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Make Belief:
The Art of Inventing Religions

Practise-based PhD (Dissertation)
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MAKE BELIEF

THE ART OF INVENTING RELIGIONS
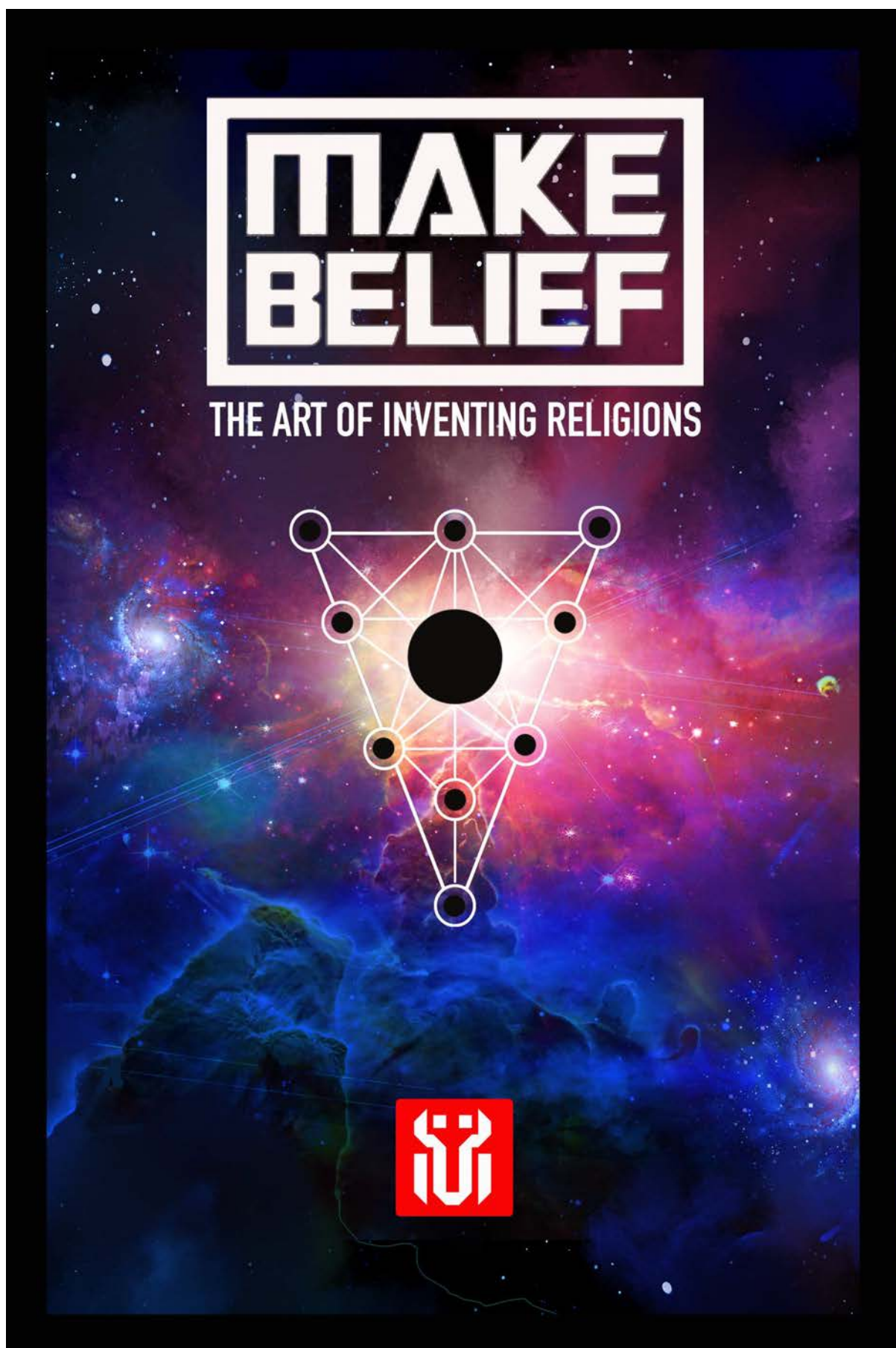
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Attention has recently turned, within the study of New Religious Movements, to the phenomenon of invented religions. Invented religions import transmedial works of speculative fiction from art and popular culture and convert these fictions into scriptures for new forms of religious belief. I approach this phenomenon from the unique position of being both a student and practitioner of invented religions. For the past thirteen years, my work as an artist and cultural engineer has focused upon the transmedial dissemination of a fictional queer religion as art, called RELIGIONVIR.US. My religion invokes sci-fi franchise culture and merges Judeo-Christian iconography with psychedelic, queer and cyberpunk aesthetics, to produce a religion as an ongoing transmedial space opera whose "episodes" have been presented as artworks in over twenty five countries worldwide. RELIGIONVIR.US explores religion as an infective agent capable of multiplying within the living cells of its host, while proposing religion as a form of multimedia production capable of inspiring beliefs, generating worldviews and engineering cultures. This Practise-led PhD explores the fabrication of my own invented religion in relation to others of its kind, as a manual of techniques both studied and utilised to elicit "religious experiences" in secular publics through art. It speculates upon the processes that conspire to transform something "made" into something "believed", the possibility of religion as an artistic medium and probes what happens when people begin to "believe" in something that they know is a fabrication. The contents of my artistic portfolio produced within the auspices of the PhD are presented throughout the dissertation as case studies of "Religious Prosthetics": devices designed with the intent to conjure religious reactions among various publics. *Make Belief: The Art of Invented Religions* probes the intersections of art, religion, myth and popular culture to speculate upon the difference between make-believe and make-belief in an Information Age of post-truth, alternative facts and deep fakes.

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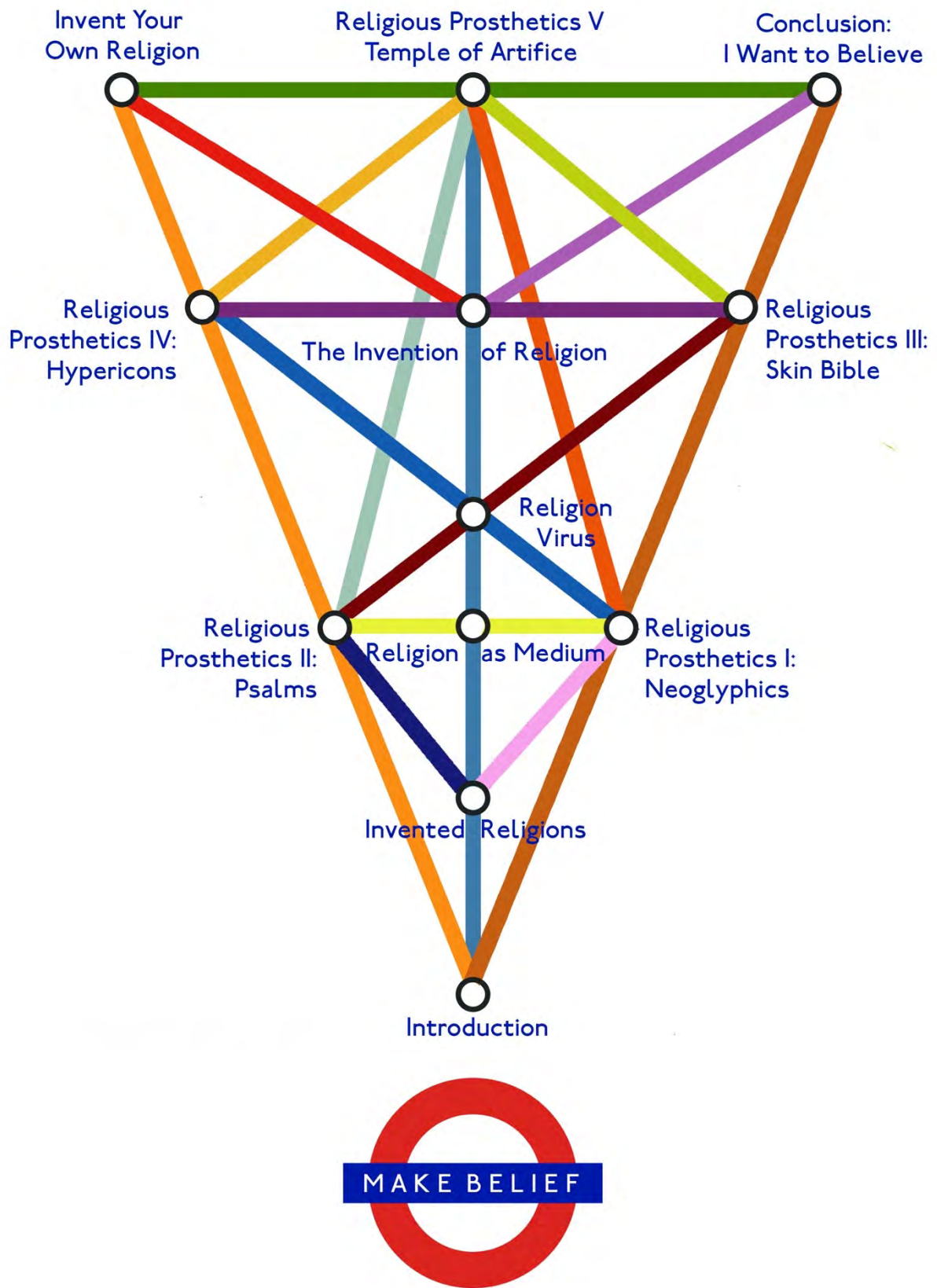| Name of student:	Michael Dudeck		UUN	SClick here to enter text.
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As an artist I have spent the past 13 years inventing a fictional religion as art. My project, called RELIGIONVIR.US, has been performed, exhibited, screened and published in over twenty five countries worldwide. My projects are presented as episodes in an ongoing performative space opera, exploring broadly how religions are constructed by constructing my own religion as a philosophical, ontological exercise. Following many of my ritual performances audience members have approached me to inform me of "religious experiences" they had inside of my performances and installations, although most of these confessors admit to not being religious. I became interested in how religious experiences were constructed and they were possible to artistically manufacture. This thesis is an attempt to probe what constitutes a religious experience and what artistic media or devices are required to elicit such a response. I muse on questions surrounding the nature of belief and art in the information age, proposing religion as an artistic medium, and the notion of religion as a form of multi-media production. I attempt to situate my own invented religion within the study of invented religions, emerging out of religious students and the study of new religious movements. Ultimately this thesis explores my 13-year practise of inventing a religion as art while analysing the phenomena of fictional religions from the unique perspective of being both student and practitioner of invented religions.

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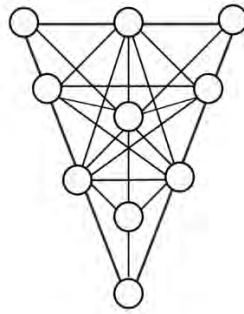| K:\AAPS\D-AcademicAdministration\02-CodesOfPractice,Guidelines&Regulations\24-MainReferencesCopiesPolicies\01-Current\Assessment BOE SCC & Feedback\Forms\ThesisLaySummary	
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[M]Dudeck, *Make Belief Anti-System*, digital image, dimensions variable, 2021.

THE ART OF INVENTING RELIGIONS

INTRODUCTION
MAKE / BELIEVE

Can a person, or a people, believe in something that they know is a fabrication ? How does something 'made' transform into something 'believed' ? What constitutes 'a religious experience' and is it possible to artistically manufacture one ? Is religion an artistic medium ? *Make Belief: The Art of Inventing Religions* excavates these questions through inter-textual commentary and critical exegesis upon my 13-year practise of inventing a religion as art. Throughout this dissertation, my own invented religion is examined alongside of other invented religions that have arisen from countercultures in the West from the 1960s to the present.

Invented religions (IRs) are unique among new religious movements (NRMs) emerging since the second World War, in that they tend to import works of speculative fiction as new forms of 'scripture', and as such have also been referred to as fiction-Based (Davidsen) and hyperreal (Possamai) religions. Examples of invented religions explored herein include Jediism (Star Wars), Matrixism (The Matrix), Tolkien Spirituality (Lord of the Rings), Chaos Magick (The Cthulhu Mythos), The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster (Pastafarianism), Discordianism (from Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*) and Scientology (Dianetics) among others.

I approach this phenomenon from the unique perspective of being both a student and practitioner of invented religions. For the past thirteen years I have focused upon the invention and dissemination of a fictional queer religion and space opera called RELIGIONVIR.US, which has been performed, exhibited, screened and published in over twenty-five countries worldwide (See *Religionvir.us by Country*, p.117). Tactics of transmission have included: ritual and liturgical performance, museological installations, the composition of scriptures and psalms (performed and inscribed in invented languages), the crafting of a fictional bible, the construction of a digital temple, the fabrication of artifacts, vestments and spiritual merchandise, as well as the installation of chapels, cathedrals and other ritual spaces. RELIGIONVIR.US performs how religious source codes can be hacked, scrambled and creatively reconstructed to produce hybrid religious experiences in secular publics. In this thesis I propose religion is an artistic form of multi-media production, capable of inspiring beliefs, generating worldviews and engineering cultures.

My work appropriates dominant Judeo-Christian religious motifs and remixes them, importing sci fi, queer and psychedelic aesthetics to produce new hybrid strains of religious iconography. The appropriation of dominant Judeo-Christian motifs is strategic in pre-shaping the Western publics' response to my work as *religious*. I refer to these contemporary remixes of iconographic source code as "religious prosthetics": artistic fabrications intentionally manufactured to invoke religious associations. Recipes for the assemblage and transmission of these prosthetics are presented throughout the dissertation as case-studies.

In *Make Belief*, I muse upon the possibilities of religion as media and/or medium, and I propose invented religions as a laboratory for non-dogmatic experiments with belief in the Information Age. I propose art as a fertile contact zone[1] where the meta-narratives of religion can be carefully deconstructed through critical practise, and reconstructed through artistic intervention and scholarly discourse. I remain keenly aware of the problems and debates that accompany my odyssey through these contested terrains. Wherever possible, I contextualize the debates my research ignites, through historical analysis, cultural theory and hybrid exegesis. Rather than

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[1] Indigenous scholar James Clifford describes the Museum as a *Contact Zone* - citing a term coined by Mary Louise Pratt who describes it as a "Social [space] where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power such as colonialism, slavery or their aftermaths" [Pratt, 34]. Clifford furthers this description as "the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict" [Clifford, 192]. Herein we see the construct and model as a specific site of "colonial encounter" -- which grounds the theory within discourses of Post or De-Colonial theory.
James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997: 188 – 219.
Pratt, Mary Louise. "Arts of the Contact Zone." Profession 1991. New York: Modern Language Association P, 1991: 33-40.

providing definitive arguments for or against such debates, I try to sculpt these problems into experiences, as artworks, that in turn initiate contemporary debates through public, artistic and intellectual discourse.

As such, this thesis is presented as part manual, part manifesto, part (auto)ethnographic treatise, part grimoire; a *cookbook* that shows the recipes I have designed to produce my religion as art. I approach the theoretical, artistic and phenomenological dimensions of my invented religion alongside of its' peers, through a series of *parables* and case studies, while presenting transmedial works from my PhD portfolio as models of religious prosthetics. The artworks included have been produced within the past four years of this PhD (2017-2021) with a few exceptions of works constructed earlier included only to give context to the overall project. My sources range and vary across historical time and space, and are all woven together to form a tapestry of knowledge. I mix together ontologies to produce compelling mutations then analyse and exegete the constituent elements combined.

While I employ a multiplicity of media to manufacture my invented religion, performance, remains the primary ingredient necessary for RELIGIONVIR.US transmissions. Performance is an umbrella medium, one which unites a range of media under one banner, with my performative presence activating the artifacts I design, sculpt, compose and implement. Writing, both creative and scholarly is another central device used to chronicle my performative interventions, and to compose my own scriptures, psalms and manuscripts. I merge several different strategies of writing together in both artistic and scholarly work, preferring the logos to resemble a polyphonic symphony rather than as authoritative, objective or inherently ethnographic. As the performance artist Guillermo Gomez-Pena writes,

> "Most performance artists are also writers, but only a handful of us
> write for publication. We theorize about art, politics and culture,
> but our interdisciplinary methodologies are different from those of
> academic theorists. They have binoculars; we have radars."[2]

What I present, deconstruct, reconstruct and evaluate within this thesis are signals assembled from my own performative radar, with a radius that samples artifacts from art, religion, popular culture and various other forms of cultural theory and production. These are the tools and models that I use and re-use, read and re-read, and continue to re-cycle in the ongoing process of *fictioning* my religion as art.

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[2] Guillermo Gomez-Pena, "In Defence of Performance Art" in Live Art and Performance, ed. Adrian Heathfield (New York: Routledge Press, 2004). 78.

(RELIGIOUS) BACKGROUND

I was adopted into and raised within an Ashkenazi Jewish Family, whose ancestors emigrated to Canada and the United States from Eastern Europe and Russia at the turn of the 20th century. My adoptive ancestors settled on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe), Ininew (Cree), Oji-Cree, Dene, Dakota and the Metis nations, referred to as Treaty 1 territory, or *Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada*. I grew up Jewish inside of a Christian-dominated culture, in a city with the largest urban Indigenous population in North America. These three cultural containers, merged with my own hybrid genetic database comprising of largely Celtic, Scandinavian and Germanic DNA, nourished a unique and highly personal synthesis of religious and cosmological understandings of the world and my place within it. My personal and artistic belief systems are self-organized as nomadic and transitory *processes* that remain in states of constant flux and endless revision. My life and work, endlessly intertwined, represent an artistic, intellectual, spiritual, prophetic and messianic pilgrimage, which has led me to invent, and inhabit a religion as art.

As an artist and scholar of religion intertwined, I have served as artist in residence at America's oldest independent theological seminary,[3] undergone Masters and Doctoral work jointly supervised between Fine Arts and Religious Studies departments,[4] lectured and published at conferences and in academic journals at the intersection of religion, art, media and queer culture, and continue to serve as a collaborator on multiple religion/art-themed research initiatives. I am in the early stages of curating a series of performances and video works by contemporary artists exploring religion through time-based art for the upcoming British Association for the Study of Religion (BASR) annual conference in Edinburgh in 2021. I am a member of the *Performance, Religion and Spirituality Working Group* of the International Federation of Theatre Research, and am currently functioning as an artistic advisor and researcher for *Narratives of Identity*, a research project examining new religious movements and hybrid spiritual identities in Canada. In all of these capacities I perform my artistic research as a hybrid of subjective and objective analysis, probing

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[3] I was artist-in-residence at The Institute for Art, Religion and Social Justice at Union Theological Seminary in New York City from Jan-May 2014 (Phase One: Genesis) and October 2014-Jan. 2015 (Phase Two Exodus). For more information please visit: http://artreligionandsocialjustice.org/residency/michaeldudeck/index.html

[4] I attended Concordia University's Individualized Program for my MA, which allowed me to combine research in Studio Art, Religious Studies, Art History and Anthropology. The Indiviudualized Program allowed me to take courses and seminars in all faculties towards the production of my Practise-based Master's thesis *The Genesis Complex: Queering the Myths of Human Sexuality* which re-read the Eden Origin Myth from a queer lens and re-mixed it to produce a new mythological story. My current Practise-based PhD *Make Belief: The Art of Invented Religions*, is jointly supervised by Edinburgh College of Art and the School of Divinity.

the intersection of artistic fabrication, speculative fabulation[5] and the production of religious experiences through Art. I construct and analyse narrative, myth, ritual and performance through ethnographic observation and critical writing in order to provide commentary upon the fictional religion I produce.

MAKE BELIEF vs. MAKE BELIEVE

"Imagination is the only weapon in the war against reality."

-Anonymous
(*fictionally* misattributed to Lewis Carroll)

The title of my thesis, *Make Belief,* is a metaplasm derived from the vernacular 'Make-Believe', where the root-word (believe) is converted from a verb into a noun (belief). *Make-Believe* is a framework used to describe games enacted by children, alone or in groups, wherein 'actors' perform elaborate fictions and ask those interacting with them to treat their fictions as *real*. These performances occupy temporal play sessions, though sometimes they permeate and crossover into reality, such as a child's invisible friend or a sustained fictional avatar. These prolonged fantasies author new realities and worldviews that challenge the precepts of the *world-as-is*, and illustrate how supple "adult" conceptions of "the real" *really* is.

The division between fantasy and reality lies at the heart of this thesis and at the core of my practise. As an artist, I knowingly appropriate adolescent aesthetics (comic books, animations, sci-fi tv series and films, superhero costumes, 80s synth music, psychedelic colour palettes) and insist that all objects, environments and worlds I

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[5] I use the term Speculative Fabulation in the manner of Donna Haraway, which she has written about in her book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Cthulhucene* (2016) and spoken about directly in Fabrizio Terranova's documentary *Donna Haraway: Storytelling for Earthly Survival* (2016). Haraway describes SF as a "critical germ" for her research, but explains why she prefers the term *speculative fabulation*, claiming the difference between narration and fabulation are critical because "narrative" in the English language has been domesticated and "occupied by a particular branch of literary critical theory", unlike the French narration speculativ which she argues is far more *open*. Haraway is interested in un-domesticated forms of storytelling "much more closely tied to the everyday storytelling practises of storytellers who aren't all writers, who aren't all professionals… the ways mothers and fathers tell stories to tell children, or the way someone tells the story of their life to a reporter…". While trained and accomplished as a visual artist, and a skilled academic writer, I make story in a manner that is far more typical of what Haraway describes than many of the literary figures I examine. The 'narratives' of RELIGIONVIR.US have largely been told to audiences during live encounters in a practise of oral performance, and only now I am starting to write them down, but without the added weight of becoming a 'writer'. Haraway talks about 'fabulation' being rooted in the fable (which is also the root of the critical queer word *fabulous*) "wild facts inhabit fables…often full of children and animals and creatures of the imagination and impossible worlds."
Fabrizio Terranova, dir. *Donna Haraway Storytelling for Earthly Survival (2016: Brooklyn, New York, USA: Icarus FIlms) DVD.*
Haraway, Donna. *Staying with the Trouble Making Kin in the Cthulhucene.*(London: Duke University Press, 2016).

produce must look like they were *made* by my own hands, even when using digital and technological devices. For me, DIY is more than an aesthetic device, it is a way to communicate that all of the devotional objects and religiosity I produce is inherently *artificial*, and can be produced by anyone, anywhere with some time and some talent. This is a *queer* strategy to entice my audience to immerse themselves in a fiction that pedagogically performs how to "do it yourself,", or Invent Your Own Religion (see pages 192-198). I enact rituals of "serious" make-believe in galleries, museums, festivals and other cultural containers that are intentionally reminiscent of children's' fantasy worlds. This echoes an inclination I expand upon in the conclusion of this thesis, called *I Want to Believe* – that the overt fictionality of my religion is precisely what makes others consider believing in it.

My own positionality as a self-described "Witch Doctor" activates the problem of make-belief vs. make-believe in audience and critics alike. It initiates questions as to whether or not I truly *believe* that I am a sorcerer (Make-Belief) or if my positionality is an ironic, satirical performance (Make-Believe.) RELIGIONVIR.US as an entity furthers this debate, as I am regularly asked whether or not my religion is "real" and if I myself "believe" in it. The performance theorist, director and author Richard Schechner describes the difference between make-believe and make-belief as follows:

> Playing professional roles, gender and race roles, and shaping one's
> identity are not make-believe actions...The performances of everyday
> life "make belief"— create the very social realities they enact. In "make-
> believe" performances, the distinction between what's real and what's
> pretended is kept clear. Children playing "doctor" or "dress-up" know
> that they are pretending. On stage – various conventions – the stage itself
> as a distinct domain, the opening and closing a curtain, or dimming the
> lights, the curtain call, etc. – mark the distinction between pretending
> and being. When people go to the movies or the theatre, they know that
> the social and personal worlds enacted are not those of the actors but those
> of the characters. Of course, it is this distinction that first the avant-garde
> and later the media and the internet have successfully sabotaged.[8]

Works of Speculative fiction depict acts of *make-believe* across media, aiming for the viewer to suspend their disbelief for the period through which they are immersed in the fiction. But, somewhat unexpectedly, fans of *certain* fictions become fan-*atics* – *believing* that the worlds in the fictions they champion resemble reality far more effectively than what they have thus far encountered in the "real." Practitioners and parishioners of invented religions question the divide between make-belief and make-believe by forcing a reconsideration of what fictions can become 'true' and what fictions are just fictions. Those who 'believe' that Christ, Moses, Muhammed

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[8] Richard Schechner. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. (Routledge: New York. 2002) 35.

or the Buddha *actually* walked the earth and performed their feats in the ancient past, can be read as living in sustained states of 'make-believe' when viewed through the lens of invented religions.

HYPERSTITIONS

The term *hyperstition*, coined by the CCRU (Cybernetic Culture Research Unit) in the late 1990s, sought to describe how certain ideas, when seeded into culture and repeated, can transform into *realities*. Superstition emerged as a means to explain mysterious circumstances with the knowledge available, and thus are deeply connected to worldbuilding, fantasy and religion. But whereas superstitions "are merely false beliefs...hyperstitions – by their very existence as ideas -- function casually to bring about their own reality."[9] I am interested in the model of the *hypersition* as it relates to the practise of what I refer to as cultural engineering, in the potential of intentionally designed cultural products to serve as blueprints to author alternative futures.

Many adherents of invented religions believe that the entities, realities and worlds encountered in the works of SF they cite as scripture, are *descriptions* rather than inventions. But most of the authors of these fictions-turned-scriptures outright deny any claims of supernatural inspiration, or any intent to produce new religious movements whatsoever. These denials seem to bear no relevance on how adherents of invented religions *make belief*. I am interested in the notion of the hyperstitional, as one lens through which to perceive how things 'made' become 'believed', and how things 'believed' become 'true'. Positioning a fictional religion as art within the public sphere can be read from this lens as a hyperstitional act: the question of whether or not my religion is real is eclipsed by its' perpetuation and proliferation as a cultural product.

The Institutional Theory of Art, according to art historian James Elkins, declares that "art is whatever is exhibited in galleries in major cities, bought by museums of contemporary art, shown in biennales and the *Documenta*, and written about in [artistic] periodicals" – and this definition was "invented to make it possible to write about conceptual art, performative art and other kinds of work that did not fit previous definitions."[10] While my own work is presented and performed in a wide trajectory of cultural arenas (ranging from highly institutional to overtly anti-institutional), my positioning as an established international contemporary artist

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[9] Delphi Carstens & Nick Land (2009): "Hyperstition: An Introduction", Merliquify, online at http://merliquify.com/collaborations/hyperstition-tedx-talk.php (accessed 21 Dec., 2020).
[10] Elkins, James. *On The Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2004),1.

having performed, exhibited and screened in major art museums[11], biennales[12], international festivals[13], while bearing long-lasting affiliations with a number of leading artists of my time[14] alongside a considerable bibliography of reviews, features and mentions in leading art periodicals and high profile publications[15] provides RELIGIONVIR.US with much more than cultural currency; it infuses it with the status of being an "institutionally sanctioned" religion. This is yet another conceptual device intentionally employed and manipulated in order to make my religion "real."

