impacts on Wicca, the chapter concludes with an interpretation of the ways in which the imagination is put to use to orchestrate religious renewal as a group effort.

The overarching conclusions of the study are drawn in Chapter 9, and formulated as answers to the three operational research questions.

First, with regard to the question on the content and structure of the systems model as applied to Wicca, opposing motives were found in each of its subsystems. The domain, the cultural repository consisting of objects, symbols, rituals, techniques, cosmological elements, and general characteristics of Wicca, is typified by a tension between *traditionalism* and *eclecticism*. The allure of the elements in the Wiccan domain depends on their pedigree and perceived authenticity, so an emphatic case can be made for a traditionalist outlook. But given the plurality of the repository, consisting of a very diverse array of elements from various admired cultures and

inspirational historical periods, such traditionalism cannot but embrace *pluralism*. This admittance of different elements, in turn, is only a step away from accepting *a novel combination of these* as a group or individual adherent would see fit. This *eclecticism*, however, has the tendency to deconstruct traditional elements well beyond what conservative Wiccans would accept.

In the Wiccan social group (i.e., the field), a similar conflict can be observed between *egalitarianism* and *elitism*. Although Wicca labels itself as democratic and egalitarian, it relies on its visionaries who develop rationales for practice and contribute to new rituals that both may become canonical. These elites have a tremendous impact on the development of Wicca. To a lesser extent, the same holds for the elders of the various traditions, and even certain scholars. Elitism can also be observed in Wiccans from well-established traditions, who sometimes criticise eclectic groups.

In the individual Wiccan, the motives of *formation* (i.e., self-construction) and *acknowledgement* clash. On the one hand, an individual will seek to construct an identity with the aid of religious imagery and symbols. In this motive, an existential orientation can be observed. On the other hand, there is a need to belong and a need for self-expression that both require acknowledgement of others. This motive relies on a stable identity that is able to communicate its uniqueness.

Second, with regard to the question about the interactions between the subsystems of the individual, the domain and the field, the study found three pairs of complementary processes.

The connection between a single Wiccan adherent and the domain of the movement is about *experientiality*. Such a person's *imagination* may introduce new elements to the cultural repository or alter the meaning of existing ones. The domain, in turn, full of meaningful imagery and techniques as it is, may impact on this individual, if he or she is proficient enough to take them in. This ability is called *receptivity*.

The link between the person and the social group is about *belongingness*. Individual Wiccans will seek to *validate* their personal experiences and interpretations to become accepted by their peers or the caretakers of the movement. The field, in contrast, is aimed at *continuity*, even if this is played out differently on collective and individual levels, with the group seeking stewardship, and individual gatekeepers aiming for ownership, or the maintenance of charismatic authority.

The last pair of interactions, those between the social group and the cultural repository, are about *appropriation*: the orchestrated efforts of preparing material to develop a particular branch of Wicca. Of all the pairs, those of appropriation are perhaps the hardest to tell apart, because they both assume each other. *Reconstruction* is about the adaptation of existing elements of the religious domain, or seeking novel ways to faithfully employ them, whereas in its counterpart, *renewal*, uses the existing material merely as a means to construct a new religious practice.

The third question—only subsidiary to the study as a whole—is about the relationship between religious creativity and change in Wicca. Interpretative, rather than descriptive like the first question or explanatory like the second one, the conclusions drawn here are based on implicit tendencies in Wicca that operate in many different guises and in many different contexts. Purposeful creativity and random change touch each other because of two reasons.

To begin, Wicca is an experiential religion, and as such has gradually developed a sensitivity and perhaps even a language that deals with the aesthetic qualities that come with all of its activities. Hence, Wiccans tune in to the *atmosphere* or 'energy' of their rituals, symbols and ideas. Although how these felt qualities will turn out cannot be fully determined, Wiccans make the effort to impact on them.

Also, Wiccans have become proficient in evoking and embracing chance events in their rituals and practice. So when they are constructing new ways to express their religion, they not only rely on their intentions, but also introduce contingencies through various means like improvisation or the seeking out the meaning of occurring chance events. In the research project, these actions are typified as *intentional non-intentionality*. But the relationship between religious creativity and change is more fundamental: each creative act ultimately introduces its own unpredictability because there is no way of saying how it will turn out.