BUT IS IT REAL ?

Of all the questions my work provokes, the one that seems to be asked of me most, is: *But is your religion real?* This question appears in other guises such as "Are you seeking followers?" or "Do you personally believe in the fabrications you produce?". In a strategy appropriated from Andy Warhol, I typically avoid answering these questions directly, instead I approach them through *indirect* means. I typically find interesting ways to reverse the question and inquire as to how the querent perceives of and defines reality, and if, in fact my work appeared 'real' to them and their frameworks.

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[11] Private and publicly funded Art Museums I have performed/exhibited at include *Museum Insel Hombroich* (Neuss, Germany, 2019/2014) *Kunstwerke ICA* (Berlin, Germany 2018), *Zacheta National Gallery of Art* (Warsaw, Poland, 2016), *Grazer Kunstverein* (Graz, Austria, 2015), *Kunstinstituut Melly* (formerly FKA Witte de With in Rotterdam, Holland, 2013), The Brucebo Museum (Visby, Sweden, 2013), and The Winnipeg Art Gallery (Winnipeg, Canada 2012).

[12] Bienalles I have officially presented work at include *ABRACADABRA*, the 6th Moscow Bienalle for Young Art curated by Lucrezia Calabro Visconti in Moscow Russia, 2018, and as part of The Research Pavillion of the 58th International Art Exhibition "May You Live in Interesting Times", La Bienalle di Venezia (Venice Biennale), curated by Emma Cocker, Cordula Daus and Lena Seraphin in 2019.

[13] International festivals I have performed, screened or exhibited in include: Hamburg Maschine (Hamburg, Germany 2019), Performensk International Festival of Performative Art (Minsk, Belarus, 2018), LAPSody Live Art Conference and Festival (Helsinki, Finland, 2015, 2017), PROGRESS Festival of New Performance (Toronto, Canada 2015), Venice Experimental Cinema and Performance Art Festival (Venice, Italy, 2014), Performatorium Festival of Queer Performance (Regina, Canada) 2014, Visualeyes Festival of Performance Art (Edmonton, Canada, 2013) among others.

[14] I have ongoing collaborations with AA Bronson from General Idea (see pages #), Marina Abramovic and the Marina Abramovic Institute (MAI) (see pages #),and Guillermo Gomez-Pena and La Pocha Nostra, the Canadian artist Evergon, among others.

[15] My work has been featured in The New York Times, The Village Voice, Frieze Magazine, Canadian Art, Border Crossings, Spike Art Quarterly, Hyperallergic, NeverApart Magazine, The Globe and Mail, Modern China Weekly, as well my work has been featured in major art publications and catalogues such as The Younger than Jesus Artist Director (New Museum, New York), Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present (MoMA Press), Winnipeg Now (Winnipeg Art Gallery Press), The Watermill Center: A Laboratory for Performance (Daco Verlag), Hamburg Maschine: Exploring a Different Digitality and Evergon: Theatres of Intimacy (Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec Press) among others.

As a result of this strategy, curators, critics, writers and art historians have read my work as an "unmistakably authentic spiritual expression"[18], interpreted that I have "actually created a spiritual practise that [I live] within"[19], and describe my construction of a world "where magic and ritual reign...where beings can be seen and protected until they too find their voice."[20] Other commentators paint me as "a new age plastic shaman"[21], an "astonishingly tone-deaf oblivious North American" with an "uber effected and hyper serious persona"[22] that "puts the sham in shaman."[23] I welcome such projections as critical fodder for my research, and as symptomatic of the spread of my RELIGIONVIR.US through critical cultural vectors.

What led me to doctoral work was a particular set of responses that came in the form of audience confessions following exposure to RELIGIONVIR.US transmissions. Members of the public of all ages, sexes, classes, genders, and cultural backgrounds claim to have underwent "religious experiences" inside of the ritual artworks I have produced. In many cases, according to their descriptions, this experience was on their parts, unintended. A vast majority confessed to having approached my work with overt scepticism, and sometimes even hostility towards the implied narcissism of positioning of myself as a fabricated messiah. But much to their surprise, of those who chose to confide in me, the majority of these confessors claim a *transcendental* experience they independently chose to use the word "religious" to describe.

In the realm of performative encounter, many artistic actions are described using terms such as "mystical", "enchanting", "hallucinatory" or even "transcendental", but to describe a performance art act as having generated a "religious experience" was for me atypical. Many 'followers' of my religion-as-art on social media have contacted me in order to organize pilgrimages to the places where RELIGIONVIR.US transmissions will be performed. In more than one instance, people whom I had never met in person travelled internationally to a performance or exhibition with the express purpose of having a "religious experience" in the work. These varied conceptions and approaches to the phenomenon led me to want to probe the very concept of the "religious experience" and deconstruct it under the auspices of my Practise-based PhD. Herein, I examine the constituent elements of the premise in effort to ascertain if "religious experiences" can be intentionally produced through the artistic manipulation of religious codes.

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[18] Mark Mann. "The Temptation of Everything in Michael Dudeck's Messiah Complex 5.0" Momus: A Return to Art Crtiticism. February, 2015. Accessed Dec. 25, 2020. https://momus.ca/the-temptation-of-everything-in-michael-dudecks-messiah-complex-5-0/

[19] SummerWorks Festival. "PROGRESS: Jordan Tannahill on The Messiah Complex 5.0" Youtube video, 2:51, Jan. 30, 2015. Date accessed: Jan. 5, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQEdoEDQY74

[20] Ibid.

[21] Steven Leyden Cochrane. "Walla Walla Bing Bang: Michael Dudeck's Amygdala" FUSE Magazine. April 2011, Issue 34:2, pp.40-41.

[22] Kegan McFadden. "Performatorium 2014: Queering the Prairies". Canadian Art Quarterly, Feb. 5, 2014.

[23] Katie Sonnenborn. "AA Bronson's School for Young Shamans" Frieze Magazine, Summer 2008, London UK.

Situating my religion as a transmedial space opera within the domain of speculative fiction aligns my practise with the larger phenomena of invented religions using works of SF as source code for new religious beliefs. What differentiates my practise from other invented religions is that I am at once the architect of the religion, the designer of its iconographies and the author of its mythologies.[24]. This runs contra to the majority of invented religions which tend to be officially formed and authored by followers or fans.

The closest example I have found to my fusion of producing a religion and a mythology together is L. Ron Hubbard (1911-1986), the sci-fi author and founder of the Church of Scientology. Hubbard spent several years as a science fiction author before producing his own religion, famously as a strategy in order to become rich.[25]. Scientology functions as a corporate mystery cult[26], wherein members rise through its ranks and gain deeper access to its secrets, many of which take the form of SF-as-scripture composed by Hubbard.[27] I claim Hubbard is my closest conceptual relative because, like me, he knowingly set out to produce a religion and used his skills as an artist to make it *real.* What differentiates my own work from his is that I have produced my religion as a conceptual art project, whose aims do not include mass conversions, achieving "official religious" status, or gaining legitimacy. I also did not undertake this path with the intent to acquire wealth, although, astonishingly, I have been able to hammer out a decent living for the past thirteen years exclusively from producing a religion as art.

Contemporary artists tend to *reference* religion rather than produce their own, despite a few here and there who have done so on a project by project basis. The Chinese artist *Chen Tianzhou* creatively merges eastern and western iconographies to produce a new queer religion that emphasises club culture. His 2015 performative exhibition at *Palais de Tokyo* featured a club-style butoh performance as well as a series of paintings, drawings, installation and videos that "incorporate a number of religious symbols into iconographic elements borrowed from several urban subcultures which are shared by a global youth culture."[28]" According to Tianzhou, his work is centred around

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[24] A Gesamtkunstwerk is a "total artwork" that brings together many forms of art into one. The term was developed by German writer and philosopher K.F.E Trahndorff in 1827, and popularized by opera composer Richard Wagner in two 1849 essays. Wolfman, Ursula Rehn. "Richard Wagner's Concept of the Gesamtkunstwerk", Interlude. March 12, 2013. Online. Accessed: Feb. 1, 2021. https://interlude.hk/richard-wagners-concept-of-the-gesamtkunstwerk/

[25] Methvin, Eugene. "Scientology: Anatomy of a Frightening Cult". Reader's Digest, May 1980. Print.

[26] Mystery Cults, or Mystery Societies flourished in the first three centuries of the Christian era in the Roman Empire, developed out of local and national cults later to become cosmopolitan. They typically involved several grades of participation following initiation, so that those who sought to rise in the movement passed through different grades and accessed the secrets that each grade bestowed upon it's members. Popular examples of ancient mystery cults include The Cult of Isis, the Cult of Mithra, and the Cult of the Magna Mater.

[27] Rothstein, Mikael. "His name was Xenu. He used renegades: Aspects of Scietology's Founding Myths" in Scientology, ed. James R. Lewis, (London: Oxford University Press) 2009, pp. 365-388.

[28] Khairuddin Hori (curator). Tianzhou Chen. Palais de Tokyo. June, 2015. Date accessed: September 25, 2020. https://www.palaisdetokyo.com/en/event/tianzhuo-chen

creating a fictional religion/fictional religious experience, I was
interested in subculture, pop culture, anime, and I try to bring
all those subculture interests into the realm of religions, kind of like
making up a religion, a contemporary religion that was more to do
with the world I am living in.[29]

Dutch artist Floris Schonfeld historicized a fictional group of spiritualists and academics from 1920-1970 called the *Damagomi Group*[30], but this was a singular artwork in a much broader oeuvre concerned with the invention of fictional scholarly discourses. Saya Woolfalk, a New York-based artist of mixed Black and Japanese heritage, has produced the *ChimaTEK* series, which depicts a fictional race of women able to alter their own genetic make-up and fuse with plants. While her installations present neo-religious iconographies of this invented sub-species. Woolfalk does not overtly produce a religion, but rather a new form of visual fantasy or science fiction that has religious elements embedded within it.

Certainly queer, feminist and post-colonial appropriations of speculative fiction in art, such as Afrofuturism, Indigenous Futurism, Sinofuturism, Neopaganism and Queer Futurity do often create religions at the core of their artworks, many of these are processes of *re-claiming* spiritual systems that were forcibly removed by the violence of colonialism and/or the heteropatriarchal policing of religious law. Contemporary artists like Matthew Barney, Gabriela Fridriksdottir, Charles Avery and Brian Catling produce mythological worlds that have religious components, but their works are more rooted in the mythopoetic and fantastic, where religion at most plays a supporting role. In contrast, a great many science fiction and fantasy authors invent religions as part of the narratives they construct, but in virtually all cases (save for L. Ron Hubbard) these invented religions are produced as narrative devices within larger, multi-layered world-building initiatives.

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[29] Palais de Tokyo. "INTERVIEW TIANZHOU CHEN." Youtube video. 3:32. Published: July 7, 2015. Date accessed: Sept. 25, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9SRxrxxUv-I

[30] According to the artists website, the Damagomi Project "recounts the history of the fictional Damagomi Group; a group of spiritualists and academics that was active in Northern California from the 1920s until the late 1970s. The project has the form of archive which consists of an ever expanding series of works that piece together the history of the group."
Floris Schonfeld. "A Brief History of the Damagomi Group(fragment)". Floris Schonfeld, 2013. Date accessed: Sept. 25, 2020. http://www.florisschonfeld.com/the-damagomi-project

Saya Woolfalk, *ChimaTEK: Hybridization Visualization System*, mixed media installation with video, 108 x 91 x 19-1/2", (Leslie Tonkonow Artworks + Projects, New York, USA) 2015.
http://www.sayawoolfalk.com/hybridization-visualization-system

Chen Tianzhou, Ksana II / 剎那 「貳」2018 Performance, Duration: 210 min, Performed by: Ylva Falk, Beio, Ndoho, Felix-Florian Todtloff, Igor Dewe, Khng Khan Faurschou Foundation, Venice. http://tianzhuochen.com/archives/1562
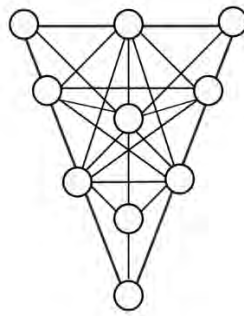
METHODOLOGY

"Art practice, that positions itself between subject and audience
in order to raise questions about routine behaviour and habitual
thought, offers a way forward which may fly in the face of acc-
eptable logic, but in so doing, asks disturbing and/or constructive-
ly disorienting questions. Beyond the strictures of the spoken and
written word, its capacity is to deploy image, sound or more gener-
ally the speculative juxtaposition of disparate elements and to
gather and compare observations through an encounter. It does
not aim to find reductive solutions or conclusions but to instigate
the possibility that we, individually or collectively, may practice-
ally look again and see with new eyes how things in the world
are configured."

-Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson
What We Can Do: Art Methodologies and Parities in Meeting[31]

I deploy the speculative juxtaposition of disparate elements in my artistic and
theoretical work, to reassemble fragments of deconstructed meta-narratives into new
hybrid mythologies, while performing critical exegesis upon the reconstructive
processes I employ. While avoiding didactic or hermeneutic descriptions of artistic,
spiritual or scholarly intent, my experimental cartographies diagram the properties
of the situations I produce – circumventing reductive solutions and conclusions and
favouring instead theoretical models of *parable* and *experimental exegesis*. These, of
course, are self-styled appropriations of established theological devices and
interpretative strategies, re-mixed in the spirit of reconstruction as both artistic mode
and theoretical model.

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[31] Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson. "What We Can Do: Art Methodologies and Parities in Meeting " in
Beyond Human: From Animality to Transhumanism, Charlie Blake, Claire Molloy & Steven Shakespeare (eds).
New York: Continuum, 2012, 77.

My interest in reconstruction emerged as a response to my training in postmodern practises of deconstruction. The French philosopher, sociologist and literary theorist Jean Francois Lyotard (1924-1998), coined the term 'postmodernism', defining it broadly as "incredulity towards metanarratives', then proposed postmodernity as the 'end of grand narratives'.[32] The postmodernist's duty, I *believed*, was to reign in transcendental inclinations and instead perform dissections upon one's own motivations as an antidote to the harm caused by the violence of grand narratives. Following my initiation into practises of critical theory, I began to consider that the deconstructive impulse was only the first stage in a much larger process of taking things apart in order to put them back together. But I was never interested in putting them back together in the way that they were before; my interest has always been in creatively re-shaping that whose preliminary structures I had previously dismantled.

I felt an urgent imperative towards the re-mixing and re-assembling of meta-narratives from the dismembered components I had been trained to deconstruct. As an artist interested in liveness, embodiment and the artist-as-subject, I began to imagine my reconstructive instinct as performative and therefore inherently pedagogical; the invention of a fictional queer religion was always meant to be instructive. I sought to perform how anyone could re-write the religious codes they were imprinted with, and produce their own religion through *Art*. My instincts developed into a procedure, which I still use today and whose skeletal forms structure the four-step methodological apparatus I employ in this thesis:

1)Deconstruction
(taking meta-narratives apart)

2)Re-Construction
(re-assembling the deconstructed components into a new hybrid forms)

3)Transmission
(the presentation of those new form to various publics
through various vectors of transmission)

4) Observation
(the analysis of the new configurations produced, mapping their affects in the
publics they been presented to, in relation to the
original deconstructed metanarrative).

Thus, the very act of producing my own religion was from the onset framed as a reconstructive, durational, performative act. The transmissions RELIGIONVIR.US

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32 Jean-Francois Lyotard. *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*. (Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (trans.) Manchester: Manchester University Press; 1984.

presents to the public function as individual experiments in an ongoing mythology that lives in flux and constant re-vision. My art practise began and persists as a hybrid of performative ritual and conceptual alchemy, wherein theoretical processes are inscribed directly onto and into the transmedial mythopoesis I produce.

RECONSTRUCTION

"The Alchemists had two components to their philosophy. These were the principles of *Solve* and *Coagula*. *Solve* was basically the equivalent of analysis – it was taking things apart to see how they work. *Coagula* was basically synthesis – it was trying to put the disassembled pieces back together, so they worked more efficiently… There has recently in literature for example been a wave of postmodernism, deconstructionism – this is *Solve*. Perhaps it is time in the arts for a little more c*oagula*. Having deconstructed everything perhaps we really should be starting to think about putting everything back together."

-Alan Moore[33]

In 2010, cultural theorists Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker introduced *Metamodernism* as a "structure of feeling", describing an influx of new artistic and theoretical trends in millennial art distinctive from the postmodernisms that preceded them. Metamodernism is "neither a manifesto, nor a social movement, stylistic register or philosophy" but more "a structure of feeling" that emerges from, and reacts to, the postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today's stage of global capitalism."[34] Vermeulen and Van Den Akker identified 5 key themes emerging in the early 2000s that marked this cultural shift away from postmodernism: (1) the return to storytelling, (2) new forms of political engagement, (3) the "new sincerity"[35] (4) renewed interest in craft and (5) affect. As a structure of feeling, they claim Metamodernism as an 'attitude' or 'approach'-- citing Frederic Jameson's notion of Postmodernism as a cultural logic[36]-- that chronicles attempts within Western Capitalism to 'escape' the irony and desperation of postmodern cynicism to arrive at a state of post-irony, or informed naiveté, a reaching to transcend postmodernist distrust rooted in paranoid scepticism.

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[33] "Alan Moore on Magic." Online Video Clip. Youtube. Wash Your Brain. Dec. 3, 2013. Date Accessed: Oct. 31, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1qACd0wHd0

[34] Robin Van Den Akker & Timotheus Vermuleun (eds). Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 5.

[35] "Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker: Notes on Metamodernism." Youtube video, 22:54. "ArtEZ studium generale," Oct. 17, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WPYFvB2DIc Date accessed: Jan. 6, 2019.

[36] Frederic Jameson. *Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism*. New York: Duke University Press, 1991.

Vermeulen and Van den Akker's definition of Metamodernism fell on fertile ground. From 2009-2016 they ran *Notes on Metamodernism*, a web-zine and transnational research project documenting developments through the Metamodern lens. Its founders discerned that their structure of feeling "evokes a continuous oscillation between seemingly modern strategies and ostensibly postmodern tactics, as well as a series of practices and sensibilities ultimately beyond (i.e. meta) these worn-out categories."[37] In terms of storytelling, Vermeulen and Van den Akker summarized postmodernisms' aversion to the meta-narrative as "whatever happens don't tell big stories."[38] They began to notice an emerging inclination amongst millennial artists to produce new hybrid forms of meta-narrative that "show they know of the problems"[39] of grand narratives. They observed how Metamodern artists "increasingly abandon the aesthetic precepts of deconstruction, parataxis and pastiche in favour of aesthetical notions of reconstruction, myth and metataxis."[40]

Brendan Dempsey, an artist, writer and scholar claims that Metamodernism involves "daring to imagine transcendence again."[41] Dempsey argues that reconstruction asserts a unique form of transcendence

> without forfeiting postmodern immanence as it reconstructs
> artificial paradigmatic models for the twenty first century. In
> contrast to Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst as mascots of postmodern
> plenty and pastiche, Post-Contemporary (i.e., Metamodern) artists
> activating re-constructive methodologies are meeting the breakdown
> of that old system with constructive (re)visions.[42]

Dempsey describes this as a kind of "metamodern mythopoeia" that engineers new paradigmatic models disguised as works of art. Through this mythopoetic practise of constructing systems-as-art, "mythologies are invented: liturgies, hymns, ceremonies, scriptures, deities, all as an artist paints a scene. 'Theology' becomes a creative and exploratory act, done for the sensation of the thing itself...the most successful metamodern mythopoeia are compelling; indeed, they create an almost convincing sense of transcendence. One even entertains the possibility of being converted to one's own invented religion..."[43]

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[37] Robin Van Den Akker & Timotheus Vermuleun (eds). Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism. (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017) 2.

[38] "Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker: Notes on Metamodernism." Youtube video, 22:54. "ArtEZ studium generale," Oct. 17, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9WPYFvB2DIc Date accessed: Jan. 6, 2019.

[39] Vermulean & van den Akker, 2016.

[40] Robin Van Den Akker & Timotheus Vermuleun (eds). Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers,

[41] Dempsey, Brendan. "[Re]Construction: Metamodern 'Transcendence' and the Return of Myth. Notes on Metamodernism (blog). Oct. 21, 2014. http://www.metamodernism.com/author/brendandempsey/

[42] Dempsey, 2014.

[43] Dempsey, 2014.

CARPENTRY

In 2012, the American philosopher Ian Bogost coined the term "Carpentry" to describe a tactile philosophical practise of "making things that explain how things make their world."[44] Arguing that logocentric conventions typically compel thinkers to play out conceptual problems through the written word, Bogost advocates for an *object-oriented ontology*, in a process (and text) he called *Alien Phenomenology: Or What It's Like to Be a Thing*. Carpentry refers in its literal sense to the process of constructing some-*thing*, (principally woodcraft) although Bogost extends it metaphorically to include any *made* material, tangible or intangible, even if it is made out of ones and zeros instead of nuts and bolts. Bogost himself makes computer software programs, which he refers to as "earnest entries into philosophical discourse."[45] Carpentry provides the opportunity to "capture and characterize an experience it can never fully understand, offering a rendering satisfactory enough to allow the artifact's operator to gain some insight into an alien thing's experience."[46] The alien phenomenologist/carpenter does more than put theory into practise ; they perform practise *as* theory. To then appropriate a Bogostian frame, I would say that:

I am constructing a religion in order to understand
how religions are constructed.

I find critical parallels between *Carpentry* and *Reconstruction* as tools to transform deconstruction from an end-game into a form of ritual initiation. In *Make Belief,* I present the story blocks I have used to re-assemble the meta-narratives of religion I inherited growing up as a genderqueer Jew/Witch in a predominantly Christian and capitalist worldview. Through parable, and hybrid forms of exegesis and ethnography I describe specific ways in which these firmaments can be re-constructed to produce new subjectivities. Thus, I write this as a manual of my own artistic praxis, and also a handbook for hacking the source-code of reality, a reality that has been shaped in the West through a succession of religious operating systems.

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[44] Bogost, Ian. (2012). *Alien Phenomenology: Or What its Like to be a Thing.*)Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 93.
[45] Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology: Or What its Like to be a Thing*, 93.
[46] Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology: Or What its Like to be a Thing*, 100.

FICTIONING

The artist/theorists Simon O'Sullivan and Dave Burrows make the claim that art which engages with *the world-as-is* has already surrendered some of its power. In the midst of what they refer to as an "increasingly homogenized and homogenizing neoliberal present that offers only more of the same – a present that overcodes all options",[47] they champion artistic initiatives across disciplines that actively "fiction", favouring performance for its' potential to embody new subjectivities that have the potential to author and disseminate new codes. However in order to "construct a genuinely new form of coding one needs material, hence, also in this task, the importance of scrambling of already existing code or the importing of a more alien code from elsewhere."[48] My practise of producing my own religion as art intentionally scrambles religious codes then reassembles them in unexpected ways to produce new myths that can summon forth new futures.

O'Sullivan and Burrows propose "fictioning" as a concept and mode of operation which refers to the "writing, imaging, performing or other material instantiation of worlds or social bodies that mark out trajectories different to those engendered by the dominant organisations of life currently in existence."[49] Cataloguing the "myth-functions" of contemporary art and philosophy, *Fictioning* employs theories and practises of mythopoesis (the production of worlds, people and communities to come), myth-science (producing alternate perspectives and models) and mythotechnesis (the way technology enters into discourse and life).[50] The term *Mythopoesis* – originally popularized by JRR Tolkien's poem Mythopoeia,[51] produced with the intent to explain and defend creative myth-making, is referred to within *Fictioning* as a "name for a summoning – or calling forth – of a people who are appropriate and adequate to those new and different worlds presented in art, films, performances, writings and other practises (a future-orientation which, paradoxically, in certain instances, might also involve a turn to the past."[52]

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[47] Simon O'Sullivan. "Myth-Science and the Fictioning of Reality", in Paragrana, Volume 25, Issue 2. 2016, 4.
[48] O'Sullivan, "Myth-Science and the Fictioning of Reality", 4.
[49] O'Sullivan, Simon & David Burrows. *Fictioning: The Myth Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy*, (Edinburgh, University of Edinburgh Press, 2019)1.
[50] O'Sullivan & Burrows, Fictioning: The Myth Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy, 1.
[51] JRR Tolkien. *Tree and Leaf: Including Mythopoeia.* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1964).
[52] O'Sullivan, Simon & David Burrows. Fictioning: The Myth Functions of Contemporary Art and Philosophy,15.

[M]Dudeck, *Religion is Gay,* digital image, dimensions variable, 2019.

QUEERING RELIGION

RELIGIONVIR.US is queer. It imports devices from queer culture and appropriates methodologies from Queer Theory in effort to *fiction* queer divinity into form. Much of my historical and theological research points to an idea, which forms a leitmotif in the RELIGIONVIR.US narrative – that religion itself is inherently queer. Queer Historiography is a complicated field, one that is too speculative for "the establishment", particularly as the constructs of homosexual identity and queer culture did not exist in many of the ancient contexts, we look for traces within. As an artist I embed my queer historiographic inclinations directly into my *fictioning*, rather than trying to argue for recognition through normative academic pathways.

Queer Theory's mission lies first in resisting and disrupting the normative metanarratives of heteropatriarchal culture, but its purview expands to interrogate all means of normativity, including "forms of knowledge, regimes of enunciation, logics of representation, modes of self-constitution and practises of community."[53] In this way, it "acquires its meaning from its oppositional relation to the norm. Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant."[54] The politicized act of subjectively producing and performing an overtly queer religion as art can be read by those who perpetuate religious prohibitions against homosexuality and gender non-conformity as a contemporary act of heresy. While the pretence of inventing one's own religion is a provocation that positions human authorship above divine inspiration, queering religion strategically includes and integrates behaviours and conditions previously excluded from divinity and anoints them as holy through radical reconstructions of the category of the sacred.

Queer Theory reads all forms of categorization as inherently suspect and "enables us to acknowledge the constructed-ness of meaning and identity and thus to begin to imagine alternative ways of thinking and living."[55] In my largely performative work, this imagining leads to *fictioning,* and fictioning leads to the production of hyperstitions that have the potential to author new realities where the sacred *is* queer. RELIGIONVIR.US takes place in a fictive 'ancient future' and is itself directed to the future. This notion, that certain queer positionalities are future-oriented and targeted at the production of alternate realities is central to queer scholar Jose Muñoz's conception of "queer futurity":

> Queerness is not yet here Queerness is an ideality. Put another way,
> we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel
> it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We
> have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can
> be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is
> queerness's domain.[56]

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[53] David Halperin. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.
[54] Halperin, *Saint Foucault,* 62.
[55] Niki Sullivan. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York University Press, 2003. p. 51
[56] Jose Esteban Munoz. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity.* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

ANTI-DOGMA

Whenever possible I attempt to avoid hermeneutics, bypassing interpretations of the 'fictional contents' of my invented religion in favour of examining the *means* through which my religions' contents are conveyed, and the loops of interpretation they participate within. I avoid lengthy discussions of my artistic, spiritual, religious, or magickal intent, and speak of them only when absolutely necessary. This is a methodological choice initiated at the genesis of RELIGIONVIR.US, inspired in part by strategies employed by the authors and directors of *The Matrix Trilogy* (one of my principal parables) to bypass the explication of their artistic agendas for their era-defining film-cycle. In the booklet accompanying The *Ultimate Matrix Collection*, the Wachowski siblings describe their anti-dogmatic approach:

> Whenever we explained what the films meant to us, other people
> became less likely to offer their own interpretation. Since the films
> obviously reflect our thoughts on the nature of truth, the reliability
> of dogma as well as the importance of individual feelings in the exp-
> loration of consciousness, we agreed that it felt a bit hypocritical to
> talk publicly about them.[57]

I hypothesize that the strategy to avoid disclosing their artistic agenda paved the way for *The Matrix* to inspire a robust range of religious and philosophical interpretations, spawning three books of essays that read *The Matrix* through a variety of religious worldviews, including Christian (Seay and Garrett, 2003), Buddhist (Ford, 2000), Gnostic (Flannery-Dailey and Wagner, 2001), Muslim (Hamid, 2005), Taoist (Lawrence, 2004) and Hindu Vedantin (Lannstrom 2005) among others.[58] I argue that the directors' decision to not reveal their artistic intentions produced a fertile field of projection that allowed for the gestation of multiple religious and philosophical readings and led to the popularity of the work as an era-defining cultural product that avoided dogmatic interpretation.

In August of 2020, in an interview for the Netflix Film Club, Lily Wachowski admitted that from the onset, *The Matrix* was created as a transgender allegory, but in 1999 "the corporate world wasn't ready."[59] When the first Matrix film came out the Wachowski Brothers were both cis-males, but since then both have "un-plugged" from their respective "matrices" and undergone gender re-assignment surgeries. In this sense, for the Wachowski siblings, *The Matrix* functioned as a hypersitional

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[57] *The Ultimate Matrix Collection*, DVD, directed by the Wachowski siblings. (Burbank: Warner Bros. Entertainment distributed by Warner Bros. Home Video, 2009). Booklet, pp.1-2 "An Introduction from the Wachowski Brothers."

[58] William Irwin. *The Matrix and Philosophy: Welcome to the Desert of the Real.* (Chicago, Open Court, 2002).

[59] *BBC News.* "The Matrix is a 'trans metaphor', Lily Wachowski says." August 7, 2020. https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53692435

work that summoned forth a new people to come: including, ironically its own authors. Once it was firmly established in the archetypal collective memory, then it was safe to impart their early allegorical intentions with the work, because it had already seeded the new world its fiction was engineering.

As the author of RELIGIONVIR.US, it has been my aim from the onset to follow the Wachowski's example, and this PhD is no exception. In that spirit, *Make Belief: The Art of Inventing Religions* focuses upon the ways in which my RELIGIONVIR.US participates in culture, the codes it re-mixes, the debates it ignites, the questions it exposes and the stories it references. It treats the entire phenomenon of RELIGIONVIR.US – performance, installation, mythopoesis, making, hacking, worlding, and critical writing – as transmedial Scripture to exegete through critical thought. It aims to never arrive at any predestined location, but rather offers another layer of commentary for the public to build their own meanings out of.

This dissertation is separated into five chapters, which chronicles the source-code of RELIGIONVIR.US. Chapter One introduces the reader to the field of study that encompasses the phenomenon of invented religions and describes the world-building processes that unite speculative fiction and religious belief in order to produce new subjectivities. Chapter Two examines the notion of religion as medium and explores the ways contemporary visual artists perform iconoclasm through their use of religion as medium. Chapter Three introduces RELIGIONVIR.US within the context of cultural engineering, and historicizes its development through a range of critical artistic influences. Chapter Four discusses the academic invention of religion as a concept and provides evidence for my suggestion that we read religion in the west through a Judeo-Christian lens. Chapter Five presents three invented religions as case studies through the lens of Timothy Leary as a cultural engineer. This is followed by my Invent Your Own Religion workbook, produced as a means to make my research applicable into a program that can be used by practitioners, researchers and the general public. My conclusion muses on the plurality of questions my thesis evokes and speculates around the role of belief in the information age. In between the introduction and each of the five chapters are placed five religious prosthetics sections, which discuss my portfolio submissions in relation to other artworks that inspired them, and are introduced in greater detail at the end of Chapter One. Altogether this thesis is an attempt to map out the terrain of my own invented religion within the context of invented religions emerging since the 1960s. My goal is neither to arrive at definitive results or assert any clear answers to the questions my work asks. It is a journey through the labyrinth of the religious imagination and the roles that it plays in processes I describe as make-belief.
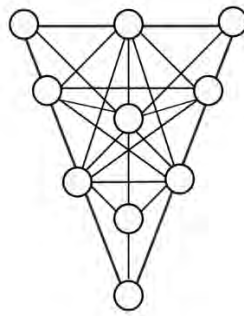
CHAPTER ONE
INVENTED RELIGIONS

The idea of an invented religion conjures a series of problems and provocations that are rooted in the configuration of the two terms it combines. It is, by definition a paradox, insofar as religion remains entangled with notions of collective transcendence that eclipse the historical and individualist pretexts 'invention' is built upon. Invented religions challenge the authority of institutionalized religions by questioning the establishments that legitimate what is and what is not a religion. These authorizing bodies, including the state, the academy and religious institutions themselves, preserve various protocols to determine how to admit or deny religious status. The notion of invented religions initiates a reconsideration of what a religion is, who has the authority to preside over or establish religions, and if religions can be created, or authored by human beings at all.

Carole Cusack, the originator of the category, defines invented religions as "self-consciously fictive movements that emerge from alternative subcultures in the West from 1950s to the present."[60] She claims the term "invention" is strategic, in that most of these movements materialize out of societies "addicted to the consumption of novelties, in which the exercise of creativity and innovation in the development of products is rewarded by wealth and fame."[61] Inventors, entrepreneurs, and creative geniuses replace preachers, prophets, and messiahs in the commodity-driven market of spiritual consumerism. The 'New Age'[62] beginning in the late 1960s, has given

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[60] Carole Cusack. "Play, Narrative and the creation of religion: Extending the theoretical base of 'invented religions' in *The Problem of Invented Religions*, ed. Steven J Sutcliffe & Carole Cusack, (London: Routledge, 2016) 10.

[61] Cusack, Carole. Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction & Faith, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 18.

[62] Steven Sutcliffe. *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices.* (New York: Routlege, 2003).

birth to a host of new religious movements invariably shaped by cults of invention and their overtly constructivist or artificial properties.

In addition to their explicit fictionality, many invented religions tend to centre themselves around transmedial works of SF or the speculative imaginary, transforming novels, films or comic books into the *scriptures* of their new religions. Markus Altena Davidsen refers to this specific blend of invented religion as 'fiction-based religion':

> Supernatural fiction is a major source of inspiration and plausibility in late modern religion. People pick up new religious ideas from super-natural fiction and find that such fiction conveys and reinforces beliefs they already hold...In some cases self-conscious new religions have em-erged that use supernatural fiction as their main source of inspiration. I refer to such movements as fiction-based religions.[63]

Distinguishing themselves from fandom, which borders on the religious through the creation of fictional-play as performative acts of devotion or deity-drag, invented religions have been interpreted by scholars of religion as "genuine...because the activity and beliefs of which they consist refer to supernatural entities which are claimed to exist in the actual world."[64] This is to say that for adherents of invented religions, characters and worlds from their selected narrative-turned-scripture are seen as sentient, and rather than having been imagined and created by their respective authors/artists, they have instead been *de-scribed*. Many of these invented religions ascribe a prophetic sensibility to the authors of their source material, yet in most cases those authors outright deny their intent to produce any sort of religiosity through the creation of their narrative-forms.[65] The prophetic, by its nature, evades contemporary notions of authorship – yet adherents of many invented religions perceive the authors to be messengers more than artists.

Adam Possamai refers these movements as *Hyperreal Religions* in his *Handbook of Hyperreal Religions,* where he defines the phenomenon as "a simulacrum of a

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[63] Markus Davidsen. "The religious affordance of fiction: a semiotic approach." *Religion*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 2016, 522.

[64] Davidsen, Markus Altena. "Fiction Based Religion: Conceptualizing a new category against history-based religion and fandom" in The Problem of Invented Religions, ed. Steven J. Sutcliffe & Carole Cusack, (London: Routledge, 2016), 26-44.

[65] In the example of JRR Tolkien, his prophetic sensibility is affirmed by Tolkien Religionists through a combination of literary devices and his own commentary in letters published in 1981. Tolkien jestfully employs a literary device wherein he presents *The Hobbit* as written by Bilbo Baggins (a main character in the mythos) and *The Lord of the Rings* as written by Frodo Baggins (the main protagonist of the novel). In this manner Tolkien pretends as though he is merely the publisher and translator of already existing works he has unearthed. In the case of his private letters, on several occasions he claimed a kind of divine inspiration and the sense that he is less an author and more, a 'recorder.' In one letter to his friend Milton Waldman, Tolkien writes that the stories "arose in my mind as 'given' things…always I had the sense of recording what was already 'there', somewhere: not of 'inventing'." JRR Tolkien, The Letters of JRR Tolkien, ed H. Carpenter & C. Tolkien, (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006) 130.

religion, created out of, or in symbiosis with popular culture, which provides inspiration for believers/consumers at a metaphoric level."[66] Possamai borrows the term hyperreal from semiotician and philosopher Jean Baudrillard, who defined it as "the generation by models of a real without origin or reality."[67] Davidson takes issue with Possamai's definition, claiming that Baudrillard rarely if ever spoke of religion, and that for Baudrillard "all religions are hyperreal."[68] Davidsen furthers his critique by analysing Possamai's *Hyperreal* definition in relation to his choice of the words "inspiration" and "metaphorical":

> It is easy to demonstrate that hyper-real religions often involve belief in entities that are lifted out of the fictional context and ascribed metaphysical reality. Many Tolkien religionists, for example, believe (seriously and ontologically) to possess Elven souls or are convinced that Middle-earth exists on another plane…Also in Jediism, Possamai's favourite case, people really believe that the Force exists, even if they do not consider Star Wars to be factual history. Possamai has responded constructively to the critique and now defines a hyperreal religion as 'a simulacrum of religion created out of, or in symbiosis with commodified popular culture which provides inspiration at a metaphorical level and/or is a source of beliefs for everyday life. [69]

According to Steven Sutcliffe, it is "reasonable to hold that all [religions] are necessarily 'fictive' or 'invented', in the sense of being rooted in a succession of artfully narrated cosmogonies and pantheons."[70] However, "the invented aspects of a religious formation must be disguised by blending them into an evidence-based, falsifiable history if reproductive success within a competitive environment such as the cultic milieu is to be achieved."[71] This is to say, that those religions that camouflage themselves within the guise of established religions have a longer shelf-life. Many subcultural worldviews appear religious while not defining themselves as such, whereas invented religions self-consciously appropriate the designation.

Sutcliffe makes the heuristic distinction between 'radical' and 'qualified' inventions of religion. 'Radical' invention rejects "evidence-based, falsifiable historiography in favour of entirely fictional narratives, while qualified invention amalgamates

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[66] Adam Possamai. *Religion and Popular Culture: A Hyper-Real Testament.* (Brussels: P.I.E Peter Lang, 2005), 79.

[67] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra & Simulation The Precession of Simulacra.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1.

[68] Markus Altena Davidsen. "Fiction Based Religion: Conceptualizing a new category against history-based religion and fandom" in *The Problem of Invented Religions,* ed. Steven J. Sutcliffe & Carole Cusack, (London: Routledge, 2016), 29.

[69] Ibid, 29.

[70] Steven Sutcliffe. "Rosicrucians at large': Radical versus qualified invention in the cultic milieu" in *The Problem of Invented Religions,* ed. Steven J. Sutcliffe & Carole Cusack, (London: Routledge, 2016), 73.

[71] Ibid, 73.

historical-empirical and fictional-imaginative sources."[72] Regardless of whether their adherents' aims are political, artistic, social, spiritual, or broadly religious; whether emerging from the cultic milieu (the cultural underground) or in the lime-light of mainstream religious, artistic or cultural institutions, invented religions re-mix the source code of religion through creative appropriation, alteration through play and performance, and mutation of already existing religious code. They produce a simulacra of religion that both resembles and obscures the very notion that we in the West like to *believe* we can all agree on.

There appears to be a distinction between those invented religions who undertake legal battles for legitimacy and those who in effect, wish to be 'left alone' to "play" under the banner of religious freedom. *The Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster* and its adherents (called Pastafarians) undertake legal battles with the authorizing bodies of the state to garner religious status, in order to draw attention to the inequities of democracies that bestow certain rights upon "legitimate" institutionalized religions. At the same time, the Pastafarians, who worship a Flying Spaghetti Monster, lobby for their religious rights to wear pasta strainers on their heads for official identity photographs such as drivers licenses, passports and health cards. The Church has been officially recognized as a religion in countries like New Zealand, Canada and the United States, but most recently the highest court in the Netherlands refused Pastafarians legal status, citing their religion as a satire and not a serious faith."[73] Steps are currently being taken to take the case to the European court of human rights.
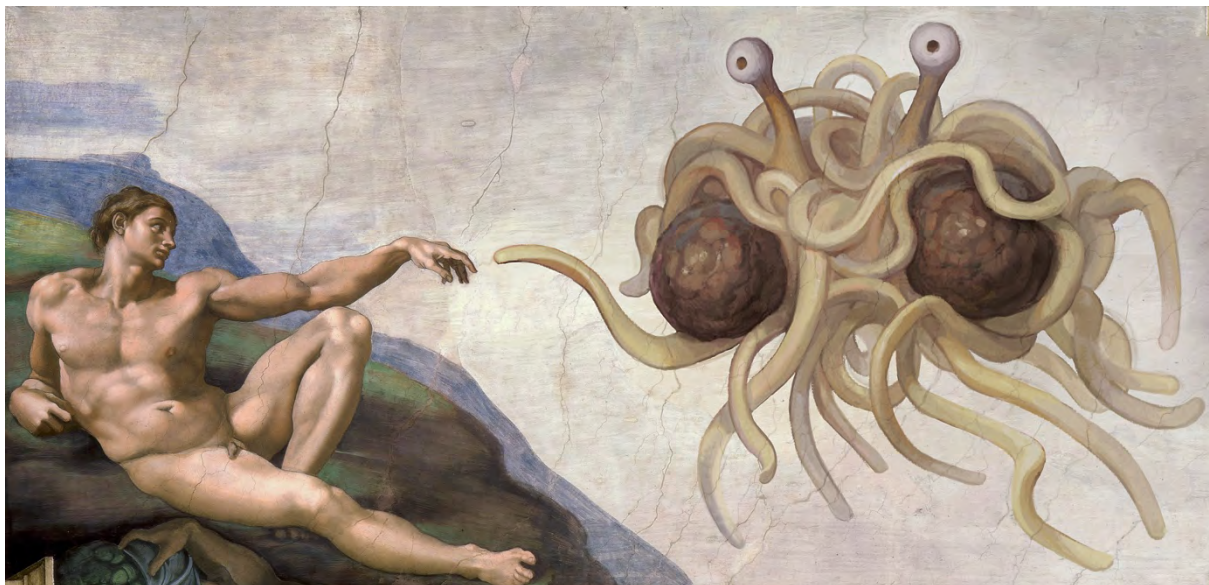
Arne Niklas Jansson. *Touched by His Noodly Appendage* (Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster), [date unknown], https://www.spaghettimonster.org

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[72] Ibid, 73.
[73] Jon Henley. "Spaghetti injunction: Pastafarianism is not a religion, Dutch court rules", *The Guardian*, Agu. 16, 2018. Accessed: Jan. 31, 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/16/pastafarianism-is-not-a-religion-dutch-court-rules

While all three categories described above, including invented (Cusack), fiction-based (Davidsen) and hyperreal (Possamai) religions, each describe different modalities within the larger phenomenon, I use Carole Cusack's invented religions category as a standard going forward, as it relates most broadly to my aims as an artist *inventing* a religion as art. I am interested in probing the space that exists *between* these categories to animate the spectrum of what Sutcliffe designates as 'radical' and 'qualified.' The questions RELIGIONVIR.US raises as an artwork, deploying "the speculative juxtaposition of disparate elements...to gather and compare observations through an encounter"[74] initiates this discourse and debate in the public sphere through the abstract positioning of a cultural product that is, as an artwork, both "radical" and "qualified" due to its proliferation as an ongoing, institutionally sanctioned cultural product.

WORLDBUILDING

For Cusack, the invention of religion is a process deeply involved in narrative construction and world-building. A story, or stories that explain the world are imprinted upon the meaning-making functions of a community, to which they are told and re-told. Cusack describes revelation as a process of narrative construction and dissemination typically involving a prophetic figure who

> has an experience, and communicates that experience as narrative to
> a group of people who haven't had that experience, who story build,
> and talk about it, externalize it and devise it, and then re-internalize
> it and it becomes *true*.[83]

It is this process of a story told 'becoming true' that interests me most, as a cultural engineer employing strategies of hyperstition in a project that combines both fictioning and carpentry. I am interested in analysing how a story transitions from something *made* into something *believed*, and how various sub-processes collaborate to *produce* revelation. Cusack cites Peter Berger's Social Constructivist model of reality building to diagram the aforementioned process of a story told becoming 'true' :

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[74] Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir & Mark Wilson. "What We Can Do: Art Methodologies and Parities in Meeting*",*77.
[83] "Invented Religions." The Religious Studies Project. Jan. 30, 2012. David G. Robertson & Carole Cusack. Date accessed: January 20, 2020. Podcast. https://www.religiousstudiesproject.com/podcast/podcast-carole-cusack-on-invented-religions/

(I)Externalization is the ongoing outpouring of human being [sic] into the world, both in the physical and the mental activity of men.

(II)Objectivation is the Attainment of the products of this activity (again, both physical and mental) of a reality that confronts its producers as a facticity external to and other than themselves.

(III)Internalization is the reappropriation by men of this same reality, transforming it once again from structures of the objective world into structures of the subjective consciousness. It is through externalization that society is a human product. It is through objectivation that society becomes a reality *sui generis*. It is through internalization that man is a product of society.[84]

I) EXTERNALIZATION

II) OBJECTIVATION

III) INTERNALIZATION

[M]Dudeck, *The Social Constructivist Model*, digital image, dimensions variable, 2020.

Berger describes a threefold process wherein the first stage (externalization) involves in my narrativist interpretation, the telling of a story, the second stage (objectivation)

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[84] Peter Berger*, The Social Reality of Religion* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969 [1967]), 4.

involves the re-telling of this story by members of its audience, making it applicable to the moral problems of the community it has been told to, and the third stage (internalization) involves the absorption of this story by members of the community and its transition into a cosmological map of existence. In this sense *becoming true* is actually a process of *becoming applicable*, a story that resonates with the community it is delivered to providing a framework that instructs and directs the behaviours of those that inhabit its' terrain.

Irving Hexham and Karla Powe describe myths as the operating systems of new religions. They define a myth as a "story with culturally formative power" that affects the way that people live, but continue that the "myth is not the story itself but the function it serves in the life of an individual, a group or a whole society."[85] Cusack refers to this process as world construction, and notes that for Berger, "World construction…is an act of creation in which that which has been created has become the real."[86] From the onset of RELIGIONVIR.US and the declaration that I was constructing a religion as art, I have always foregrounded my project to say that fundamentally I was authoring a new set of myth-germs, to produce a new kind of story, that if positioned in a certain way can become a religion. If myth is not the story itself but the role that it plays in the world– then religions, like myths are plausible stories made real by the beliefs imbued upon them.

INVENTION VS. INTERVENTION

The discrepancy between *receiving* and *producing* a vision, an idea, or in this case a religion, is a matter of competing frameworks, and the hierarchy of these frameworks is exposed in the act of asserting the category of invented religions. The belief held by many that religious narratives are divinely inspired (as opposed to creatively produced) is one of the main problems raised by the new category. Many authors in the field of literature describe the phenomenon of literary works having *written themselves.* JRR Tolkien wrote in a 1951 letter to Milton Waldman that the stories in his Middle Earth mythology

> arose in my mind as given things, and as they came, separately, so
> too the links grew…yet always I had the sense of recording what was
> already 'there', somewhere: not of inventing.[87]

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[85] I. Hexham and K. Poewe. *New Religions as Global Cultures: Making the Human Sacred.* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press) 1997. 69.

[86] Cusack, Carole. Invented Religions: Imagination, Fiction & Faith, (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 22.

[87] Carpenter, Humphrey and Christopher Tolkien (eds.) *The Letters of JRR Tolkien.* New York: George Allen & Unwin.) 1995, 145.

It was this statement and a few others like it that have fuelled many Tolkien religionists to claim that Middle Earth exists as an alternate dimension and the author was merely mapping its' terrain through the novel as media. Sculptor, performance artist and poet B. Catling, who recently authored a trilogy of fantasy novels called *The Vorrh*, describes his highly imaginative prose practise as akin to "someone talking in my ear."[88] In an hour-long feature on the artist and his practise, Catling outright declares:

> There is no planning in any of this writing, there is no skeletal structure. I don't know what's going to happen. Sometimes I'm writing like this [*mimes his fingers writing continuously overtop an invisible keyboard*] and I'm going "He didn't... He didn't !" ...Because it works like that. I don't know how it works like that, I don't know what the mechanism is, it's very difficult to say. I go back and edit the thing of course but it's coming out full stream, to some extent, already fully formed, and I can't trace it...[89]

According to Simon O'Sullivan, it is this very "sense of being channelled – of both being by Catling and not by him at the same time – that gives [The Vorrh] its very particular 'flow' and other-worldly character... there is a sense that Catling is not the sole author of this and others of his works – that they are also, in some sense, a collective endeavour involving other, non-human, entities and forces."[90]

The idea that artists receive inspiration from divine, non-human entities is as ancient as we are; in Ancient Greece and Rome, artists and thinkers were thought to have divine attendant spirits who lived in their walls and assisted in their creative processes. In Ancient Greece this type of being was called a *daemon*, and in ancient Rome it was called a *genius*. Thus, an artist who produced culturally formative work was understood in the Classical context not as "being" a genius, but as "having" a genius. This all changed in the Renaissance, with the rise of rational Humanism, where the artist was no longer read as a vessel, but as the originator of the work.[91] Invented religions, with their ascriptions of divine intervention into the time-honoured practise of making stories and art, represent an attempt to resurrect this ancient idea, and insist upon it as a matter of *belief*, even if the maker denies any such intervention.

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[88] Andy Spragg. "Brian Catling speaks to Andy Spragg." M*iso Sensitive: A Site Dedicated to Interviewing Writers and Others While They Make Soup.* May 14, 2011. *http://misosensitive.blogspot.com/2011/05/brian-catling-speaks-to-andy-spragg.html*

[89] Lush. "Matter is a Relative Matter with Brian Catling." Youtube video, 45:03, March 24, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4bsqXf2aP8

[90] Simon O'Sullivan. "Mythopoesis or Fiction as Mode of Existence: Three Case Studies from Contemporary Art", *Visual Culture in Britain,* 18:2, 2017. 292-311.

[91] 2009. "Your elusive creative genius." February, 2009. TEDTalk video, 6:14. https://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_your_elusive_creative_genius?language=en

ASCRIPTION VS. TRANSCRIPTION

In *The Invention of Sacred Tradition,* James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer make the case that the attribution of anonymous texts to authoritative religious leaders, or to supernatural entities in the Old and New Testaments, is evidence of the early craft of what we now refer to as 'invention.' The Torah, a compendium of the Five Books of Moses, is believed by adherents of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, to have been transmitted directly to Moses from Yahweh on Mount Sinai and transcribed by the Lawmaker's hand. Yet the Documentary Hypothesis[92], widely accepted within the fields of Religious Studies and Theology, identifies four separate authors stretched over hundreds of years with distinctly different writing styles and competing terminologies.

In Religious Studies it is commonplace to overtly refer to 'the authors' of the Gospels, with the implication that the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were neither composed nor transcribed by the particular Apostle who was ascribed authorship over them. Whether because we know they were orally transmitted for hundreds of years before being recorded, or because we understand that the process of canonization involved a regulative method of authoritative attribution. In both cases, appropriating Cusack's model, we could say that critical texts to the religions of Judaism and Christianity were *invented* insofar as creative stylistic choices were made surrounding not only the substance of but also the authorship ascribed to them.

The canonical Scripture of the New Testament, originally composed in Greek, contains quotations that are said to have come from the mouth of Jesus of Nazareth, who would have allegedly spoken those words originally in Aramaic. Even if the authors of these texts intended to translate faithfully their precise 'original', the difference between Semitic and Greek languages are manifold. The two belong to radically different language families, expressing contrasting linguistic attitudes and most importantly underlying philosophies. Thus, the words of Christ himself can be read through this lens as a misattribution: a series of interpretations and translations where the principal meaning, the originary script has been altered by varying degrees, while maintaining the fiction of primary authorship. Translation can also be read through this lens as an ancestor to invention.

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[92] Referred to additionally as The Welhausen Theory as well commonly known as the JEDP Theory, this motion proposed that the Five Books of Moses was a composite of four altogehter different texts composed by different authors separated over centuries. This was determined by identifying "different writing styles, ideological assumptions -and] word choice, particularly with regard to divine names." Stern, David. "Recent Trends in Biblical Source Criticism. (Cover Story). Jewish Bible Quarterly 36, no. 3. (July 2008): 182-186.– ed. Englewood Cliffs, (N.J: Prentice-Hall, 1995) 20.

Gioacchino Altobelli. 1860-1880. Michelangelo's Moses. black-and-white prints. Place: <A HREF=https://www.tepapa.govt.nz/>Museum of New Zealand - Te Papa Tongarewa</A>, Collection: Photography, Purchased 1999 with New Zealand Lottery Grants Board funds. https://library.artstor.org/asset/27135881.

Let us take an example from the history of art to demonstrate this process in another medium. Michelangelo's 1513-1515 marble sculpture of *Moses* depicts the lawmaker seated, holding the Decalogue. Enigmatically, the prophet appears in Michelangelo's depiction to be crowned atop his head with two horns. Several depictions of Moses from the Renaissance bear similar iconographic ornamentations. This is a misattribution caused by translation errors from ancient Hebrew into Greek into

Latin, originating in verses 29, 30 and 35 from Exodus in the Latin Vulgata. The Douay-Rheims Bible translates the Latin verses from the Vulgata as:

> And when Moses came down from Mount Sinai, he held the two tablets of the testimony, and he knew not that his face was *horned* from the conversation with the Lord.[93]

This misattribution was based on Jerome's mis-translation from the original Hebrew, where the word קָרַן, *qāran* (based on the root, קֶרֶן *qeren*), describing someone shining or emitting rays was transcribed by Jerome as "horned." Because of differences in syntax, a *halo* became *horns*. Depictions of the horned Moses line the streets of Rome to this day, and as artworks cast in marble, occupying the complex positionality of historical artworks and objects of devotion, an iconography has developed based upon a mistranslation which many unknowing regard to be scripturally based.

Hans Blumberg, in his *Work on Myth*, speculates that the religious narratives embedded within Scripture "were written down in canonical form only after hundreds of years of oral recital, during which their tellers were able to sharpen and improve them in response to the likes and interests of various audiences"[95]. Religion and its accompanying mythologies can therefore be read as an ongoing 'production' that sharpens itself with each generational iteration, endlessly re-inventing itself in the language of its times and adapting its narrative content to engage with new questions and problems that emerge. All the while they maintain traditional fictions of authorship and originary sources even if/when those sources are disputed.

<div style="text-align:center">THE POSTMODERN SACRED</div>

Invented religions tend to ground themselves within one or more primary SF narratives and project upon them various mythological streams in order to give to them greater context. Many combine aspects which descend from established religious ideologies or graft historical religious lineages onto the contemporary narratives themselves. Religious Studies scholar Em McAvan refers to the belief practises that hybrid mythological narrative strategies engender as the postmodern sacred[96], which as a category

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[93] Edgar Swift and Angela M. Kinney (trans.) *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims translation*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Divinity Press, 2010.)

[95] Hans Blumberg. *Work on myth: studies in contemporary german social thought.* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1985), 159.

[96] Emily McAvan. *The postmodern sacred: popular culture spirituality in the science fiction, fantasy and urban fantasy genres.* (NC: McFarland & Company, 2012).

consists of texts that are consumed in part for their spiritual content, for an experience of the transcendent ambivalently situated on the boundary of formal religious and spiritual traditions... Because of the suspension of the usual rules of the 'real world' in their textual universes, the postmodern sacred occurs most of all in the literary and visual genres of science fiction, horror and fantasy (what I have termed the "fantastic post-modern sacred.[97]

Most if not all of these invented religions undergo a kind of *bricolage*, wherein composites are authored that weave together established religious ideologies with fictional material to produce new hybrid religions. As will be discussed in Chapter 5, most *Tolkien Spiritualities* are composites of Tolkien's worldmaking with other neopagan sources, while *Matrixism* merges religious interpretation of the blockbuster film cycle with the theological precepts of Bahai, and Chaos Magick blends the writings of HP Lovecraft with a magickal/religious practise that builds upon the work of Aleister Crowley and Austin Osmand Spare.

Markus Altena Davidsen suggests that "supernatural fiction affords religious use in so far as it imitates rhetorical strategies of religious narratives" and uses what he refers to as 'veracity mechanisms' in order imbue the chosen narratives with the aura of factuality. Davidsen identifies two distinctive categories of veracity mechanisms that collaborate to produce belief:

> 1)Evidence Mechanisms – which "assert the reality of supernatural agents within the story-world" and

> 2)Anchoring Mechanisms, which "destabilize a narratives fictional status by implying that it ultimately speaks about the actual world rather than only about a fictional world."[98]

Thus, we see a remarkable occurrence in narratives involving a "portal quest," wherein protagonists from our recognizable modern world, through a hidden doorway, gate or other means of interdimensional travel, enter and exit an other-world where supernatural elements are commonplace (i.e., Chronicles of Narnia, Harry Potter, The Never-ending Story, Stargate, Avatar). These stories as a rule do not inspire the kind of inventive fiction-based religion practises that stories taking place entirely within an alternate universe or dimension (such as Lord of the Rings, Star Wars, and the Chulhu Cult[99]) afford. Anchoring mechanisms, particularly in the

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[97] Emily McAvan. *The postmodern sacred: popular culture spirituality in the science fiction, fantasy and urban fantasy genres*. 6.
[98] Markus Altena Davidsen. "The religious affordance of fiction: a semiotic approach", 529.
[99] *The Matrix* is an in-between, in that it sees the world we come from as artificial, and once the protagonist Neo escapes or un-plugs from that world, the remainder of the story occurs rooted within the "real" world, where portals permit him and his team entry and exit back into the artificial world familiar to us. Harry Potter has recently been the subject of an essay by Carole Cusack who ascribes it as a new form of Invented Religion.

realm of works that produce cosmogonies, function to make meaning out of our contemporary world through mythologizing recognizable human concerns and experiences in other worlds that reflect our own. Evidence mechanisms are plausibility enhancers that contribute to the suspension of disbelief when one is engulfed in a world-making narrative, enough so that when one's experience of the work is finished the reality it described maintains its authority as a framework through which the reader reads the world.

The art of world-building requires detailed consideration given to superimposed modes of *plausibility* – i.e., magic in Middle Earth has certain limits, and is capable of producing certain effects, but not others – and this plausibility is enhanced by the detail and precision of the author's craft. Thus, when evidence mechanisms and anchoring mechanisms operate in tandem, "the effect of verisimilitude produced by the evidence mechanisms and the effect of referentiality produced by the anchoring mechanisms together promote the interpretation that the narrative is essentially a truthful, factual story."[100]

RELIGIOUS AFFORDANCES

In asking how fans of Tolkien's literary world transform the fictions of Middle Earth into religious beliefs, Markus Altena Davidsen identifies key semiotic elements within the Tolkien milieu that not only make religionist readings possible, but actively encourages them. Examples of these include :

> (a) an elaborate cosmology and theology (in the Silmarillion and
> The History of Middle-earth), (b) a frame narrative connecting the
> narrative world to our own (in the Lord of the Rings), and (c)
> Tolkien's personal experience of being inspired during the writing
> process (in his letters).[101]

Davidsen refers to these semiotic devices as "religious affordances" claiming that within the precincts of *fiction-based religions*, it is not simply a matter of the religious actors *choosing* a text to become a holy scripture, but "also because those texts *afford* religious use more so than other works of fiction."[102] I am interested in the notion that certain artistic constructions afford religious uses more than others, and in identifying what kinds of affordances breed different kinds of religiosity.

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[100] Markus Altena Davidsen. "The religious affordance of fiction: a semiotic approach", 529.
[101] Mark Davidsen. "The Spiritual Milieu Based on JRR Tolkien's Literary Mythology" in *Handbook of Hyperreal Religions* (ed. Adam Possamai). Leiden: Brill, 2012. 188.
[102] Mark Davidsen. "The religious affordance of fiction: a semiotic approach." *Religion*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 2016. 523.

Davidsen borrows the concept of 'affordances' from ecological psychologist James Gibson who described how

> "objects in the environment possess particular 'affordances' that present themselves as 'action possibilities' for animals and humans. Hollow trees for instance, afford living-in for certain animals...Some of the affordances of human artefacts will be functions of the designer's intention, but not all. Chairs, for instance, afford sitting-on, but also standing-on, throwing, and so on. I argue the same is true of texts."[103]

Davidsen claims that the intended and dominant use of supernatural fiction in the construction of fiction-based religions, includes "reading as fiction and playing-with-as-fiction, as when fans dress up as characters, write fan fiction, and role-play within the narrative universe."[104] Religious affordance – he claims, tends to be un-intended by its author and sub-dominant, but nonetheless allows for a religious reading of the text. These readings surpass the fantasy realm of fiction and provide religious uses wherein the text itself initiates "ritual interaction with the supernatural agents of the story (besides merely playing with the fictional universe.)"[105] The divisions between make-believe and make-belief are animated in the difference between the fan and the fan-atic.

RELIGIOUS PROSTHETICS

> "Long ago, [man] formed an ideal conception of omniscience which he embodied in his gods. To these gods he attributed everything that seemed unattainable to his wishes, or that was forbidden to him. One may say, therefore, that these gods were cultural ideas. Today he has come very close to the attainment of this ideal, he has almost become a god himself... Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs, he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown onto him and they still give him much trouble at times..."[106]

> -Sigmund Freud

A Prosthetic is an artificial body part, such as an arm, a foot, or a tooth, that replaces a missing part, either to replicate an organ that was damaged, destroyed, or was missing from the onset. Prosthetics are mimetic, not inventive, save for the need to

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[103] Markus Altena Davidsen. "The religious affordance of fiction: a semiotic approach.", 523
[104] Ibid, 523.
[105] Ibid, 523.
[106] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, New York: Norton, 1961, p. 39.

manufacture technological capacities that would be inherently produced by the organ or body part they are referenced from. I am interested in the ontology of the prosthetic in that it stands squarely between the real and the fake, the natural and artificial, and for our purposes, believing and belief. A person with an artificial limb is at once a person who is missing a limb and also a person with two limbs. The design and function of the device is only in rare cases successful in disguising its artifice entirely, so when we encounter a person wearing a prosthetic, despite its' overt artificiality, we are socially conditioned to treat it as though it is just as real as their own. When we bear witness to prosthetic devices, we are asked to *believe* in a fiction that is modelled after the real, but intentionally and artificially produced. As Freud suggests, I would argue that the *prosthetic* is both a metaphor but also a condition, lives at the core of what it is to be human.

Building upon Davidsen's suggestions that certain devices in fictional texts afford religious uses, I am proposing the concept of *Religious Prosthetics* to describe visual and material devices employed by visual, sonic, performative and time-based artists that similarly afford religious use. In the precincts of Art History, we have a variety of different devices used over the centuries to designate material culture with a religious aura. A particular kind of painting can be an icon, a particular kind of container can be a reliquary, a certain kind of object can become a relic, if legitimized by religious institutions. The difference in title denotes that these objects were either created within a distinctly religious mindset, or are housed in such a legitimizing context. Thus they are *more* than just paintings, containers or objects – they are spiritual objects, or religious prosthetics.

I will suggest throughout this thesis, that visual/material culture works in the same way as literary texts in producing religiosity among secular publics through the deliberate appropriation and manipulation of religious codes. *Make Belief* features five Religious Prosthetics I have used over the course of my Practise-based PhD thesis to produce my own artworks as intentionally designed religious artefacts:

1) Neoglyphics – invented languages and the auditory performance of that invented language alongside of its English translation,

2) Skin Bible – wherein I appropriate the aesthetic of the Holy Bible in production of my own,

3) Psalms – the composition of sacred music in English and my invented language appropriating easily recognizable strategies of ritual chants,

4) Hypericons – which detail my alchemical process of iconographic re-mixing climaxing in the production of seven light-boxes resembling stained glass windows, and

5) The Temple of Artifice – deconstructing and reconstructing the idea of the Temple in the information age, into a web-based artwork, a liturgical performance, a procession and a communal dialogue.

These works are presented alongside other examples in contemporary art, literature and popular culture that perform similar processes of affording religious use through various means of cultural transmission. Therefore, while exposing the particular combinations I have used to produce religious experiences in otherwise secular publics, my Religious Prosthetics may be read as recipes in a cookbook of how to produce one's own religion using literary, visual, sonic and performative devices to evoke religious association and use.
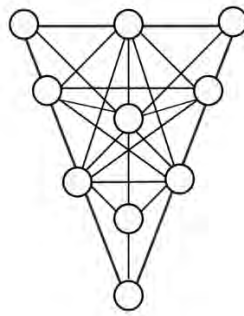
RELIGIOUS PROSTHETICS I
NEOGLYPHICS

[M]Dudeck, *In'Sekht Conlang (Keyboard)* digital image, dimensions variable, 2018.
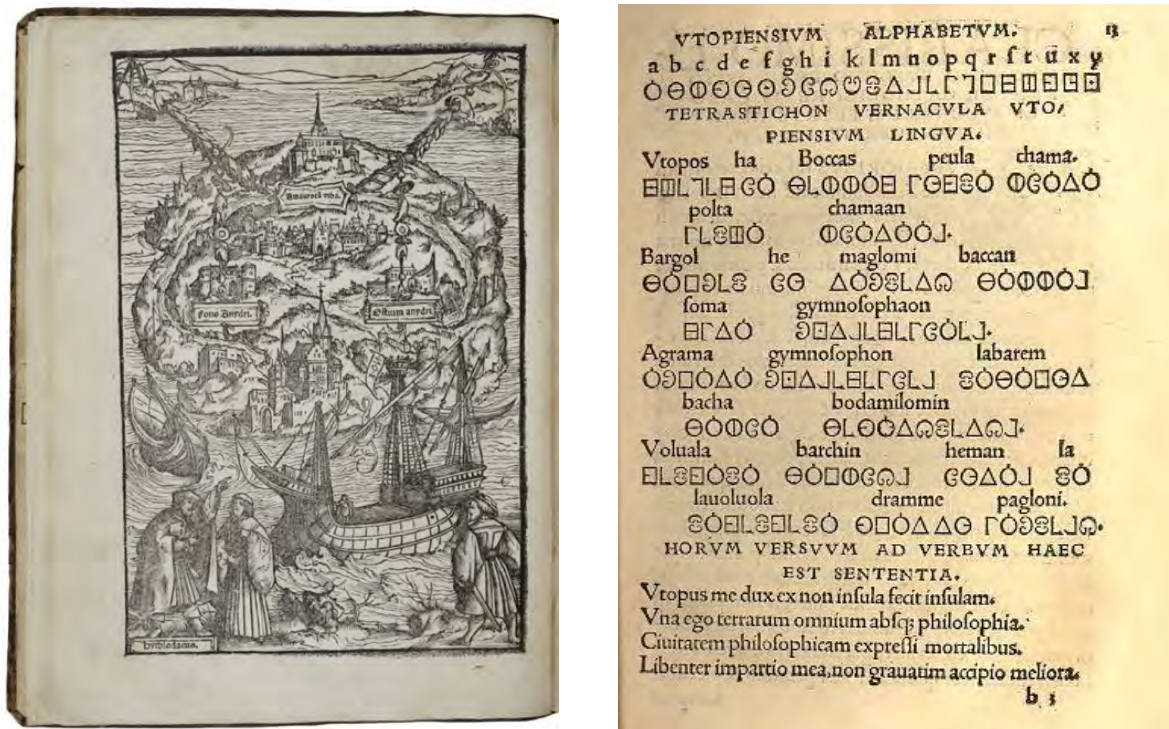
INVENTED LANGUAGES

Invented, artificial, and constructed languages (or conlangs) are essential ingredients in the construction of conworlds (constructed worlds) within the genres of speculative fiction. Arika Okrendt's encyclopaedic *In the Land of Invented Languages,* a picaresque describing the author's ethnographic and historical forays into the worlds of language inventors and their followers, lists hundreds of such initiatives over the past five hundred years.[107] Invented languages give shape and dimension to imaginary worlds through the introduction of new concepts/word-forms that known languages do not have words for, and through exotically re-naming existing concepts in a foreign tongue so as that audiences will consider them anew.

One of the earliest intentionally invented languages in the West was 'Utopian', as described in the addendum to Thomas More's *Utopia.* This proto-world-building initiative penned by the former Lord High Chancellor of England under the reign of King Henry VIII, describes a fictional island and it's religious, social, and political customs. Although written in 1516, the work bears many of the landmarks of modern worldbuilding, including a woodcut illustrated map of the fictional island, a conversion table which depicts the fictional alphabet alongside its corresponding Roman letters, and verses transliterated from 'Utopian' to Latin (the language of the books original publication).[108]

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[107] Akira Okrent. *In the Land of Invented Languages: Adventures in Creativity, Madness and Genius.* (New York: Random House, 2010.)

[108] Ralph Robinson, a 16th-century translator, rendered the passage from Utopian to Latin into English as follows: "My king and conqueror Utopus by name / A prince of much renown and immortal fame / Hath made me an isle that erst no island was / Full fraught with worldly wealth, with pleasure, and solace. / I one of all other without philosophy / Have shaped for man a philosophical city / As mine I am nothing dangerous to impart, / So better to receive I am ready with all my heart."

More, Thomas, Sir, Saint, 1478-1535. ; Robinson, Ralph, 1521- ; Lumby, J. Rawson (Joseph Rawson), 1831-1895 (Cambridge : The University Press,1897), 167.

More, Thomas, Sir, Saint, 1478-1535. ; Robinson, Ralph, 1521- ; Lumby, J. Rawson (Joseph Rawson), 1831-1895 (Cambridge : The University Press,1897), 167.

Media theorist Mark J Foster identifies two key forms that constructed languages take in Conworlds :

> 1) *a posterioi* languages borrowed or based upon existing natural languages or

> 2) *a priori* languages that are not based on real languages at all.[109]

An example of an *a priori* conlang is the Fremen language in Frank Herbert's *Dune*, which is presented as a futuristic version of Arabic, where significant changes have re-shaped the 'original' language source over aeons into a new hybrid. In the 2003 made-for-television adaptation of Herbert's *Children of Dune*, composer Brian Tyler pieced together excerpts of the Fremen dialect found within the *Dune* novels and composed the song *Inama Nushif* (She is Eternal), written entirely within the semi-fictional language of Fremen. Another example of an *a priori* conlang is the unnamed invented language in the 2004 television re-make of *Battlestar Galactica*, that appropriates letters and word forms from Armenian, and inscribes them both into a fictional "bible" called *The Book of Pythia*, and in multiple original songs composed for the series sung in Armenian.

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[109] Mark P. Wolf. *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*. (New York: Routledge, 2012), 184

A posterioi examples of invented languages are far more common and popular, including Tolkien's Elvish language, the Klingon language from *Star Trek*, and the Dothraki and Valyrian languages, from George R. R. Martin's Game of Thrones. Famously, JRR Tolkien, a philologist and linguist by training and trade, developed the entire Elvish language prior to the composition of his mythos, and arguably the structure of the language helped shape the fabric of the narrative itself.

Within the genres of visual art, an *a posterioi* invented language occurs in *"Chapter 7: Pending Cipher for the Open Present"* by Los Angeles-based artist Daniel R. Small. This project was presented as part of "The Manifest Destiny Billboard Project" which commissioned a series of artist-produced billboards across the United States in Spring 2015. Small's billboard presented black hand-written inscriptions taken from the *Los Lunas Decalogue Stone,* an artifact originally found in New Mexico, controversially claimed to be Pre-Colombian, which was inscribed in a language derived from old Cypriot Greek and Ancient Hebrew. Small superimposed a copy of this text atop of film stills from Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* (1923), overlain with modern red proofreading marks.

The inability for the public to identify the alphabet led journalists to speculate if the language was invented, or inscribed by ISIS terrorists.[110] Others in the local community protested the work claiming it was written in either "Satanic, or Islamic."[111] Yet Small retains that the language found on the "Decalogue stone" was itself intentionally fabricated, formulated from a fusion of ancient Greek and Hebrew. It is commonly agreed among scholars that the *Los Lunas Decalogue Stone* was staged and fabricated by archaeologist Frank Hibben who was "known to have forged several archaeological sites to prove his theory about pre-Columbian contact with North America by an unknown civilization."[112] This "ancient" text, resurrected by a contemporary artist using the new media of billboard design, was itself originally a form of scholarly make-belief.

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[110] Kemy Lin. "Billboard Art Project Sets Off Terrorism Scare Near US/Mexico Border." *Hyperallergic* . Feb. 20, 2015. Accessed: March 20, 2020. https://hyperallergic.com/183852/billboard-art-project-sets-off-terrorism-scare-near-usmexico-border/
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.

Daniel R. Small, *Billboard #7* (top left), *Billboard #5* (top left), *Billboard #7* (bottom left), *Billboard #1* (bottom right), above interstate highway, New Mexico. *Hyperallergic*, Feb. 20, 2015. https://hyperallergic.com/183852/billboard-art-project-sets-off-terrorism-scare-near-usmexico-border/

The most notable example of an *a priori* invented language within the visual arts occurs within the 2013 edition of the *Codex Seraphinianus* by Italian artist Luigi Serafini. This surrealist 365-paged monograph published by Rizzoli, features hundreds of pages of a fictional manuscript illustrated and inscribed entirely with an indecipherable language. The work is presented as an encyclopaedia which recalls the aesthetics of illuminated manuscripts, perhaps most specifically the Voynich Manuscript, dated to the early 15th century written in an unknown script which some speculate was an early example of an invented language itself.

The *Codex Seraphinianus* is replete with illustrated diagrams, schematics, formulas, conversion tables and taxonomies penned by Serafini all in his calligraphic alphabet. Aside from the publications' title written in English, there is no forward, preface, or epilogue, much less publishing information inscribed in any language other than the author's own conlang. However, in the edition I have, there is a small booklet titled 'Decodex' contained by an envelope on the back cover in which the artist has composed a short essay describing the origin of his process with the Codex:

> "Do you remember how, when we were children, we'd leaf through
> picture books and, pretending we could read before the children
> older than us, fantasize about the images we saw there ? Who knows,

I thought to myself, perhaps unintelligible and alien writing could make us all free once again to experience those hazy childhood sensations."[113]

Serafini's interest in re-creating an experience from childhood aligns with my interest in the role of *make-believe*/make-belief and the "serious play" involved in making certain stories, or fictions *become true*.
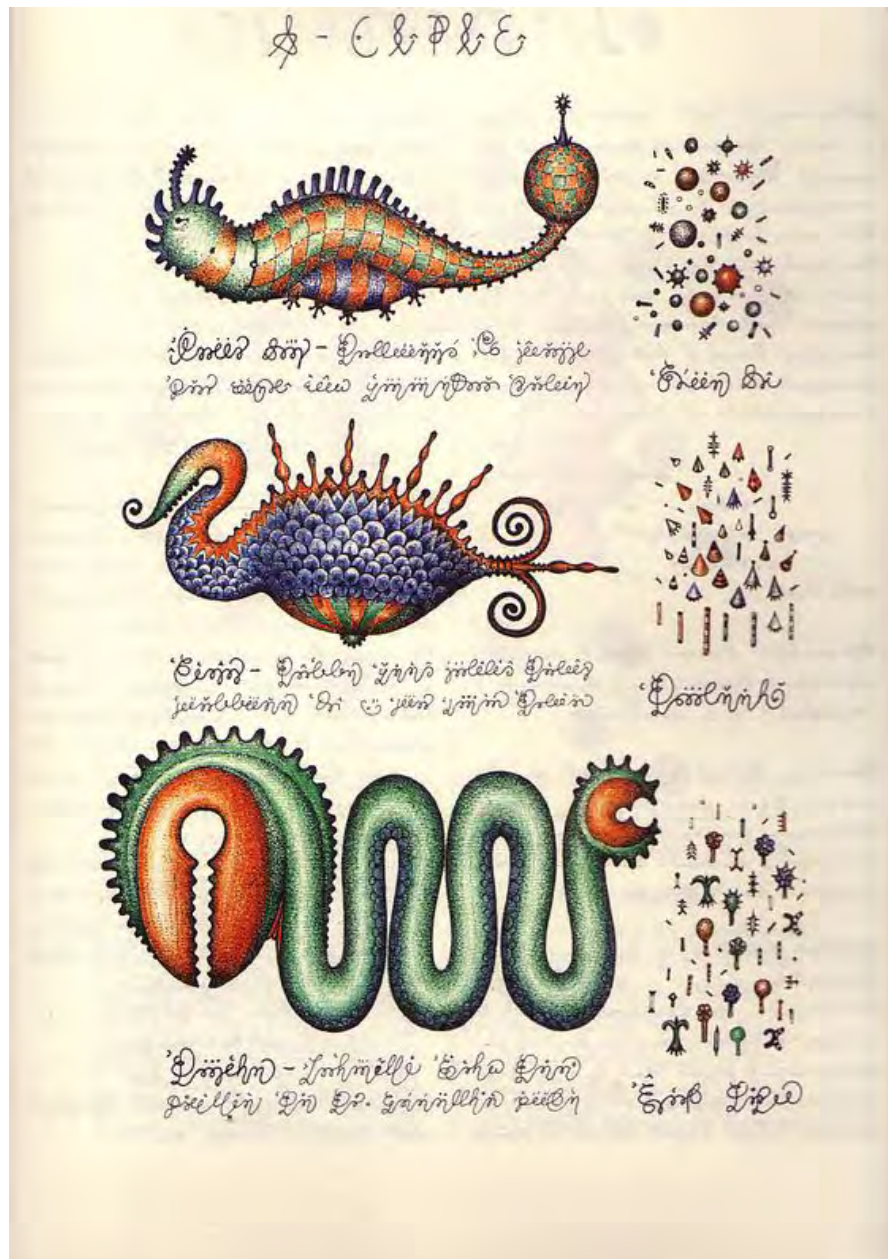
Luigi Serafini. Codex Seraphinianus (Decodex), Decodex, (New York: Rizzoli) 2013, page number illegible (written in invented alphabet.)

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[113] Luigi Serafini. Codex Seraphinianus (Decodex), Decodex, (New York: Rizzoli) 2013. *Decodex* (accompanying booklet), 9.

NEOGLYPHICS

"Art is, like magic, the science of manipulating symbols (words or images)
to achieve changes in consciousness. The very language of magic seems to be
talking as much about writing or art as it about supernatural events. A *grimoire*,
for example, the book of spells, is simply a fancy way of saying *grammar*. Indeed,
to cast a *spell* – is simply to *spell* – to manipulate words to change peoples
consciousness, and I believe this is why an artist or writer is the closest thing
in the contemporary world that you are likely to see to a shaman."[114]

-Alan Moore

In June 2019, I was invited to present my ritual lecture/performance *Neoglyphics* as
part of the *Convocation on Expanded Langu*age-based Practises for the Research
Pavilion of the 58th edition of the Venice Biennale. In my techno-sermon I mused
upon the ontological and phenomenological aspects of my own invented language as
part of RELIGIONVIR.US TRANSMISSIONS, diagramming and defining the dimensions
of conlanging as a central apparatus within the larger processes of making religion
as art. The following is an excerpt from the lecture, historizing my invented language
within its mythological apparatus, presented to the convocation on June 17, 2019 :

> *In the beginning, was the word. Or rather, in the beginning there*
> *was the awareness of the magnitude of words, of the ways in*
> *which words make worlds, form concepts, write histories;*
>
> *the ways in which systems of magic and making are reliant upon the*
> *strategic invocation of selected words in ceremonial sequence –*
>
> *the ways in which the Genesis Act spun the world into form through*
> *the correct enunciation of sacred words.*
>
> *RELIGIONVIR.US began not only with the need to produce my own*
> *words, my own alphabet, my own language – but also with the*
> *need to mythologize the role of language within the larger construct*
> *of my invented religion.*

After consulting linguists in the early development of the aesthetic and philosophical
dimensions of my invented language called *In'Sekht*, I determined there were three

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[114] "Alan Moore on Magic." Online Video Clip. Youtube. Wash Your Brain. Dec. 3, 2013. Date Accessed: Oct. 31, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k1qACd0wHd0

central ideological characteristics my queer, trans-dimensional written/spoken language had to have:

1) No Gender Signifiers

In my mythos the concept of gender as we know it does not exist, the closest analogy is that of *archetypes* – of which there are a great many and individuals are understood to be constellations of several archetypes, so the signifiers used depend on which archetypal code, or configuration they are animating. Varieties of different genitals and non-procreative sexualities in the mythology have nothing to do with language nor subjective signification.

2) Subjects as Verbs not Nouns.

Following a Kabbalistic precept expounded in God is a Verb[116] by Rabbi Alan Cooper I was inspired by the notion of the subject as a verb, not a noun. Considering ourselves as nouns, according to Rabbi Cooper, contributes significantly to our spiritual illnesses, for thinking of oneself as a fixed entity runs contra to the spiritual processes of unfolding, transformation, and mutation. These are all themes central to the RELIGIONVIR.US religion. Indeed, within RELIGIONVIR.US 'individuals' are seen as *processes*. So rather than 'Michael', I should be 'Michael-*ing*'. Within my own mythos and religion individuals/subjects are understood as *constellations* – and the word for 'self'(*kah*, or ꗏ ꗏ) translates into English as the word for 'Host'. In effect, the Self is a process that *hosts* multiple sub-processes, always in motion and rigorous mutation.

3) There is no past tense.

I took inspiration from the poet Christian Bok, and the television program *Earth: Final Conflict's* invented language of *Eunoia*, which had no past tense, whose concepts and their polar opposites were embodied together (like war and peace). In RELIGIONVIR.US, past, present and future are all understood as one entity, because linear time does not exist. Therefore, things do not 'happen', they are in constant stages of happen-*ing*. The future however is spoken of, because it is understood to be constructed by ones' imagination, but can never be devoid of the 'past' and 'present' processes that give birth to it and are embedded in it.

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[116] Rabbi Alan Cooper. *God is a Verb: Kabbalah and the Practise of Mystical Judaism.* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997).

INVOCATION

When composing the visual/auditory invocation for the web-based *Temple of Artifice* (Religious Prosthetics V), I wanted the text to be read aloud both in English and my invented language atop of originally composed music (Religious Prosthetics III). I took inspiration from the opening scenes of Peter Jackson's 2001 cinematic adaptation of JRR Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* to help guide the composition of my prologue. In the first film of the trilogy, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, an opening text is whispered in Elvish and then read aloud in English by the same voice. This voice, we later learn, is from one of the principal characters, the Lady Galadriel (performed by Cate Blanchett), although the viewer does not recognize the correlation until the Elf Queen is introduced in the second half of the film.

My own invocation, inspired by the incantation of Galadriel, similarly begins being whispered in *In'Sekht*, accompanied by subtitles in my invented alphabet below. The auditory incantation is then followed by its translation into English, performed by the same voice actor, who, like Galadriel, in subsequent chapters will be revealed as a central Archon in my mythos named *Methuzaiia*. However, despite the complex conditions of my invented language outlined on the previous page, I felt I had to adapt the translations of the text in order to make them accessible to general audiences. Therefore, in addition to translating the invocation from my invented language into English, I had to then re-translate from its literal translation into a more stylized/poetic one, following the ABAB rhyme scheme. Below, *Fig. I* presents the opening four lines of the invocation, written first in original *In'Sekht*, followed by its phonetic transcription using English letters, followed by its literal translation according to the precepts of my language, finally followed by its adapted, stylized translation:

Original In'Sekht	⫿⊡⏚ ⦙⫿⫶ ⫿⫨⏚ ⦙⫿⩑ ⫿⊡⏚⦙⫿
Phonetic Transcription	**Achayash Amayath Amayeh**
Literal Translation	**Every Being, Every Process, Always Born**
Stylized Translation	**There is no beginning**

Original In'Sekht	⫿⊡⏚ ⦙⫿⫶ ⫿⫨⏚ ⭰⊡ ⊡⦙⩏⦙ ⌐
Phonetic Transcription	**Achayash Amarii Qiri Thii**
Literal Translation	**Every Being, Every Process, Remains Continuous**
Stylized Translation	**There is no End**

Original In'Sekht	⊓⭰⫨ ⭰⏚ ⚡⫿⦙⏚⦙⫿⫪
Phonetic Transcription	**Qum Ra Ha'Ya'Yad**
Literal Translation	**All Processes Occurring**
Stylized Translation	**All that has happened**

Original In'Sekht	⊓⭰⫨ ⭰⏚ ⫝⏚⫶⫿⫪
Phonetic Transcription	**Qum Ra Vashayad**
Literal Translation	**All processes [re]occur infinitely**
Stylized Translation	**Will happen again**

The following pages depict the invocation in its' entirety, with phonetic transcription accompanied by its' stylized translation and the original In'Sekht text presented in 'language tablets', a fictional device used to demarcate and differentiate different sentences/trains of thought within my fictional scriptures. Various colour differentiations occur in the language tablets for emphasis. Below are some further notations on the structure of the language as presented in the Invocation.[117] You can listen to the full Invocation here.

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[117] The word for GOD, or ARCHON, in In'Sekht is RYA – however the word GOD in a RELIGIONVIR.US denotes Multifold set of meanings, and is conveyed in different manifestations from the central root word of RI/RY/RYA. This very much echoes the structures of ancient Hebrew, wherein root-words are reassembled and represented in different manifestations linking word /concepts that are connected through underlining shared lines of meaning. Therefore within the invocation there are several different versions of the term, wherein the root verb of the process of RYA appears in multiple iterations :

The Growing of a God	Ha-**Rya** Ha-Qanda
A Weaver	Ish-**Ri**
A Builder	**Rya**-Tha
An Archon	Qith-**Rya**
God-School	**Rya**-Qa
Temple of Artifice	**Rya**-Appis

*Ish-**Ri*** – from the same root as Ry, implies growing/weaving – a collaboration instead of a proclamation or insemination – a different principle of creation that implies tending as opposed to planting (an archetypal differentiation which can be understood in relation to gender).

***Rya**-Tha* -Tha – refers to the act, or the art of construction, carving of idea into matter, altering forms in order to insert new form. Archons are often referred to as Builders or Engineers.

Qith-Rya – An Archon. The word Archon is almost never used without 'Qith as a designator to invoke respect. Qith is the principle of Power – Power over or under, therefore a God who explores or motivates or utilizes power as part of their creation is an Archon – a rulergod, very different from Ish-Ri

***Rya**-Qa* – A God-School is not a physical place per se, but a training– a Way, a process of Growing Worlds in controlled environments in order to understand how to build them in the vast expanse.

Rya-Appis – (Temple of Artifice): Temple comes from the same root as God/Archon. A Temple is therefore understood to be the same as the God to which it is dedicated, and therefore when one enters it – physically or psychically, they enter the state and the way of the God. Appis means artifice – that which is made, grown, built, imagined, or constructed.

Qi/Qith is used in place of "the" – which denotes a title but does not imply singularity

Yi – is used similarly to the English 'and', but as the worldview views all subjects as multiple, yi is used to denote those that accompany, or surround, like a constellation

Yah – is used in place of "of" – like in Italian Leonardo da Vinci, the 'of' or 'from' becomes part of the name

There is no beginning
Achayash Amayath Ama'Yeh

There is no end.
Achayash Amarii Qiri Thii

All that has happened
Qum Ra Hayayad

Will Happen Again
Qum Ra Vashayad

This is the Story
Qiri Ha Qum Tum

of the Growing of a God
A-Rya Ha'Qayanda

A Weaver
Ishri

A Builder
Ryatha

An Archon
Q'Ithrya

A Fraud
Hud

The Mother of Clones
Qi Ammah Yah Qoon

The Destroyer of Worlds
Qi Hammah Yah Ithri

The Adept
Qi Quyum

The Star-Mage
Qi Naga

The Star-Shrine
Qi Saadhi

The Crone
Qi Oon

The God-Schools and Treeship
Qi Rya-Qa yi Etherai

The Chthonic Abyss
Qi Neykia Qith-Ra

The Alchemical Temple
Qi Anssaziia

of Artifice
Yih Rya-Appis

CHAPTER TWO
RELIGION AS MEDIUM

> "Religion is an ur-medium. Right from the start, through the demand for repeatability embodied by ritual, religion was not only bound to media, but was itself a medium."
>
> –Boris Groys & Peter Welbel[118]

The worlds of Art and Religion have been inextricably interwoven since the dawn of the Human Story. Palaeolithic cave paintings and ritual burial practises are cited as cornerstones of human evolution. Our capacity to produce abstract symbolic images and symbols paved the way for us to develop at first hieroglyphics and eventually written language. Unlike most other mammals who display only a casual interest in their dead, excavated remains of ancient burials suggest that, early on our ancestors began to conceive of life after death and drafted the blueprints for the concept of an immortal soul.

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[118] Boris Groys and Peter Weibel, *Medium Religion: Faith, Geopolitics, Art* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), 41.

Depictions of horses and bison with eight, twelve and sixteen legs, scrawled on prehistoric cave walls imply movement. One can speculate that when torchlit, and choreographed through sudden bursts of flame and shadow, possibly accompanied by a chanting and ritual performance, that the prototype of what we now call 'animation' may have been rehearsed in mysterious ceremonies in darkened caves, foreshadowing what we now call the black-box theatre.[119] The burial of the dead, with tools and objects, flowers and ornamentation as well as the deliberate attention paid to how these objects were placed in the ground, attest to a formative relationship between aesthetics and the divine. It is clear that from the beginning, religion and art are, historically, two sides of the same coin.

Upon the backdrop of the polytheistic Ancient Near East, the first monotheistic religion now referred to as Judaism, emerged as the flagship of a number of critical historical innovations. Chief among these was the advent of an image-less text-based religion, that emphasized literacy as the means with which to commune with the divine as a singular, abstract, imageless God. Monolatry mutated into monotheism, where the God archetype became singular in its updated version. This *God 2.0* could only be accessed, or explored through syntax. Thus, in contrast to and "set apart" from its ancestral cosmogonies, the origin myth of Judaism ascribes the creation of the universe and the growing of the world through the medium of language: "In the beginning was the Word." Following many centuries of transition and revision, this concept mutated to align with the arrival of Jesus of Nazareth, a prophet containing the god in human form, a new version we can call God 3.0. Thus we have the rise of the concept of The Word (God) made Flesh (in Christ.)

In *Nothing Sacred: The Truth About Judaism*, media scholar Douglas Rushkoff presents Judaism as a historical "technology" that emerged within the Axial Age, a context of significant evolutionary change. This phase of our evolution saw roaming nomads rapidly transform into agrarian farm-based communities, as cities and temples were now being built as stationary and sedentary structures. This transition required contracts: agreements condensed into text and made 'legal' through authoritative inscription. According to Rushkoff, these legal devices abstracted and incorporated Judaism's source code into the new spiritual technology of the *Covenant* – a legal contract based upon mutual reciprocity – between the singular God 2.0 and his (chosen) people.

After the destruction of the First Temple in Jerusalem, the Israelites fled for their safety and survival, to the polytheistic metropolis of Babylon. In fear of losing their flock to exotic gods and alluring mystery cults, the Jewish Priests and intelligentsia devised a new method to keep their congregants attention focused on the imageless God. The oral scriptures that had previously been performed ritually, or inscribed

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[119] Werner Herzog, Erik Nelson, Adrienne Ciuffo, Peter Zeitlinger, Joe Bini. *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*. Cave of Forgotten Dreams. 2011. Orland Park, IL: Creative Differences Productions Inc., distributed by MPI Media Group. DVD.

on individual scrolls and read before believers in the sacrosanct Temple, were now condensed into written passages that literate adherents were instructed to read in divided sections (referred to as Parshahs) stretched out over the course of an entire year. The Parshahs enacted what Rushkoff refers to as a *proto-deconstructive* instinct – one that emphasized critical engagement through communal acts of close reading. This gave birth to a robust tradition of commentary that could counter the cultic immersion one would experience through the seduction – and *artifice* – of the full, cinematic stories. Breaking up, or 'cutting up' the text, into small weekly sections required the reader to engage in acts of critical reflection, and this in turn protected them from falling under the 'spell' of story.

The tradition of Torah study is one of mitigating and abstracting our compulsion for immersion through the autonomous practise of critical exegesis. As a media theorist trying to make sense of the internet and the changes its' global implementation could ignite, Rushkoff was looking for historical precedents where major new media was introduced to large populations with the potential to drastically shift historical paradigms:

> Judaism is a religion dedicated to media literacy...Like the early internet, which was too slow to render pictures, Judaism is a "text-only" religion. As a result, also like the early internet, Jewish law and legend is as easy to write as it is to read—the very definition of transparency. It is a two-way set of texts, continually annotated by its readers. The annotations judged most successful by the greater community becoming part of the religion's core code – just as in the shareware software development community. Images are forbidden, because they can so easily become sacred in their own right...[120]

If we are to consider the rise of monotheism as the rise of so-called "religion", the relationship between image and text undergo a critical juncture at the onset of the Abrahamic religions. As part of its radical reformation from polytheism to monotheism, what we now refer to as Judaism centred around a set of Commandments which structured the moral and religious worldview of its adherents. This Codex, called the Decalogue, has remained unhindered for at least 3000 years. The first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me" pertains to the singular worship of God 2.0: Yahweh, the central and exclusive deity of all three Abrahamic religions. The first commandment describes the critical reformative power of proto-Judaism, which set itself apart by monopolizing Godhood into a single form, diverting ritual practises of human sacrifice into symbolic acts (Abraham & Isaac), and transforming worship from an image-based orthopraxis into text-based religion.

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[120] Rushkoff, Douglas. *Nothing Sacred: The Truth About Judaism.* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2003), xiii.

The second commandment declares: 'You shall not make unto thee any graven image", implying that personifications of divine agents, whether produced in 2 or 3-dimensional form, of either Yahweh himself or any other God, were exclusively forbidden. The lengthier description declares greater detail of the prohibition:

> You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

The Second Commandment is the only prohibition that provides any explanation, and the explanation provided is concise and direct. The distinction being made is that the foes of Yahweh are image-worshippers, and those who are faithful to him must piously refrain from producing or engaging with images in their singular worship. Proto-Judaism's emphasis upon the exclusive sacrality of the text was revolutionary, and the Torah, or the First Five Books of Moses describe the ongoing and repetitive failings of the Israelites to follow this decree. These moral failings summon Yahweh's wrath and jealousy in cyclic repetition throughout the Hebrew Bible. Golden Calves, Asherah Poles and hundreds of statues dedicated to Baal line the pages of the text that continually reiterate that image-worship and polytheism as abhorrent, but nonetheless persistent. The Graven Image, that is the unsanctioned, forbidden image as source of apostasy and heresy, has its roots in this early codex of spiritual law.

THE NEW ICONOCLASTS

Three thousand years later, in an Information Age rife with visual culture, Art and Religion remain at odds with one another, or as Aaron Rosen describes in *Art & Religion in the 21st century*, they appear to be "headed for an apocalyptic showdown."[121] Invariably, when religion and state were more interdependent, the lines between art and heresy were policed by federal powers that saw art as propaganda and feared the power that it wielded. But now, in so-called democracies, we have independent art institutions, publicly and privately funded that claim to remain outside of the purview of religious oversight. This has not, however, stopped various religious organizations from attempting and at times succeeding in silencing art they deem blasphemous, offensive, or heretical to their religious worldviews.

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[121] Aaron Rosen. Art & Religion in the 21st Century. (London: Thames and Hudson, 2015), 8.

Maurizio Cattelan, *La Nona Hora,* sculpture, polyester resin, painted wax, human hair, fabric, clothing, accessories, stone and carpet, dimensions variable, 1999 (courtesy Maurizio Cattelan's Archive) in *Art & Religion in the 21st century* by Aaron Rosen, London: Thames & Hudson , 2015, 13.

Italian artist and provocateur Maurizio Cattelan's 1999 sculptural installation *La Nona Hora,* presented a polyester resin replica of Pope John Paull II, produced through hyperreal mimesis, depicting the pontiff moments after he has been knocked over by a meteorite. Broken Glass is scattered across the plush red carpet while the Pope firmly clutches his ceremonial staff revealing a pious and prayerful determinacy even in the weight of his collapse. Cattelan told *Sculpture Magazine* in 2005, that

> In the beginning, he was supposed to be standing, with the crucifix
> in his hands... When it was finished and I stood in front of it, I
> felt as if something was missing, that the piece was not complete.
> What it needed was very simple: It lacked drama and the capacity to
> convey the feeling of being in front of something extraordinary and
> powerful. It didn't have the sense of failure and defeat.[122]

In the year 2000, the exhibition *Beware of Exiting Your Dreams: You May Find Yourself in Somebody's Elses* premiered at the *Zacheta National Gallery of Art* in Warsaw Poland curated by Swiss Art Historian Harald Szeemann from Switzerland. Among the works exhibited was Catellan's *La Nona Hora*, which activated calls of

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[122] Scott Indrisek. "Revisiting Maurizio Cattelan's Sculpture of the Pope Struck by a Meteorite". Artsy.net, April 26, 2019. Date accessed: Sept. 14, 2020. https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-revisiting-maurizio-cattelans-sculpture-pope-struck-meteorite

removal, as it was seen as an act of heresy and blasphemy from the largely Catholic Polish public. There are 33 million registered Roman Catholics in Poland – which according to 2015 demographics makes up roughly 87% of the overall population.[123] But unlike in the United States of America, where the Catholic League is able to, in some instances, exert its' influence upon the State, in Poland the Catholic League *is* the State. During the exhibition in Warsaw, two politicians attempted to intervene against the blasphemous work by physically removing the meteor from the installation. Others tried to cover the artwork, and after an ongoing battle between the Museum and the government, the notably Jewish art historian and director of Zacheta, Anda Rottenberg, seen as responsible for the blasphemous state sanctioned depiction, was dismissed from her position.

Andres Serrano *Piss Christ,* Cibachrome Print, 152.4 x 101.6cm, (courtesy of the artist and Nathalia Obadia Gallery) 1987, in *Art & Religion in the 21st century* by Aaron Rosen, London: Thames & Hudson , 2015, 14.

Perhaps the most notorious and historically recent example of iconoclasm in the United States is Andrea Serrano's 1987 *Piss Christ*, wherein a miniature replica of Christ's crucifixion, submerged in urine was photographed and developed on a Cibachrome print. The mass-produced effigy floats in a womb-like substance, illuminated by a hazy golden light that bubbles and from a distance resembles amber. Serrano photographed a series of other religious replicas floating in urine including a *Madonna and Child*, Michelangelo's *Moses, Discobolus and the Winged Nike of Samothrace*, but it was the *Piss Christ* that garnered the attention of then US senator Jesse Helms, who protested against the 1989 exhibition of Serrano's work in his home

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[123] "Poland: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions" European Commission, Eurydice. Friday Feb. 5, 2021. Date accessed: Feb. 15, 2021. https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-56_en

state of North Carolina. This act led to severe funding cuts to the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States, which remains in place to this day.

Marina Abramovic *Spirit Cooking,* Colour photographic print, (courtesy Sean Kelly Gallery), 1993, in Alex Marshall. "Marina Abramovic Just Wants Conspiracy Theorists to Let Her Be." New York Times, April 21, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/21/arts/design/marina-abramovic-satanist-conspiracy-theory.html

Yugoslavian performance artist Marina Abramovic's provocative oeuvre from the past forty years has instigated a series of religious controversies, many of which are ongoing. She has been referred to by religious critics as a "witch", a "black magic performer" and a "Luceriferian individual" and "Satanist."[124] Most recently, at the launch of her performative exhibition *'The Cleaner'* in 2019 at the *Centre of Contemporary Art Snaki Czasu* in Torun, Poland, members of a group called Zawierzam Maryi (Polish for "I Entrust to Mary") protested the 'Satanic vernissage' through collective silent prayer outside the museum.

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[124] Alex Marshall. "Marina Abramovic Just Wants Conspiracy Theorists to Let Her Be." New York Times, published April 21, 2020. Date accessed: Sept. 22, 2020.
https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/21/arts/design/marina-abramovic-satanist-conspiracy-theory.html

Abramovic's repeated invocations of pagan iconography, such as the pentagram[125] (which as a symbol she cut into her stomach with a knife in *Lips of Thomas* (1975), and set ablaze in *Rhythm 5* (1974)), the goats head, horns, as well as the spellcasting references in her *Spirit Cooking* installations, all contributed to make witchcraft a constant accusation by religious extremists. In the case of her 2010 blockbuster retrospective *The Artist is Present* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (which I had the great privilege of assisting with, as witchdoctor-in-residence[126]) religious fanatics decreed that Marina Abramovic herself was the *Whore of Babylon*, prophesied in Christian apocalyptic narratives. This led members of the public to not just protest the blasphemy in her work, but to mythologize the artist herself as an actor in a religious apostatic drama.
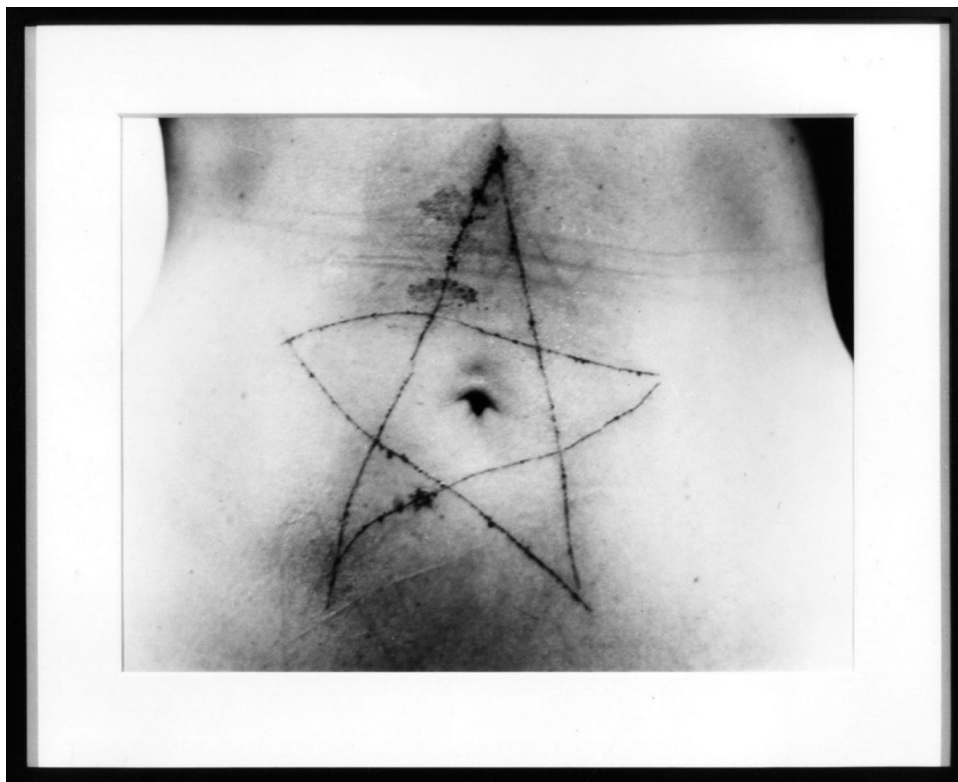
Marina Abramovic, *Lips of Thomas,* black and white photograph, 29 ¾" x 39 ½" framed, 1975. (Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York). https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/5176

At one point during her performance, as documented in the film *The Artist is Present,* hundreds of A4 pages titled *The Artist is Putrescent* were flung from above

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[125] Despite the pentagram's overt symbology in Occult Paganism as depiction of the wizard's foot, according to Abramovic the star was in direct reference to the petokraka, or the five-pointed star of socialism and was used by the artist as a "critique of Socialism's oppressions".
Richards, Mary. *Marina Abramovic*, (London: Routledge, 2010), 12.

[126] I was originally hand-selected by Marina Abramovic as one of the reperformers for the Artist is Present retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art, but at the last minute MoMA refused to sponsor any international artist visas which made me legally unable to perform. Instead, Marina offered for me to offer spiritual support for herself and select reperformers during the experience, wherein we coined the term Witchdoctor-In-Residence.

the atrium, landing upon spectators, the artist and within the performance space of the event. Security guards, portrayed in the film like modern-day Temple Priests, attempted to trace the source of contagion and promptly cleared the artist's vicinity of its defilement. One viewer read a segment of the text aloud to the camera crew:

> We have come to sit with Marina, Whore of Babylon and confess... speech superfluous, pure form against pure form... The reflection of an emptiness full of value. We have come as the last spectators before the crucifixion. We sit as Apostles at her table, and our non-chalance betrays her...[129]

Six years following the ground-breaking retrospective which effectively launched Abramovic from the cults of the avant-garde to worldwide celebrity, the *#PizzaGate* conspiracy surfaced. The former White House Chief of Staff's emails had been hacked and in them it was revealed that he was planning to participate in one of Abramovic's' *'Spirit Cooking'* dinners at her home in New York City. *Spirit Cooking* was the name of a book by Abramovic, and a series of installation works wherein the artist painted recipes resembling spells onto gallery walls with pigs' blood. Abramovic insisted that these dinners were fundraising events for her new institute, where she cooked "regular" food for her guests and assured "there was no human blood, or baby servings, or sex orgies."[130] Since then, until now the artist has received many emailed death threats – sometimes, she noted, three times a day – from religious fanatics that see her as a messenger of Satan. The rise of the Q-ANON conspiracy within the United States and its belief that the Democratic Party is a secret-wing of satanic, child-eating paedophiles, implicates Marina Abramovic as a central figure and Whore of Babylon. In an open letter written to address to a range of conspiracy theories that have developed around her practise, in 2020, she appealed to these groups to leave her alone by declaring "I'm an artist, not a Satanist."[131]

These are but a few examples of the ways in which contemporary artists perform iconoclasm in secular contexts that claim to have separation between church and state. While smaller galleries, or art festivals, theatres or small venues may sometimes encounter a version of this push-back, it tends to be Museums, that are in most cases federally funded, that end up being targeted. In turn, these institutions either stand up to, or surrender to religious factions that call for certain works to be de-platformed, cancelled, or removed because of their blasphemous design or intent. Hilde Hein describes Contemporary Museums of Art as secular temples that "endow the objects they contain with an aura and elevate the act of aesthetic contemplation

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[129] Matthew Akers, The Artist is Present, (2012; Chicago: A Show of Force Productions/ HBO Documentary Films). Film.

[130] Alex Marshall. "Marina Abramovic Just Wants Conspiracy Theorists to Let Her Be." New York Times, April 23, 2020. https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/21/arts/design/marina-abramovic-satanist-conspiracy-theory.html

[131] Ibid.

to ritual."[132] It is the act of ritual consecration – by the Museum, the Institution, and the State – that gets targeted by religious powerbrokers who protest against blasphemous art being elevated and given status by the state. The Artists/Iconoclasts tend to be read as iconoclastic only if their work is elevated by these modern secular temples.

"Marina Abramovic with a bloody goats head", *Fellowship of God's Covenant People* (website), Pastor Don Elmore, Pastor Jim Jester, Union Kentucky ,accompanied by the description *"Marina Abramovic performs satanic ritual in the guise of art."* http://fgcp.org/image/marina-abramovic-bloody-goats-head

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[132] Hein, Hilda, "Institutional Blessing: The Museum as Canon Maker." The Monist 76:4 (1993) 556-573, 561.

RELIGION AS MEDIUM

The word 'medium' is particularly promiscuous. Its English etymology originates in the late 16th century, imported from the 13th century Latin *medius* – referring to a middle ground, quality, or degree, denoting a centre [or] interval. Initially it conveyed a form of spatial neutrality: an in-between of high and low, linking binaries. The middle finger (medio) stands flanked on either side by two distinctions. This connotation mutated in the late 1590s, as the territory it described began to be utilized. 'Medium' became not only a temperature between things but also an intermediate agency or channel of communication. Now that it had function as well as location, it began to gain mass, shape, and most importantly: movement. It became the vessel, the angel, the *messenger* – the vehicle through which something could be ferried between two or more poles. In the 18th century it moulted again, and its meaning was industrialized and mass-produced to describe the printing press (the origins of mass-media) and it was only in the aftermath of this that in the 19th century it began to describe various other modes of artistic transmission (pottery, sculpture, painting, photography). Curiously, for our purposes, it was more or less during the same historical time period, amidst the rise of Theosophy and European Occultism, wherein medium branched off to further describe a kind of spiritual messenger, a prophet, a conduit (or vessel) of communication from beyond.

I came of age as an artist in an era where mixed-media and inter-disciplinary were staples of contemporary practise. I was neither interested, nor encouraged to train in any one medium and perfect it, as was the modus operandi of Western art through the ages. As a Contemporary Artist I was encouraged to use whichever media satisfied the intention of my work best. Distinct mediums exist because centuries were spent developing their uniqueness, but now one was encouraged to use them as they need, without the promises of mastery that once enshrined them.

I became interested in the notion of *Religion as Medium* following my encounter of an exhibition of the same name curated by Boris Groys and Peter Weibel at the *Centre for Art & Media* in Karlsruhe. In their exhibition and accompanying catalogue essays, Weibel and Groys suggest that "Religion was from the outset not only tied to media, but was and is itself a medium."[133] They suggest that the very promise of technology, "the overcoming of time and space and the promise of eternal life"[134], was formed within the promise of Religion in the past. Beginning with stone age drawing and painting all the way through to television, radio, internet and now virtual reality, transmission was and remains to be the *lingua franca* of religion as an ur-medium. Weibel refers to this medial infrastructure as *theotechnology*: finding

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[133] Boris Groys and Peter Weibel, *Medium Religion: Faith, Geopolitics, Art* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2009), 41.
[134] Ibid, 41.

the root source of all technological advancements within the precincts of the religious imaginary.

Groysz inverts McLuhan's legendary invocation "the medium is the message", by giving it a digital upgrade : "the message has become the medium" or to be more specific "a certain religious message has become the digital code."[135] Like Weibel, Groys bridges the contemporary digital image, and its propensity to generate, multiply and endlessly re-distribute itself with earlier versions of the copyist, the scribe, and oracular recitation and memorization of the principal sacred referent, story, image, or arc. He cites the effectiveness of digital reproduction, and its ability to reproduce any text or image more effective than any other method that has preceded it, and cites this as a critical *religious* development.

RELIGION AS MULTI-MEDIA PRODUCTION

Many definitions of religion continue to compete in secular, religious and academic spheres, in attempt to classify what a religion is, what a religion does and how it goes about being a religion. Over the years I have explored and 'tried on' several definitions both as tools for my own creative imagining but also under pressures to take an academic "position." Out of all of the definitions I have encountered, there is one which remains central to my aims as an artist, describing the precise mechanisms by which I appropriate religion as medium in order to raise questions and ignite debate. This definition comes from social anthropologist Clifford Geertz's 1956 essay "Religion as a Cultural System' wherein he circumscribes a religion as

> (1) system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.[136]

Geertz's definition is helpful in analysing artworks with culturally formative power and invented religions that emerge from experience with the artworks that inspire them. The space that exists between "the aura of factuality" and the "suspension of disbelief" in religions and artworks, collide to fertilize "long-lasting moods and motivations" that continue to affect and alter the conceptions of the public following their direct experience inside of them. When executed effectively, as various media collaborate to produce this "aura", the viewer transforms into a *believer* in a story

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[135] Ibid, 27.
[136] Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 90.

whose truth has surpassed factuality. I am interested in the process of how myths become real, how the made becomes believed, and what devices certain stories must be *clothed in* to produce such devotional reception in secular audiences, particularly those in the new millennium overtly sceptical of belief.

In *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation,* Media Scholar Mark P. Wolf argues that the notion of 'transmediality' – of a narrative, or franchise, or series of works represented in different media

> suggests that we are experiencing something which lies beyond
> the media windows through which we see and hear it... [It] implies
> a kind of independence for its object; the more media windows we
> experience a world through, the less reliant that world is on the
> peculiarities of any one medium for its existence.[137]

It is extremely commonplace for worldbuilding projects of speculative fiction to exist across multiple media simultaneously, including (and not limited to), literature, film, music, television, internet, video games, comic books, merchandise, action figures, board games, soundtracks, manuals, and costumes. When one encounters a fictional entity or construct that appears to cross media thresholds, Wolf argues that this adds to the ontological weight it has, becoming more like reality than reality itself. These notions combined – of religion as medium, religion as a cultural system and the role of transmediality in make-belief, have led me over the course of this Practise-based PhD to "produce" my own take on what a religion is, what it does and how it functions from the unique perspective of an artist producing a religion as art. I therefore attempt, in my humble way, to define a religion from the perspective of an artist who uses the construct as medium:

> Religion is a form of multimedia production,
> capable of generating worldviews, inspiring beliefs
> and engineering cultures.

Let us use the analogy of walking into a Church for Sunday Service to illustrate this. One enters the Church, and encounters a symphony of transmediality. Images are presented as paintings or frescoes, as well as 3d sculptures, stained glass windows and symbolic, iconographic ornamentation carved into the pillars of the architecture itself. All of this material is symbolically derived from the narrative at the centre of the religion, in this case, The Holy Bible. Typically, the architecture of the space has been designed for optimal acoustic transmission of sound/music as well as performed oration to reverberate through the halls. On the pews where people sit are placed copies of the mythology and its' hymns notated so that audience members can read

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[137] Mark P. Wolf. *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation*. (New York; Oxfordshire England, Routledge) 2012. 247.

and sing along. When the service begins, the priest and the choir emerge wearing vestments – visual garments not unlike costumes that present the roles they are to perform. The Priest reads aloud from the text and interprets it, contextualizes it and makes it applicable for the congregation in a style that merges improvisation with oration, but in all cases was creatively assembled, or authored by the Priest as sub-creator. Choirs sing versions of the text put to music, and sometimes ritual performative acts accompany such iterations. Smells are activated through the burning of frankincense and myrrh, symbolic foods are eaten that relate to the central story, and at a certain point the concert ends, and people greet and meet in another location to discuss their experience of the sermon of the day.

When read this way, the Church itself *is* a multi-media production, a performative installation or total artwork, combining visual art, writing, music, costume, performance, architecture and sculpture to produce an experience that can be deemed religious. The figures, allegories and symbols from the central narrative all have transmedial trajectories – passing through story, song, sculpture, and painting – which adds to their ontological weight and makes them appear to be true, if not real. I use this tool – of Religion as a Multi-Media Production – in my effort to synthesize religious experiences in publics predisposed to imagine themselves immune to its charms and seduction.

RELIGIOUS PROSTHETICS II

SKIN BIBLE
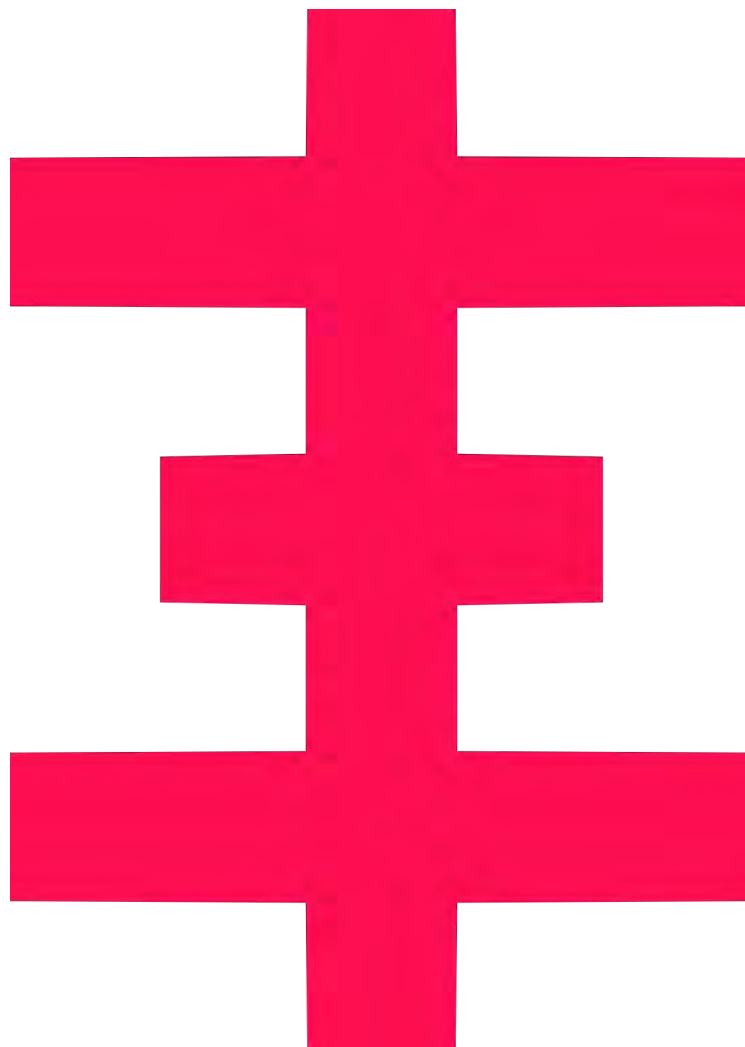
Thee Temple of Psychick Youth, *Psychick Cross*, digital image, dimensions variable.
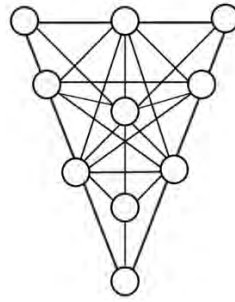
THE BIBLE AS SOURCE CODE

The word 'bible' descending from the Greek *biblia,* describes a *library* of individual works bound together into a single compilation, publication or scroll. In the West, the term *bible* describes two different, but deeply entangled libraries. The first is *The Hebrew Bible*, the Old Testament, or *Tanakh*: a 46-book canon containing all of the Hebrew Scriptures, including the *Torah* (the five books of Moses), *Nevi'im* (the Books of the Prophets) and *Ketuvim* (Writings). The second is referred to as *The New Testament*, a 27-book canon which follows the Old Testament, containing *The Gospels*, *The Acts,* The *Epistles*, and *The Book of Revelation*. Most standard bibles contain both libraries in one, while some also contain also the *Apocrypha*, a collection of ancient books that were not included in the original canons.

As a religious prosthetic, the Bible functions in the contemporary West as a loaded and immediately recognizable artifact of material culture. Nearly every hotel room or hospital ward has one lingering in a drawer, placed there by the Gideons. Its codes have been hacked and repurposed by a range of artistic cultural productions, seeking to replicate the biblical 'aura' and redistribute it outside of institutionalized religion.

I am interested in the Bible as religious prosthetic in terms of (1) its physical structures as an item of material culture, (2) it's stylistic devices, both textual and aesthetic, and (3) its use as *metaphor* to describe elaborate fictional works that either in scope or scale, or through theological affordance elevate the work to the status of *biblical.* Frank Herbert's *Dune* is regularly referred to as the *'Sci Fi Bible'*, Tolkien's *Silmarillion* is referred to as *the Bible of Middle Earth,* and Alan Moore's 2016 Jerusalem (whose name itself is a biblical reference) is described as a "million word book longer than the bible."[138] The Bible as religious prosthetic is the source code for religion as a form of multi-media production. RELIGIONVIR.US hacks this biblical source code by producing, performing and literally growing my own Bible as an ongoing conceptual artwork.

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[138] Matthew Jackson. "Alan Moore's Latest Achievement: A Million-Word Book Longer than the Bible", *SyFy Wire* (website), Sept. 11, 2014. Date accessed: Jan. 10, 2021. https://www.syfy.com/syfywire/alan-moores-latest-achievement-million-word-book-longer-bible

That dang ol' tequila worm 🄴
@BasedDrWorm

Instead of a bible this hotel just had a copy of Dune???

Science Fiction's Supreme Masterpiece

DUNE

FRANK HERBERT
With a New Afterword by Brian Herbert
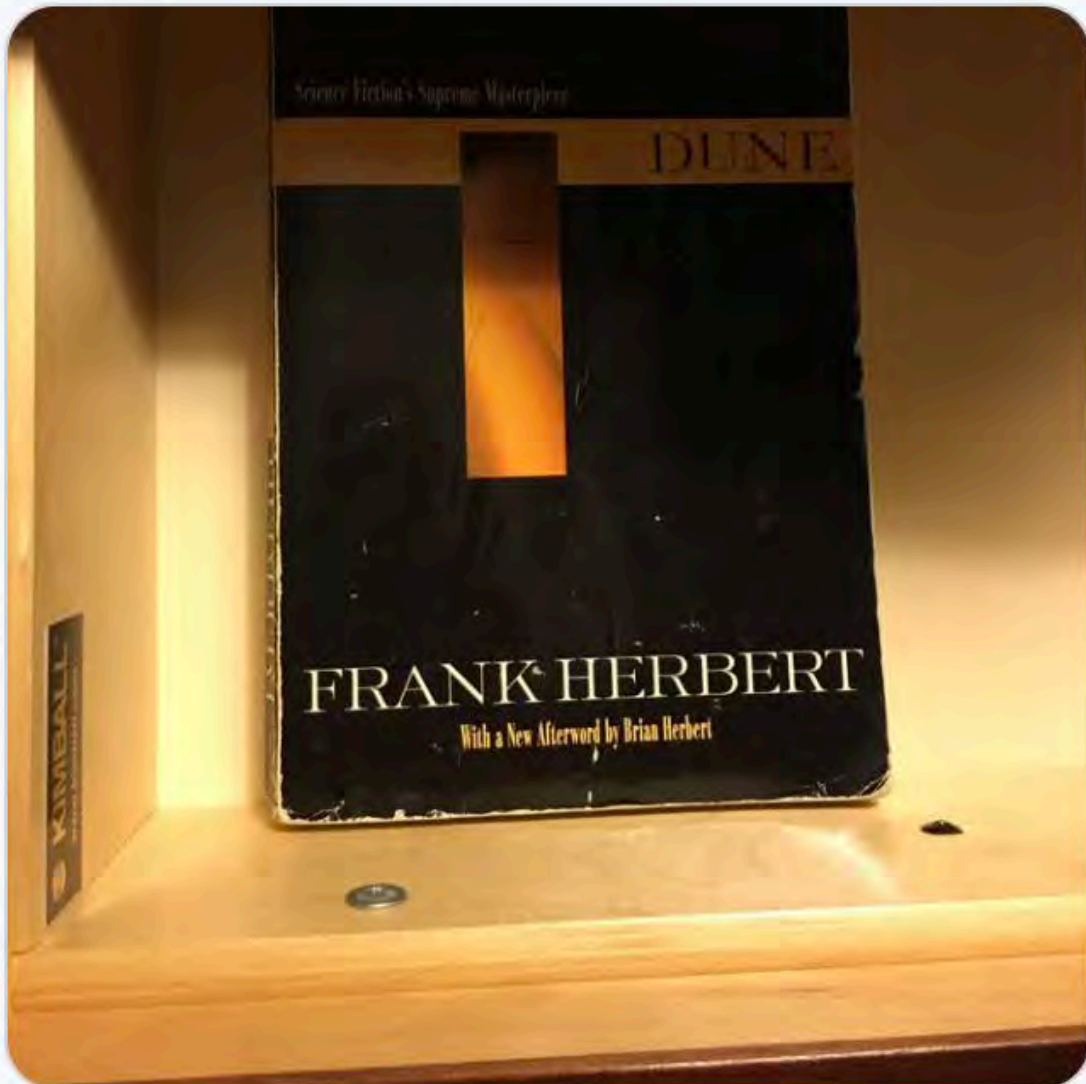
2:35 AM · Jan 2, 2020

♡ 25.8K   💬 4.3K   ⬆ Share this Tweet

BasedDrWorm. Twitter Post. Jan. 2, 2020. *Instead of a Bible this hotel just had a copy of Dune???*
https://twitter.com/BasedDrWorm/status/1212547870454358017

An example of visual culture that radically repurposes the biblical aura is Genesis Breyer P-Orridge's 547 paged *Thee Psychick Bible: Thee Apocryphal Scriptures Ov Genesis Breyer P-Orridge and Thee Third Mind Ov Thee Temple of Psychik Youth.* Breyer-P-Orridge has seeded the prosthetic with a number of religious affordances directly on the cover and embedded within the title itself. The word 'Bible', clearly the most prominent word in the title, is inscribed in gold-lettering, and centred against a black hardcover roughly the same dimensions as a standard bible. P-Orridge's use of the terms "Bible", "Apocryphal Scriptures", and "Temple", alongside the artists' chosen name of "Genesis" straddle the line between religious affordance (literary device) and religious prosthetic (aesthetic device). The book uses a biblical typeface, includes a red ribbon bookmark and its interior affords the technique of *rubrication*, a medieval device common in holy manuscripts where the main text is written in black but certain words or sentences are made red for emphasis.

The most glaring device invoked to christen *Thee Psychick Bible* as a religious prosthetic is the central location of ToPY's self-styled "Psychik Cross", placed squarely in the centre of the cover (in gold) as well as the interior cover page in stark red, re-occurring in various locations throughout the text. While avoiding an overt definition of the Cross (as is Genesis' strategy) *Thee Temple of Psychik Youth* described their intent with the stylized logo as follows:

> The Psychik Cross is a symbol of TOPY. That is it's main meaning. It can also represent a trinity, a reversal of the Papal Cross (i..e two long crossbards and one short), and a TV aerial (receiver and transmitter of information.) No meaning is imposed upon it by the group.[139]

[139] Tyagu@HouseofKaos.Abyss.com. "TOPY FAQ", *Sacred Texts* (Website), Nov. 2, 1993. https://www.sacred-texts.com/eso/topy/topyfaq.txt

The contents of *Thee Psychik Bible* relate only broadly to themes in the Old and New Testaments, but the book itself is charged with spiritual/magical intent. Breyer P-Orridge and their apostles induct the reader to wide range of occult practise, and their appropriation of the Biblical aura is central to their "religious" aims to liberate the reader from all shackles of "Control."

JRR Tolkien's *Silmarillion* – the prequel to both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* – chronicles the events in the First Age of Middle Earth and its cosmogony. While the content of *The Silmarillion* stylistically resembles the writings of the Book of Genesis (including most notably Illuvatar's ordered seeding of Middle Earth), the hard-back *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, condensed into a single volume *aesthetically* references the size and scope of the Bible much more than its' prequel.

But it is the three volume *History of Middle Earth*, edited and assembled by Christopher Tolkien, that presents the most striking biblical referent as relates to material culture within the Tolkien lexicon, by invoking a host of visual strategies that associate it with the holy writ. These include: a typeface which references both standard tropes of Old English and the Donatus Kalender (D-K) font that was used for the first printed Gutenberg bible,[140] the decision to print on thin scritta or light-weight offset paper, standard for most study bibles and those placed by the Gideons in hotel rooms, red ribbon bookmarks, biblically numbered passages and aesthetic deliverance of commentary that echoes the Talmudic.

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[140] Lora Raykova. "The Hidden Story of Gutenberg's First Typeface and Bible Typography" *Inside Font Fabric*, website, Date accessed: Oct. 31, 2020. https://www.fontfabric.com/blog/gutenberg-first-typeface-original-bible-typography-used/

LIBER META 1:0

Whilst the authorship of many of the individual books of both the old and the new testaments are attributed to historical figures (such as the Five Books of Moses (Torah), or the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in the New Testament,) biblical scholarship over the past few centuries has deemed the attribution of authorship in many cases to be a fictional strategy enacted by biblical editors. Thus, the majority of these Scriptures prior to being inscribed and canonized had been:

> handed down orally by poets and storytellers; and even after it was
> given written form in court or priestly circles, the oral tradition
> persisted among the people...therefore when we hear about the
> "book" of Exodus we are apt to think of an author who sat down in
> a study to write for a reading public after having consulted sources
> available in a library. This situation did not prevail in antiquity, when
> only a few could read and write, and the tradition was often passed
> on through oral performance on ceremonial or informal occasions.[141]

RELIGIONVIR.US metaphorically and stylistically appropriates this process of trans-mutation from oral into scriptural text. The First and Second Mutations of RELIGIONVIR.US were orally performed live in ceremonial "techno-sermons" where I told aspects of the mythos live to assembled publics, accompanied by digital iconographic depictions projected onto screens to support the narrative being performed. Many of these stories produced rituals which were enacted, and contextualized within the precincts of the performance. Once the narratives central to RELIGIONVIR.US had been established, after roughly eight years of international performance, at the dawning of the Third Mutation I became interested in appropriating the Bible as religious prosthetic and container for the myths I had been performing. I wanted to archive the mythology I had developed through the artistic appropriation of the most recognisable religious prosthetic in material culture: The Bible.

I began by drafting a fictional *Stemma Codicum*, and mapping the gospels and scriptures I would include within the RELIGIONVIR.US Bible. I then began transcribing sermons delivered in live performance into text, and re-writing them with an authorial voice that echoed those of the Old and New Testaments, as well as *The Silmarillion* and Frank Herbert's *Dune*. But, as my practise was rooted in liveness, I was not content composing, inscribing and illuminating my mythos privately in the sanctity of my own scriptorium. Rather, thanks to my early training in the Abramovic method of durational performance, I gave birth to a new form of performative installation which I referred to as *durational monastic illumination performance.*

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[141] Bernard Anderson. *Understanding the Old Testament*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall), 1966. 23.

This method would involve the construction of a hybrid Scriptorium/Chapel as an art installation in public space, wherein I would illuminate and inscribe my Bible live over multiple hours, and many days consecutively. Here I would invite the public to enter and witness the "myth in its making" while "the artist is present" in a process that broke the fourth wall of creative composition as well as producing a hybrid chapel that evoked religious association.

Caravaggio. *St. Jerome*, oil on canvas, 112 x 157cm, (Rome: Villa Borghese) 1605/06 in Caravaggio: The Complete Works, Sebastian Schutze, (Koln: Taschen, 2015), 181.

Making use of Caravaggio's 1605-1606 painting *St. Jerome Writing* as source code, I began to construct a template, wherein I would sit upon a desk inscribing papyrus and parchment for multiple-hour sittings where the public was invited to witness. The first iteration of this came in the form of *Liber Meta 1.0*, presented as part of *Elastic,* a performance art festival presented in 2017, organized by the *Live Art Performance Group* (University of Oxford Brookes) curated by Veronica Cordova de la Rosa. This was a salon style event, featuring several performances occurring simultaneously (including original works by Brian Catling and Plastique Fantastique.) The event was presented in various rooms of Headington Hall, a 19th century Italianate mansion which forms part of the University of the Headington Hill site.

Liber Meta 1.0's inclusion in this festival was conceived of as a site-specific work. Here, against the backdrop of Oxford, a city dedicated to knowledge and very much a library in its own right, I adorned myself in a large red robe (emulating

Caravaggio's source code image), administered prosthetic breasts, drew onto my arm a stylized version of Jewish Tefillin[142] and set about to illuminate the pages of my bible on parchment in a room I transformed into a hybrid Scriptorium.

[M]Dudeck, *Artificial Intelligence (binding of tefillin on the arm of the androgynous mutant),* digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, 2017.

The performance lasted approximately five hours, one of nearly thirty individual performances presented in the mansion, where audience members were guided through the building by volunteers. Several audience members returned again and again to my installation, in part to track the progression of my inscription/illumination, but also, as I was told later, as a reprieve from the immensity of the performance festival itself. In this sense the performance/installation became a kind of *sanctuary*, where congregants could retreat and restore themselves in the meditative sanctum I produced.

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[142] Tefillin is a ritual in Judaism which traditionally was only to be performed by men, although in recent times thanks to reform in Judaism the practise has become pluralized and practised also by women and transgender individuals. leather straps are bound around the fingers, the hand, the forearm and the upper arm, going up to the top of the head, where a small box is placed at the center of the forehead, which has a small piece of the torah scroll written and placed inside of it. Men are supposed to put on tefillin each weekday morning, and during the prayer they recite one of the things they thank god for is having been born a man and not a woman. One of my earliest mentors, the performance artist Sharon Alward, ritually bound herself in white tape as tefillin in a number of early performances. I carried this tradition on as a queer feminist, multi-gendered artist engaging with religion in new ways.

My desk was covered with papers, artifacts, and materials from the ark-hive[143] of RELIGIONVIR.US. Much to my surprise audience members began to handle and explore the various religious prosthetics I'd laid out and positioned on the desk. This breach of the boundaries typical in museums that restrict audiences' urge to *touch* artworks was revelatory for me, religious prosthetics within the performance were no longer artworks, but rather 'props' that could ignite physical interaction. The performance concluded and the papyrus pages I illuminated were donated to audience members who handled them, including one small child whose curiosity I rewarded by consecrating him as a guardian of the scriptures of my new religion.

LIBER META 2:0

The second iteration of *durational monastic illumination performance* came in the form of *Liber Meta 2:0*, presented as part of *LAPSody 2017,* the 6th international festival and conference of Live Art, hosted by the Theatre Academy at University of the Arts Helsinki, May 24-27, 2017. As a festival rooted in a theatre school, I was allowed access to props and devices typically outside of the purview of contemporary performance art. I was assigned a dramaturg at the onset of the festival to assist in the construction of my monastic chapel. His task was to help me realize my vision with access to the prop collection held by the theatre school, as well as providing technical support for lighting, sound and atmosphere. *Liber Meta 2:0* was installed in a black box theatre, and featured a long neo-classical desk, an ornate chair, Gregorian chant played on loop over loudspeakers, a large-scale projector screen that hosted a high-resolution reproduction of Caravaggio's *St. Jerome Writing*, with stark overhead lighting painstakingly positioned to capture the chiaroscuro Caravaggio was famous for. This work is a perfect example of what I later refer to as a *Hypericon* in Religious Prosthetics IV, wherein I undergo strategic re-mixes of recognizable religious artworks and iconographies in effort to evoke patterned religious associations. The inclusion of the projected Caravaggio work was and remains the only time I have ever shown my source-material inside of a Hypericon itself.

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[143] Mimicking Genesis Breyer P-Orridg'es cut-up method of remixing established constructs through word and letter alterations, I refer to the "archive" of RELIGIONVIR.US as an "Ark-Hive."

[M]Dudeck, *Liber Meta 1:0,* as part of Elastic Festival, digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, 2017. Photographs by Pier Corona

I performed all four days of the festival, for five hours during each sitting, and in this time I was able to initiate and complete the illumination and inscription of an entire papyrus scroll, 400 cm in length, with an early version of the cosmogony of my mythos. I became aware that in addition to providing the public access to a living mythology,[144] *durational monastic performance* was also a productive strategy for me as a maker to produce prolific work in a short amount of time. Performance adds adrenaline to the creative process, and the traditionally internal acts of drawing and writing transposed into a live event provided a disciplinary structure that did not permit me to take breaks, or pull back and reconsider.

Much like the first iteration of *Liber Meta 1:0* in Oxford, several festival-goers and conference participants returned to my installation again and again, many coming back each day and staying for various lengths of time. They came to witness the development of the scriptures and also to access the sanctuary I had created. A few members of the viewing public elected to stay with me and watch me for multiple hours at a time, including one participant who spent the entire duration, nearly all five hours, of one day of the performance with me. I began to see the potential of this work not only as a way to perform how religions are "constructed" through the live "construction" of a Bible, but as the spatial enactment of manufacturing sacred spaces where people could meditate upon religious questions without the burden of dogma.. This paved the way for me to imagine the development of this work into a Temple (of Artifice) and has set forth the foundations for a series of new durational monastic illumination performances I will be referring to in the future as CHAPEL.

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[144] ArtSync. "Interview: Michael Dudeck." Feb. 24, 2012. Interviewed by Barbara Isherwood. Vimeo, 12:04. https://vimeo.com/37324623

[M]Dudeck, *Liber Meta 2:0*, digital performance documentation dimensions variable, performed as part of LAPSODY Festival of Live Art, 2018. Photographs by Ray Langenbach.

[M]Dudeck, *Liber Meta 2:0*, digital performance documentation dimensions variable, performed as part of LAPSODY Festival of Live Art, 2018. Photographs by Ray Langenbach.

THE NEON BIBLE

Both *Liber Meta 1:0* and *2:0* occurred prior to my initiation into the Practise-based PhD at Edinburgh College of Art. The third performative iteration of this method (which contained a critical aesthetic mutation) occurred during my second year in the program, as part of *Perfomensk International Festival of Performative Art* in Minsk Belarus from June 29-July 1, 2018 with a work called *The Neon Bible*. Similar to *Liber Meta 1:0 & 2:0,* I performed this iteration during all three days of the international festival, this time for six hours per day, totalling eighteen hours of durational performance in total. Organized as a DIY festival by anarchist artists in a politically charged country under the yolk of a ruthless dictatorship, the festival was, as I was told, the first ever international performance art event in Belarus open to the general public. In a political climate that was unpredictable and the looming possibility of a police presence, I was advised by the curatorial team not to wear my prosthetic breasts in case of altercation with overtly homophobic authorities.

In the midst of the PhD's creative incubation, which saw me move towards more overt psychedelic, cyberpunk and sci-fi aesthetics in the outward production of the RELIGIONVIR.US space opera, I elected this time to construct a scriptorium that referenced rave culture with a vast new colour palette. Using blacklight and covering a long table with with neon and pastel pigmented paper, my neon artifacts (including bones, invented tools and masks) were strewn out across the table and even spilled out onto the floor. Instead of parchment or papyrus, this time I elected to inscribe upon a scroll of black felt paper – illuminating with coloured pencils that matched the colour palette of the installation, made neon by the blacklight. I painted my face in turquoise and neon pink, in homage to my fictional Archon *Methuzaiia* (The Mother of Clones), but otherwise wore punk/priestly black, donned large metallic hoop earrings and bore a large metallic dog-chain around my neck.

Like both earlier iterations, the scriptorium erected in *The Neon Bible* became a place of respite from the over-programmed performance festival, but unlike earlier versions, members of the public in Minsk seemed entirely unaware of the fourth wall whatsoever. They engaged me directly during the performance with questions and conversations while I was illuminating, and I spoke back while inscribing my neon bible. Several audience members were astounded I had developed a practise of queering religion without fear of political or legal repercussion, and I elected to integrate this dialogue into the performance. Itself. I considered it as a site-specific work which required me to engage with the complex political dynamics of its positionality, and speak while I write as part of the work.
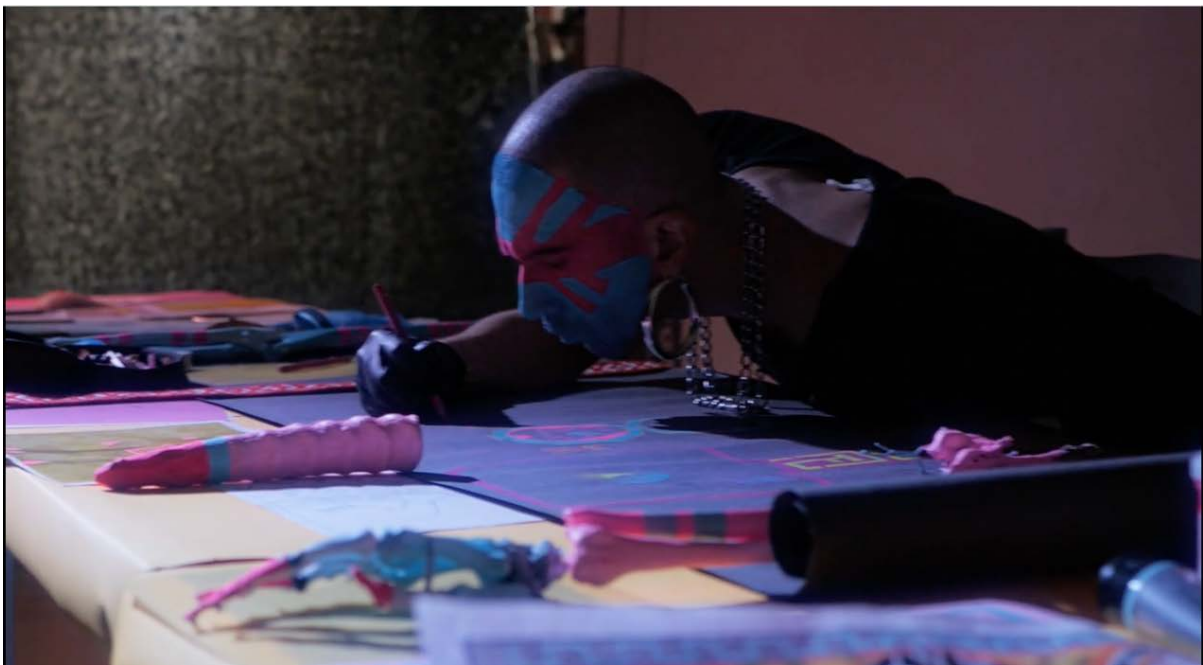
Several of my notebooks and scrolls were again handled, but this time audience members instinctively took my drawing devices (pens, pencils, and paint) and began to compose their own images on the paper and scrolls I myself had laid out. This second breach of the fourth wall not only challenged the sacrality of the art object as

being untouchable, but transformed members of the audience into collaborators through their artistic acts of solidarity and bold interventions of participating in the *myth in its making*. I left Minsk with a lasting sense of the dire importance of performing my own religion as an act of political, spiritual and cultural reclamation, and I have been informed by the curators that it has had a resounding influence on a number of local Belarusian artists interested in engaging religion directly with their work.

M]Dudeck, *The Neon Bible,* digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, 2018. as part of *Performensk International Festival of Performative Art* Minsk, Belarus. Photographs by Antonin Brinda.

M]Dudeck, *The Neon Bible,* digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, 2018. as part of *Performensk International Festival of Performative Art* Minsk, Belarus. Photographs by Antonin Brinda.
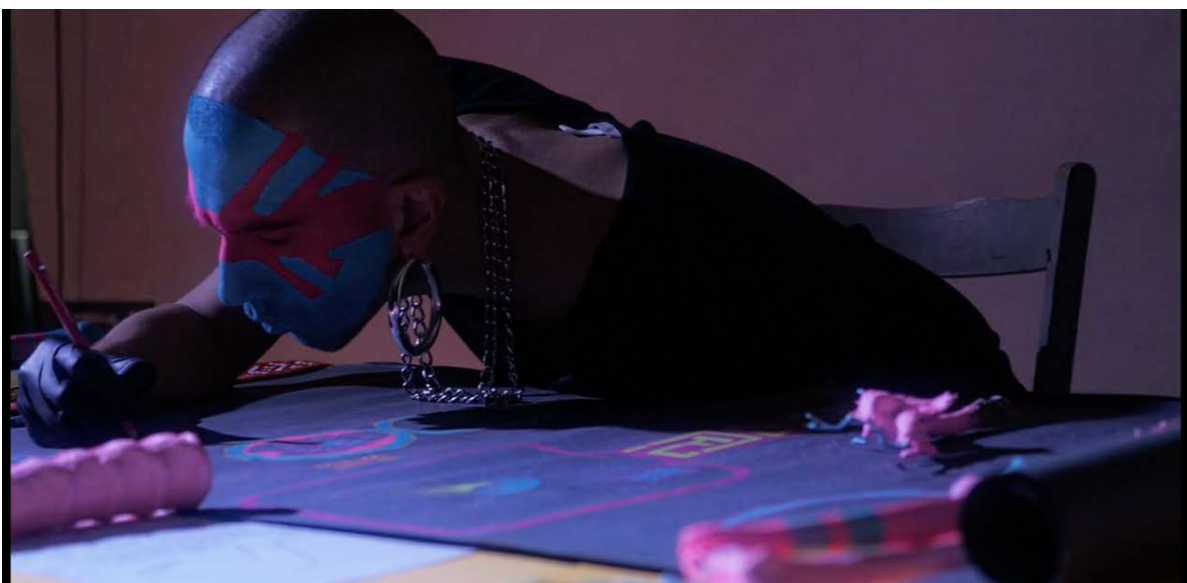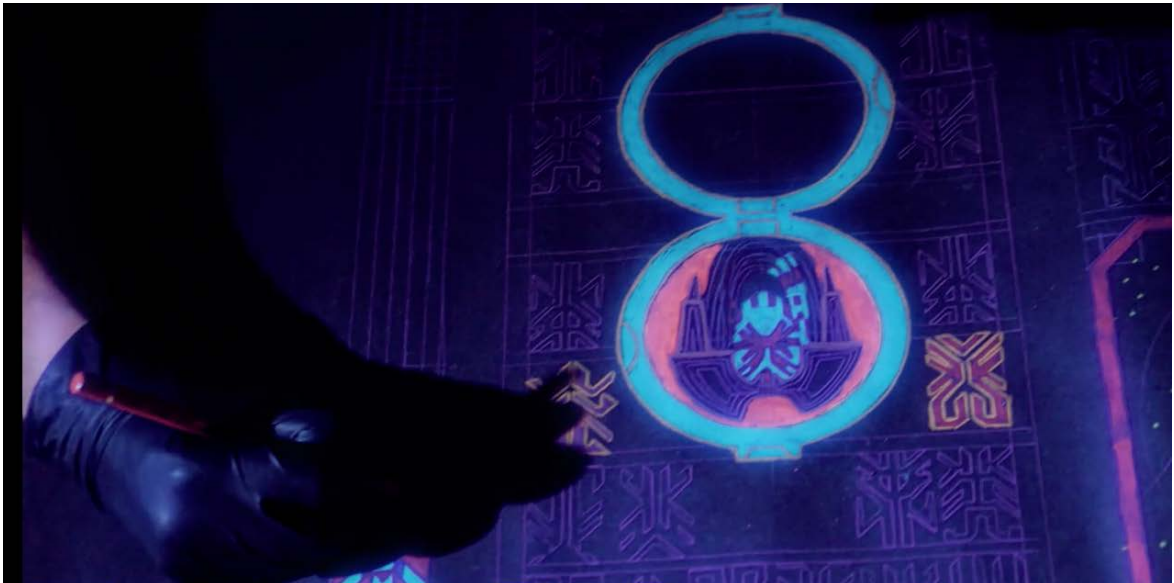
M]Dudeck, *The Neon Bible,* digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, 2018. as part of *Performensk International Festival of Performative Art* Minsk, Belarus. Photographs by Antonin Brinda.
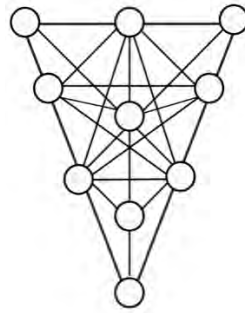
SKIN BIBLE: THE WORD MADE FLESH

The Hebrew word for Holy, קָדֹשׁ (Kadosh), as well as the Arabic word for sanctified المقدس (Muqqadas) share the same Semitic root – *q-d-s* – which translates into English as *'set apart'*. This ancient phonetic stem denotes *the sacred* as an act, or domain of *separateness*, implying that holiness is a process of *demarcation* that divides the sacred from the profane. The Hebrew Mishnah describes this terrain spatially; holiness is presented as a host of concentric circles, emanating outward from the nucleus of the Temple in Jerusalem, and protocols are in place to police entry and exit of each concentric perimeter. Within this framework, if some-*thing* is to be transferred from lesser to higher levels, it must do so via ritual *check-points*, where qualified agents (priests) inspect the incoming material then accept or deny entry. If some-*thing* is deemed unclean but still welcome, it is the priests that are uniquely qualified to purify it so that it may be permitted entry to the higher spheres. Thus the act of *consecration*, of making something holy or sacred, involves first and foremost the act of removal or separation, followed by processes of purification followed then by formal rites of sanctification.

Skin is a porous membrane, a flexible boundary between inner and outer worlds. Skin wraps the body and defines it, and *"sets it apart"* from the world. In my Invented Language or Conlang, the root-word *sa'ba* (꞉ꝗ⌷ꕟ) is included in the words for skin (*sa'ba'ri*), holiness (*saba'ra*) atmosphere (*a-saba-qi*) and membrane (*ha-saba*). They all share the same originary root (꞉⌷) that describes the process of protecting and enshrining that within its purview as sacred, or sacrosanct. In the third and final year of my Practise-based PhD, I began to conceive of the RELIGIONVIR.US Bible being made, or grown, or woven out of my own skin.

POLYMER PARCHMENT

In 2013, the first major Bioart event in Canada took place in my home-town of Winnipeg Manitoba, titled *The Toxicity Project,* curated by Melentie Pandilovsky and Jennifer Willet, jointly presented through PLUG IN ICA and Videpool. As part of her participation in the exhibition as well as the overall project, Australian bioartist Niki Sperou presented her workshop *Zones of Inhibition,* which I attended as a participant.

The Gods, or Archons in my space opera literally grow universes and life-forms in a hybrid practise of art and science. In short, the Gods, or Archons of RELIGIONVIR.US *are* Bio-Artists. I wanted to learn more about the medium, to be aware of the metaphor and to get my hands "wet" as an artist working in a laboratory. Over the course of this four-day workshop, myself and Sperou discovered, despite significant differences in the outputs of our practises, a number of shared mutual interests and aligned approaches. This climaxed in the view that we shared of biotechnology as a (micro)performative ritualistic practice rooted in myth. As an artist of Greek heritage living in Adelaide Australia, Sperou has a sustained interest in the relationship between Greek myth and contemporary biotechnology, most notably present in her ongoing research into the Chimera, which she defines as:

> the fanciful artefact defined by contemporary biotechnology and
> ancient Greek culture. The term pertains to the hybrid monster, the
> transgenic organism and the illusion. Chimera is etymologically
> linked to khemia or alchemy – the magic art of transmutation or
> the fusion of disparate things to make new.[145]

After dialogue exploring our shared interests, I approached Sperou with the following words:

> I have this dream of making my bible
> out of a leather made from my own skin

Parchment from animal skins was used in Medieval times to house illuminations and scripture. What if I could produce one that was made of my own flesh ? I developed a curiosity towards bioart devices to grow the pages with cells from my own body. This was meant to further the relationship between liveness, body art, and religion, to inscribe a bible that was "made of my body" and produce a skin that literally and metaphorically grown out of our collaborative artistic processes and convergence.

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[145] Niki Sperou & M Dudeck. *Skin Bible: The Word Made Flesh*. Video Essay, 2020. Duration: 10:05.

Sperou is the artist-in-residence at the *Centre for Marine Bioproducts Development* at Flinders University in Adelaide, Australia. At the point where our dialogue began, she had been appointed as the 2020 Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) Synapse residency recipient, which supported her to explore marine algal polymers as alternatives to plastics as an artist in the Flinders lab. From the onset, Sperou was enthusiastic about the idea of my Skin Bible, and it quickly transformed into a collaboration. We began to explore the possibility of producing a *polymer parchment* that could merge my own DNA with that of seaweed, which she was at the time researching. Merging my own skin cells with those of plants, arguably the oldest plant (seaweed) on the planet, connected to another metaphor central to my queer psychedelic religion: that of merging of animal and plant into one harmonious entity. This also fit with earlier works of Sperou where she explored similar themes, particularly in her human-plant chimeras.

Inspired by anthropodermic bibliopegy (the tradition of binding books in human skin), Sperou began to develop an alkaline alginate extraction method with which to produce a leather for our parchment. Over skype and zoom conversations, we began to develop a strategy wherein a hybrid seaweed/skin polymer would be created by seeding the algae with my own skin cells to produce our parchment. Sperou had been working with biodegradable marine algal biopolymers as greener alternatives to petroleum plastics, and we decided that our collaborative Skin Bible would involve the production of a new form of hybrid, polymer parchment, that was genuinely post-human and also homo-vegetal.

Whilst we intended to begin the process of fabricating the pages of the *Skin Bible* at CMBD in Australia in early 2020 (as part of this PhD), my ability to travel to Australia to undergo production of the Skin Bible was restricted due to the global pandemic of CoVID19. In November 2020, Sperou and I participated in the interdisciplinary conference *Taboo-Transgression-Transcendence in Art & Science* hosted by the University of Applied Arts in Vienna with our video-essay *Skin Bible: The Word Made Flesh* as part of their adapted online conference. Here we presented our research in process and I present it here as part of my thesis submission, as a conceptual unfinished project that grew out of the process of durational monastic illumination performance outlined in the pages previous. Currently, my expedition to Australia has been postponed to January 2022, wherein we will collaboratively merge my skin cells, with the seaweed polymers to produce the prototype of the *Skin Bible* for future durational monastic performances.

[M]Dudeck $ Niki Sperou, *Skin Bible: The Word Made Flesh*, digital video still, 2020.

Niki Sperou. *Marine Algal Polymer Matrix.* Digital image, dimensions variable, 2020.

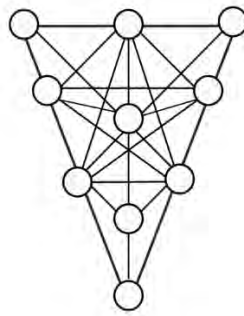Niki Sperou, *Seaweed Biopolymer Skin*, digital image, dimensions variable, 2020.

Niki Sperou, *Seaweed Biopolymer Leather,* digital image, dimensions variable, 2020.

[M]Dudeck, *Chapel Prototype*, digital drawing/illustration, 16.84 x 26.01cm, 2021.

CHAPTER THREE
RELIGION VIRUS

CULTURAL ENGINEERING

I define myself as a Cultural Engineer. The term itself is incongruous; used to describe high-paid positions in marketing, international development, sociology, as well as "trend-setting" *cool-hunters*[150] that steal fashion from subcultures and sell them to corporate design firms. Needless to say I do not use it in those terms. I appropriated the construct from performance artist and self-described cultural engineer Genesis Breyer P-Orridge (1950-2020), who coined the term to describe an artist or visionary, invested in cultural production, who wilfully uses their creativity to knowingly "altar"[151] reality and change the story of the culture they belong to.

The definition of cultural engineering provided above is my own – a "cut-up"[152] of various interpretations provided by P-Orridge in a series of interviews and essays s/he gave over the years. The reason I have opted to self-define rather than rely on an overt definition, is that despite P-Orridge's frequent use of the term, they appear pathologically resistant to "defining" almost anything. I read this is a queer strategy, to resist normativity through the refusal of codification and classification devices. Both Genesis Breyer P-Orridge and AA Bronson, two avatars who feature

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[150] Naomi Klein. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies.* (Toronto: Knopf Canada, 2000).

[151] As part of their Cultural Engineering, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge intentionally re-writes certain common words to imply multiple meanings. An example of this is when s/he uses the term "alter" as in, to change character or composition, s/he spells it in the way that altar – a table or flat top block used as the focus for religious ritual. The transpositions favored by P-Orridge typically involve ritual, religious, or magik based transformations, including using "thee" in place of "the", "Psychick" in place of "psychic", and creating new terminologies such as esoterrorist – which combines "esoteric" and "terrorist" to engineer new associations.

[152] Genesis Breyer P-Orridge. *30 Years of Being Cut Up.* (New York: Invisible Exports), 2009.

prominently in my thesis, favour *parables* over prescriptions, and as far as possible in my anti-dogmatic stance, I try to follow suit. In an essay called *An Over Painted Smile* in *Thee Psychik Bible*, P-Orridge uses the parable of the "Warhol Superstar" to describe how s/he perceives cultural engineering *operates*:

> I had also been thinking about celebrity, how Andy Warhol had turned fame into a new artistic medium, upping the cultural ante by making a "star" merely a stage, and inventing a new word for the next stage with "superstar." We all know how successful and impressive this insight was and how the word has passed into our vernacular so that it is easy to assume the term always existed, and forget it was contrived and deliberate. This was an early example of what I have named "cultural engineering.[153]

The blockbuster Broadway musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* conflated the quasi-historical Christ with Warhol's engineered "superstar", to produce a unique cultural product. The Warholian referent was never made explicit, though hinted at through aesthetic devices and *style*. Many people don't realize or are unaware of the claim that it was Warhol who *invented* the idea of the Superstar, or that it was Genesis Breyer P-Orridge who *invented* Industrial Music.[154] Cultural Engineering proposes the radical notion that some cultural producers seek to author new cultural codes with the intent to re-shape reality by altering its very source-code, without the change necessarily being ascribed to themselves.

I should be clear: not all artists are cultural engineers and not all cultural engineers are artists. In fact, a number of those I regard as cultural engineers do not define as artists, but rather as theorists, philosophers, prophets, or public intellectuals. Regardless of whether or not my subjects self-identify as cultural engineers, I graft the construct onto the functions of a range of cultural producers discussed throughout this dissertation. My inference is that those I mention herein sought to re-shape the paradigms they inherited through their creative compositions, even if they didn't overtly say they were doing so. In the case of JRR Tolkien, whose Middle Earth Saga or Legendarium was regularly described as an attempt to produce a new mythology for England, the author himself never used those words or made that declaration. The notion emerged from his biographer Humphrey Carpenter, and that interpretation in the minds of many has entered the realm of fact.[159] Similarly,

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[153] Genesis Breyer, P. Orridge. *Thee Psychik Bible: The Apocryphal Scriptures ov Genesis Breyer P-Orridge and Thee Third Mind ov Thee Temple of Psychick Youth*, (Port Townsend, Feral House) 314.

[154] Margarita Shalina. "Genesis P-Orridge on pandrogyny, psychedelic tourism, and how s/he invented industrial music". Detroit Metro Times, July 10, 2016. https://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/transformative-love-genesis-p-orridge-on-his-soul-mate-and-how-he-invented-industrial-music/Content?oid=2456812

[159] Tommy Kuusela. " In Search of a National Epic: The use of Old Norse myths in Tolkien's vision of Middle Earth." Approaching Religion, Vol. 4, No. 1. Open Access online Journal. Ma7 7, 2014. Date accessed: Sept. 5, 2020. https://journal.fi/ar/article/view/67534

Matthew Barney's epic *Cremaster Cycle, Drawing Restraint 9,* and *River of Fundament,* the artist have all been described as attempts to author a new mythology for American culture[160], though Barney rarely if ever said those words himself.

BATTLESTANCES DISGUISED AS DANCE-STEPS:

"At General Idea we used to talk about battle stances disguised as dance steps, and maybe that is the kind of person I look for; the one beyond reason, the kind of person who is totally committed to something, but it is difficult to know just what. Ultimately, they don't care about anything except their own secret way, and yet at the same time, they are highly ethical, even saintly.
I call them artists."

-AA Bronson

I find there to be an important connection between what AA Bronson and General Idea refer to as "battle stances designed as dance-steps," and what Genesis Breyer P-Orridge describes as cultural engineering. Both strategies are inherently *viral*, in that they seeks to enter a host body undetected in order to re-code its interiors. A Cultural Engineer is someone who masters the code that they wish to alter and appearing as though they are wilful participants, enter into and alter the programming of culture awhile avoiding overt detection. If they are *caught*, then the alteration is ascribed to them, authoritative forces are employed to discredit them and their aims, as in the case of the manufactured media scandal that forced Genesis Breyer P-Orridge out of the United Kingdom in the early 1990s.[163] But if a cultural engineer is to be successful – not just in one operation but in an ongoing practise of changing the culture they belong to, they must employ disguises that permit them to do so (battle stances disguised as dance-steps). As an artist and cultural engineer I employ such dance-steps in order to engineer new cultural codes by deconstructs the metanarrative of religion while reconstructing an immersive fiction. The disguise I employ is that of an "artist" – as opposed to a religious leader, reality hacker or heretic – and this grants me the ability to perform my de/re-constructions in plain sight, without fear of retribution.

In a culture of contemporary art that alienates many members of the general public through lack of training tools for deciphering its manifold meanings, I employ a

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[160] Alexandra Keller and Frazer Ward. "Matthew Barney and the Paradox of the Neo-Avat-Garde Blockbuster." Cinema Journal, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Winter, 2006). University of Texas Press: 00.3-16.

[163] Conversation Item Idem vs. AA Bronson. Stimuli Magazine, Vol. 2, 2008, 102-104.
https://issuu.com/stimulimagazine/docs/stimuli_nr2

number of artistic strategies of medial recognition that seeks to *include* rather than exclude. This consists of using recognizable religious, renaissance-inspired, psychedelic, sci-fi , cyberpunk and queer motifs which make RELIGIONVIR.US from the distance appear familiar even if inside of it I perform esoteric acts of queer conceptual alchemy. These "dance-steps" in many cases are battle stances – against the state, against dominant religious institutions, and in some ways against the academy itself. I use Art as a means to bypass restricted territories and perform what superficially may appear to be a stylized play, in effort to engineer new cultural codes.

MEDIA VIRUS

"I advance the theory that in the electronic revolution
a virus is a very small unit of word and image.
I have suggested how such units can be biologically
activated to act as communicable virus strains."

-William S. Burroughs, *Electronic Revolution*[164]

A virus is an infective agent capable of multiplying within the living cells of its host. Viruses spread by means of contact between disease-bearing organisms and these lines of transmission are called *vectors*. A virus infiltrates its' target by commandeering the body's replication technologies, producing thousands of copies of itself within the host's bloodstream. Infection typically initiates immune responses within the host body when it identifies an intruder and attempts to localize the site of infection to minimize, mitigate or in some cases eliminate its spread. Systems that have effectively combatted and controlled the infective agent memorize the characteristics of the invader so as to be able to detect and deter future invasions from the same source. Viruses, in turn, adapt and mutate in relation to these detection mechanisms, and the cycle continues. Despite the existential threat posed to all living beings by these self-replicating organisms, scientists and evolutionary biologists claim that the very "viruses that infected our ancestors provided the genetic foundations for many of the traits that define us."[165] In short, as the title of the article from this quotation is derived, *Viruses Made Us Human.*

A meme is defined as a unit of cultural transmission, imitation or replication similar to a virus, that is passed from person to person across symbolic, phenomenological

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[164] William Burroughs. *The Electronic Revolution.* (Cambridge: Exmanded Media Publications, 1970), 153-54.
[165] Carrie Arnold. "The Viruses that made us Human" *PBS Nova* (online). Sept. 28, 2016. Date accessed: August 20, 2020. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/article/endogenous-retroviruses/

and thematic vectors. The term was coined by Richard Dawkins (b.1941), a British ethologist, evolutionary biologist and author of the 1976 bestseller, *The Selfish Gene*. A meme can refer to a behaviour, or style, or an idea that infects through writing, speech, gestures, rituals and various other forms of replication through the cultural art of *imitation*. Dawkins argued that evolution was not simply a chemical phenomenon pertaining to genetics, but also a cultural process where ideas transmit, spread and infect in similar self-replicating patterns to that of genes. Groups of memes, when banded together, produce what Dawkins refers to as a meme-plex, a set of memes which interact to reinforce each other.[166] Thus, when a host of individual memes join together, they produce an ideological structure – like a credo, a philosophy, or even a religion.

In the Information Age, rapid technological advances have radically reshaped the way we act, think and connect collectively. As these advances have become daily parts of all our lives, we have been forced to name and frame these new phenomena in an equally rapid manner. *Viruses* and *memes*, concepts originally used to describe biological and cultural evolutionary processes, are now being applied to digital and social media phenomena in the Information Age.

The idea of the computer virus was first generated in 1949 when computer pioneer and theorist John Von Neumann postulated that a computer program could have the capacity to reproduce.[167] The idea was fictionalized and serialized in a 1950s computer game produced by Bell Labs called 'Core Wars'[168], which featured two programmers who unleashed 'software organisms' that battled one another for control of the computer. The germ then spread into the fertile host body of science fiction in the 1970s with two novels – John Burrows' *Shockwave River* (1975) and Thomas Ryan's *Adolescence of Pi* (1977.) Both featured software that could transfer itself within systems without detection.[169] Shortly thereafter, in 1986, the term "computer virus" was coined by Fred Cohen to describe self-replicating software as "a program that can infect other programs by modifying them to include a possibly evolved version of itself."[170]

In 1991, the world wide web went live to the world. Fourteen years later in 2004, Facebook was launched and in 2006 came Twitter. As millions of people began to congregate and spread information via social media platforms in real time, the term 'viral' became *viral*, describing "a digital video, image, or article that has spiked in popularity and has reached a large number of users in a short period of time."[171] The

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[166] Richard Dawkins. *The Selfish Gene.* (London: Oxford University Press), 1976.

[167] John Von Neumann. *Theory of self-reproducing automata.* (Urbanada: University of Illinois Press), 1966.

[168] Scientific American. "When did the term 'computer virus' arise ?" Oct. 19, 2001. Date accessed: Oct. 6, 2020. https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/when-did-the-term-compute/

[169] Ibid.

[170] Ibid.

[171] Tech terms. "Viral Definition". Feb. 9, 2011. Date accessed: Oct. 7, 2020. https://techterms.com/definition/viral

term 'meme' was incorporated shortly thereafter to refer to the article, video, image or gif that *became* viral through replication and rapid transmission.

Debate surrounds the origin of the term 'viral' in relation to the spread of *memes.* In 1964, renowned media scholar Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980) described photography (and technology in general) as having a "distinctly virulent nature",[172] and in 1972 sociologist and cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) described the media of television as containing a "viral, endemic, chronic [and] alarming presence."[173] Douglas Rushkoff, a prominent media theorist and graphic novelist coined the term 'media virus' in his 1994 bestseller *Media Virus: Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture* and is popularly credited as the originator of the term 'viral media.' He described viral media as memes that spread by rapid transmission to thousands of consumers, provoking far-reaching political, social and spiritual change. Rushkoff describes the phenomena in detail:

> Media viruses spread through the datasphere the same way biological ones spread through the body or a community. But instead of travelling along an organic circulatory system, a media virus travels through networks of the media space. The "protein shell" of a media virus might be an event, invention, technology, system of thought, musical riff, visual image, scientific theory, sex scandal, clothing style or even Pop hero – as long as it can catch our attention. Any one of these media virus shells will search out their respective nooks and crannies in popular culture and stick on anywhere it is noticed. Once attached, the virus injects its more hidden agenda into the DataStream in the form of ideological code – not genes, but a conceptual equivalent we now call 'memes.' Like real genetic material these memes infiltrate the way we do business, educate ourselves, interact with one another, even the way we perceive reality.[174]

The first two sections of Rushkoff's *Media Virus* explain the mechanisms and devices used to manufacture and spread "ideological code", but the third takes an entirely different tone, presenting a series of case studies and examples of media hackers who exploit viral media as means to alter, disrupt and re-code reality through overt media manipulation. In the last pages of his book, Rushkoff documents a conversation between Genesis Breyer P-Orridge and Timothy Leary, at a point where Genesis had to flee their native England for America following a media campaign that portrayed the cultural engineer and their wife as "child-eating Satanists."[175] Leary himself was

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[172] Marshall McLuhan. *Understanding Media: the extensions of man.* W. Terrence Gordon (Ed), (Corte Madera, CA: Gingko Press) 2003.

[173] Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulations.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press) 1994.

[174] Douglas Rushkoff. Media Virus: Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture, (New York: Ballantine Books) 1994, 10.

[175] Ibid, 136.

jailed in the United States after having been forced to flee the country years prior, and Genesis had been in need of sanctuary and guidance and was staying at Leary's house in Los Angeles as a guest. The following is an excerpt of a conversation between Leary and Genesis documented by Rushkoff who was visiting the two:

> The immune system is the system that every culture sets up to keep out the memes that could change it" Leary reassures Genesis... "Just as the individual, time-based human physical manifestation of being is dictated by DNA, which led to genetic engineering and genetic interference, the same goes for culture. Culture is a host body which can be manipulated and engineered and tampered with and corrupted and infected and healed...[176]

Rushkoff, Breyer P-Orridge and Timothy Leary all feature prominently in this thesis, as exemplars of the art of cultural engineering, and as ancestors of RELIGIONVIR.US as a tactical performance of viral media. Viral and memetic media are heralded by all three cultural engineers as psychologically and politically dangerous in the hands of society's powerbrokers. But all three are united in advocating that media activists, artists and other cultural engineers should commandeer these technologies to produce alternative memes to counter hypnotic ideological codes through the spread of artistic, spiritual, and tactical media viruses.

IMAGEVIRUS

General Idea (1967-1994) was a Canadian media-art collective made up of Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson, whose works sought to critique popular culture and mass media by critically inhabiting the medial dimensions they sought to subvert. The three individuals operated as avatars, lived communally, organized performative beauty pageants, broadcasted artistically designed television talk shows, and interrogated art and commodity culture by producing a range of artist multiples. From 1972 to 1989 *General Idea* published FILE magazine, whose editorials sought to disseminate the groups conceptual ideas around art and commodity culture, as a way of documenting and chronologizing mail art activities they and other colleagues facilitated in the early 1970s. The magazine produced 26 issues that garnered a substantial international following. FILE Magazine appropriated the recognizable pop-aesthetic of LIFE magazine by exchanging the L and the F in in their branding but keeping the recognisability of the logo intact. Bronson later referred to the

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[176] Ibid, 305-307.

strategy of appropriating pop-culture logos as "as a kind of virus within communication systems."[178]

In 1987, seven years before Rushkoff coined the term 'media virus,' *General Idea* produced a conceptual artwork which consisted of the four letters A-I-D-S reorganized into an original artwork appropriated from the famous L-O-V-E painting by artist Robert Indiana in 1966. As a conceptual artwork it sought to animate the harrowing correlation between a deadly sexually transmitted disease with an artifact from the archives of the Free Love movement of the 1960s. The A-I-D-S logo was reproduced in many forms, at first using the same colour pattern as Indiana's original, and later with alternative colour schemes in simultaneous contrast. It's forms included "painting, posters, videos and sculptures. They put it out in public or on subway cars, walls and billboards all over the world."[179] The title for this project – which has been reproduced for every work, exhibition and public intervention that has employed it from 1987 to the present day – was and remains *Imagevirus.*

General Idea, *AIDS*, acrylic on canvas, 182.9 x 182.9cm, 1987 (Private Collection) in Greg Bordowitz. *General idea: Imagevirus.* (London: Afterall Press, 2010), 23

[178] Paul O'Neill and AA Bronson. "AA Bronson Interview with Paul O'Neill" North Drive Press Issue 3, 2006. Online, p. 2. Date Accessed: June 20, 2020.
http://www.northdrivepress.com/interviews/NDP3/NDP3_BRONSON_ONEILL.pdf
[179] Greg Bordowitz. *General idea: Imagevirus.* (London: Afterall Press, 2010), 1.

In general terms, *Imagevirus* behaves in the manner that a virus does. It infects its' host body (Indiana's 1967 L-O-V-E logo) and multiplies itself within the living body of its host (producing hundreds of iterations globally). Its effect on the unsuspecting viewer, particularly in public space (as opposed to inside the walls of the gallery or inside of the pages of art publications) also echoes the way in which viral bodies enter the circulatory system of a public body. FILE Magazine similarly reconstructed the logo of LIFE Magazine, just as Genesis Breyer P-Orridge's Psychic TV reconstructed the logo of the American TV guide, so that the recognizable motif elicits amongst its target audience a sense of familiarity through unconscious medial recognition. Following exposure, the public body then detects the subversive material (AIDS) embedded within its host (LOVE).

Imagevirus spread across the globe internationally, via several vectors of medial transmission (print, books, videos, public artworks) and has continued to mutate and reinfect for the past 25 years. It caused considerable controversy amongst mainstream and religious publics, including the heteropatriarchal political elite, accused then of wilfully neglecting the AIDS epidemic because it was predominantly affecting homosexuals who were framed as sexually promiscuous blasphemers. But *Imagevirus* also garnered disdain from AIDS activists who accused *General Idea* of "thwarting what activist artists should be doing, namely countering government neglect, providing safer-sex education and fighting for access to medical treatments."[180] Gay critics claimed that, "in its repetitions, it drained the word of meaning at a time when a political battle was being waged over the meaning of the disease itself."[181] *General Idea,* like the Wachowskis, consistently refused to disclose their artistic or political agendas with the work, and I argue that this ambiguity has contributed to its viral spread.

The final years of the collective (1990-1194) saw two of its principal members – Jorge Zontal and Felix Partz, diagnosed with AIDS, which put the disease and its relation to queer culture at the forefront of their artistic practise of cultural engineering. In one of their most famous works, entitled *One Year of AZT* (1991) the collective addressed the challenge of living with AIDS by fabricating enlarged sculptural depictions of 1,825 pill capsules of the antiretroviral drug AZT, and presented them in a grid-like pattern on the wall that echoed a year-long calendar of drug dosages. Each white pill, produced out of vacuum-formed styrene with vinyl mounted-capsules, bore a blue stripe across the middle, and the work was regularly presented alongside of *One Day of AZT* (1991), which featured five large pills presented as the daily dosage for HIV+ patients. Each pill in *One Day of AZT* was slightly larger than the size of a human body, harrowingly evoking coffins when presented in the middle of the gallery floor.

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[180] Ibid, 108-109.
[181] Ibid, 108-109.

General Idea. *One year of AZT*, 1991, 1,825 units of vacuum-formed styrene with vinyl wall mounted capsules, 12.7 x 31.7 x 6.3 cm each. (National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa). https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/general-idea/key-works/one-year-of-azt

Jorge Zontal and Felix Partz both died of AIDS-related complications in 1994. Having cared for and worked as a midwife for his dying companions, AA Bronson suddenly found himself in the position of grieving not only the loss of his two life-partners, but the loss of the collective itself. His first work as a solo artist was called *Felix, June 5, 1994*, and was presented as part of the *Whitney Biennale* in 2002. It was a billboard size photograph of the corpse of *Felix Partz*, taken hours after his death in the collectives' shared home in Toronto. The image portrays Partz, lifeless, skeletal, his eyes still open locked in a haunting exchange with oblivion. Bronson notes that "there was not enough flesh to support life, he did not die of any particular infection, he just couldn't support life. So, his eyes are open because there was not enough flesh left to close his eyes."[182] The visceral remains of the disease-afflicted body is juxtaposed with the bright colours of the pillows, the stylized zebra-print pattern of his shirt and the colourful repetitive vintage designs of the bedsheet. Herein Bronson chose to counter the horrific death-rattle of AIDS with the "fabulous" aesthetic of queer life. The piece has won several awards and been exhibited many times, most recently as part of the blockbuster exhibition "*Hide/Seek: Difference and Desire in American Portraiture*", an exhibition dedicated to the exploration of queer photography at the Smithsonian Museum's National Portrait Gallery in Washington in 2011.

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[182] Art Fag City. "AA Bronson Speaks to CBC About the Smithsonian Fiasco." ARTFCITY, DEC. 23, 2010. DATE accessed: July 17, 2020. http://artfcity.com/2010/12/23/aa-bronson-speaks-to-cbc-about-the-smithsonian-fiasco/

A scandal erupted in relation to the *Hide/Seek* exhibition when right wing congressmen alongside of the American Catholic League threatened to dismantle funding for the Smithsonian unless they removed a controversial video work called *Fire in My Belly* by David Wojnarowicz (1954-1992) from the exhibition. This piece featured ants crawling in honey overtop of a crucifix, whilst Diamanda Galas wailed a harrowing requiem in the background. Wojnarowicz, like Bronson's companions, had died from AIDS related complications in 1992, and the Museum bent to the will of the Catholic league and removed the contested segments from his video, replacing it with an edited version with the problematic segments removed. In protest, AA Bronson demanded that his artwork, *Felix, June 5, 1994,* the exhibition's centrepiece, be removed from the exhibition in an act of solidarity. Bronson claimed that he "didn't want [Felix] to be in a show where Wojnarowicz could not...where he was not there to protect himself."[183]

The National Portrait Gallery refused Bronson's request to remove the artwork, and in response Bronson activated his numerous social media contacts and initiated an international media campaign which went immediately went *viral*. Overnight, numerous art centres all the world over screened Wojnaroviczs' piece online and in their art spaces, with several artist-run-centres organizing spontaneous screenings and vigils in performative protest. Employing the tactics of viral media, Bronson made the censorship of *Fire In My Belly* into a meme that activated a massive international debate, leading eventually to the National Portrait Gallery creating a public colloquium to address the matter where Bronson was invited to represent the piece, and speak for those who had been silenced.

AA Bronson. *Felix, June 5, 1994*. Inkjet print on vinyl, 213.4 x 426.7cm, 1994, (Whitney Museum of American Art, New York: gift of Mark J. Krayenhoff van de Leur), https://whitney.org/collection/works/16348

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[183] Ibid.

AA BRONSON'S SCHOOL FOR YOUNG SHAMANS

Following the passing of Jorge and Felix, Bronson struggled greatly with how to reinvent himself as an artist outside of the collective of General Idea. General Idea was all about *fictioning* themselves as a media construct, and Bronson faced the prospect of redesigning his "self" as an artistic avatar:

> After Felix and Jorge died in 1994, I found myself thrown back into a position of having no identity. My identity was General Idea and General Idea was gone...At the point where [Jorge and Felix] both became HIV positive, or really at the point where they had AIDS I began to think about death and how to deal with death. I started to take all these courses at the Body Electric School in California that I thought would help me dealing with people dying...[184]

This training enabled Bronson to function as both a midwife and a healer to his dying comrades and merged with his lifelong interest in queer spirituality. He re-emerged from the death of General Idea as AA BRONSON HEALER. He printed business cards, constructed solo exhibitions, produced stickers and even a soundtrack that all bore the title of HEALER, while exploring the phenomenon of his new avatar through various transmedial lenses. In one exhibition, Bronson installed a massage table in the centre of the commercial gallery where he performed 'butt massages' for willing queer men searching for spiritual healing. At the same time Bronson was observing a burgeoning phenomenon whereupon a small but determined group of young queer artists were aligning themselves under a similar mantle, interested in exploring witchcraft, religion, ritual and healing from a distinctly queer perspective.

AA Bronson's School for Young Shamans, original promotional poster, produced by John Connelly Presents, photocopied image, 2008.

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[184] AA Bronson, Andrew Zealley, Bill Arning, Jop von Bennekopm, Robert Morris, Scott Watson, Wayne Naerwaldt. *AA Bronson: The Quick and the Dead.* (Toronto: The Power Plant and the Morris and Helen Belkin Gallery Press, 2003), 20.

In 2008 Bronson conceived of *AA Bronson's School for Young Shamans*, a social sculpture, alternative-school and conceptual-artwork, which took the inaugural form of a group exhibition, featuring 8 young contemporary queer artists of which I was the youngest. Still in art school (finishing up my Undergraduate degree) I travelled to New York City for the first time in my life to perform *Fish Dance II: For Joshua from Moses* and exhibit a series of drawings in a prominent Chelsea gallery called *John Connelly Presents*.

Fish Dance II (recalibrated) for Joshua from Moses consisted of myself, painted white, donning a Cleopatra wig and combat boots, holding a fish for the entire four hours of the exhibition's opening. I performed this work inside of a 'Sorcerer's Tent' produced collaboratively by Scott Treleaven and AA Bronson. I was positioned in the centre of the "Young Shamans Room" whose walls held artworks by the other young shamans, including my own Anal Mandala drawings, three of which were exhibited alongside of my performance. This was my first large-scale public performance work, presented in the heart of the commercial art market in New York City, in an exhibition featuring prominent contemporary artists including Terence Koh, Item Idem and Bruce LaBruce, augmented with artworks produced by Bronson and even a small reliquary of a work by Joseph Beuys.

[M]Dudeck, *Fish Dance II (for Joshua from Moses)* durational performance inside of *Cabine* (installation produced by AA Bronson and Scott Treleaven), digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, 2008.

The opening was attended by hundreds of spectators, many of which took photographs of my performance on their smartphones as I engaged in unflinching eye contact with those who stopped to look at me. Although silent and otherwise still, my presence was sculptural and at the same time monastic. My dripping sweat merged with the fluids of the previously frozen fish to produce an abject bodily odour that blended with the pungent scent of a floor covered with dried white sage leaves, which had been crushed into a powder and putrescent aroma by the hundreds of viewers walking all over it.

Fish Dance II (recalibrated) for Joshua from Moses was positioned through its titling as sequel to an earlier performance I produced one year earlier, titled *Fish Dance in Five Movements (2005).* In this earlier iteration, I emerged before an audience of my peers painted white, donning an aristocratic powdered wig with a fish bound to my phallus with hockey-tape, fingering myself and masturbating the fish-phallus while bagpipe music wailed in the background. Following this, in sequences differentiated through various sound scores of overlaid classical music, I tore off the fish from my genitals and began beating myself with it, performing fellatio upon it, dismembering it, then symbolically shape-shifted into an obscure animal form, picked up the mutilated carcass with my teeth and crawled out of the room on all fours. *Fish Dance II*, in contrast, although framed as a 'dance', was entirely motionless for a duration of four hours. The contrast between the abject dismembering ritual and the still meditative posture of the durational performance animated my interest in fusing shamanistic and transcendental religious approaches through various strategies in time-based live art.

Fish Dance II for Joshua from Moses intentionally invoked Michelangelo's *Pieta*, and within an exhibition dedicated to magic, religion and the occult from a queer lens, the fish held against my effeminate torso conjured echoes of the *Ichthys* as a primitive symbol of the messianic Christ. It was also intended to reference the depiction of the Celtic God Cernunos on the Gundestrup Cauldron, albeit less overtly. Through this iteration, the Fish established itself as one of the primary symbols in my iconographic database, an archetypal object loaded with religious symbolism whose meanings shapeshifted with each public iteration I produced.

"Panel of the Gundestrup Cauldron." Digital Image. Image Number WNF641447
Bridgeman Education, date accessed: March 1, 2021. https://wwwbridgemaneducation.com

As part of its inclusion in a highly publicized art spectacle at a prominent Chelsea gallery, the fish performance rapidly became viral media. Descriptions of the performance were written up in the New York Times, Frieze Magazine, Time-Out New York and Spike Art Quarterly, among innumerable blogs, online articles and social media posts. It became the mascot image for the *School for Young Shamans*, with medial mythologies speculating that I, holding my fish, was in fact an instructor, or professor of the Shaman School enacting a "lesson." As a Media artist and hacker, Bronson educated me in how to manipulate media through the strategic repetition and reiteration of viral symbols, which led to the fish performance being re-performed three more times, with its' third and last iteration reperformed during the tenure of this Practise-based PhD.

In 2013 Bronson approached me to re-perform the motionless *Fish Dance* as a durational performance during the opening of his blockbuster exhibition *The Temptation of AA Bronson* at Witte de With ICA (now renamed Kunstinstituut Melly) in Rotterdam. The performance would occur within the same sorcerer's tent as its predecessor, upon a similar floor covered in white sage. I re-named this iteration *Fish M/Other Re-Mix* – as I was interested in embodying the maternal posture and dimension of the Pieta as a focal point of the performance. But this time, unlike its silent predecessor, I elected to use my voice to '*daven*': a performative recital of Jewish liturgical prayer typically accompanied by rhythmic swaying front and back, which in Yiddish is called *shuckling*. But rather than chanting in Hebrew which would be customary, I performed a repetitive chant in my invented language called *The Amah'Di* (ᕫᘈᚻᗑ) or the *Call to Surrender*. Many passers-by (including critics) assumed this chant to be Hebrew because of some of the sounds combined

with my performative posturing, and pronounced Jewish upbringing. *Fish M/Other*, like its predecessor, lasted approximately 4 hours in duration, and as a blockbuster exhibition involved an audience of over a thousand individuals over the course of the opening of the museum show. At various points I elected to make eye contact with members of the audience but also when deep in my invented prayer I closed my eyes and even rolled them back into my skull, to convey an ongoing state of ritual trance.

[M]Dudeck, *Fish M/Other Remix,* durational performance inside of *Cabine* (installation produced by AA Bronson and Scott Treleaven), digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, 2013.

The third iteration of the performance came in the form of the exhibition *AA Bronson's Sacre de Printemps* at the Graz Kunstverein in Graz Austria, in 2015. This exhibition was much smaller in scope and scale than the previous one, and a bit larger than the original in New York. I titled this iteration *Fish M/Other (Ape-Witch)*, continuing my excavation of the maternal dimensions of the performative Pieta, this time donning an ape-mask that bore red markings on the face and upon my left arm (again in reference to Jewish tefillin). In this performance I would continue the prayer in my invented language, only this time below my Ape Mask I was wearing a lapel microphone that was linked to a sound-system so my chanting could be heard all across the gallery. With the mask obscuring my lips, the source of the chanting was not clear to audience members until they approached me and heard the originary sound emanating from behind my mask.

Occurring again within the same sorcerer's tent, this performance involved a surprising element, witnessed by only one audience member, that blended make-believe and make-belief in an unprecedented manner. The opening of the exhibition was delayed because the fish the gallery had ordered had not been delivered on time. Although we were told the fish was caught the day prior, it had been mistakenly flash frozen overnight. This meant that holding it in my arms for four hours was considerably more challenging for me as a performer, as the gallery was already cold and performing naked clutching a frozen fish made my body even colder. This led to the physical necessity to *shuckle* in prayer in order to keep hypothermia at bay. At a certain moment, about thirty minutes into the performance, while a young boy was standing in front of me watching me curiously, the fish suddenly underwent a spasm and made a sound that was not unlike gasping for breath. The child and I both stared at each other in wonder and fear. I admit that for a brief moment I wondered if the performance had in fact been necromantic and if somehow my chanting had brought the fish back to life. But later it was explained by the curator that because it was flash-frozen the fish corpse may have been in the midst of its' final movements and the unthawing activated a spontaneous convulsion. For a brief moment in time, in an exchange between myself as an artwork and a small child as audience – make believe became make-belief for artist and audience alike.

[M]Dudeck, *Fish M/Other (ApeWitch),* durational performance inside of *Cabine* (installation produced by AA Bronson and Scott Treleaven), digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, 2015.

The fourth and final iteration of what I have now called *The Fish Cycle* occurred as part of the performative exhibition *AA Bronson's Garten der Luste*, presented at Kunstwerke ICA in Berlin for Gallery week in Spring 2018. This iteration, titled *Fish Scroll (Yaldabaoth)* sought to merge all elements of the previous three works and integrate new components inspired by the research I was undergoing as part of this my Practise-led doctoral thesis. By far the most ambitious iteration, *Fish Scroll* would be enacted once a day for five days, for three hours each sitting (18 hours consecutively) over the course of the five day Gallery Week exhibition. It presented an opportunity for me to test out new concepts that were emerging from my research in the arenas of fictioning and transmediality as method.

M]Dudeck, *Fsh Scroll [Yaldabaoth],* durational performance, digital performance documentation (dimensions variable), photographs by Frank Sperling, 2018.

M]Dudeck, *Fsh Scroll [Yaldabaoth],* durational performance, digital performance documentation (dimensions variable), photographs by Frank Sperling, 2018.

M]Dudeck, *Fsh Scroll [Yaldabaoth],* durational performance, digital performance documentation (dimensions variable), photographs by Frank Sperling, 2018.

M]Dudeck, *Fsh Scroll [Yaldabaoth],* durational performance, digital performance documentation (dimensions variable), photographs by Frank Sperling, 2018.

Within their model of *Fictioning*, O'Sullivan and Burrows' describe a process they refer to as 'nesting': wherein an artistic practise begins "to re-use and recycle its own motifs, nesting one set of fictions within another, so as to produce a certain complexity – a density even."[185] I was analysing this phenomenon through a specific series of works by Brian Catling, whose Cyclops motif nested itself across the varied media of performance, photography, painting and prose.

Brian Catling RA, Cyclops Series, 2013 (in collaboration with David Tolley),
https://www.royalacademy.org.uk/art-artists/name/brian-catling-ra

[185] Simon O'Sullivan. "Myth-Science and the Fictioning of Reality", in Paragrana, Volume 25, Issue 2. 2016, 4.

Catling's *Cyclops* had originated as a performative strategy, employing the use of a custom-designed latex mask with a single eye stretched out over top of his face, obscuring his own eyes from view. This seeded other medial depictions, including a series of gouache paintings, staged photographs, and live performances, climaxing in the creation of a cyclops named Ishmael as a central protagonist in Catling's trilogy of fantasy novels called *The Vorrh*.[186] The effect produced in me was not unlike what Mark P. Wolf had described in terms of transmediality. Witnessing Catlings' Cyclops appear in multiple mediatic forms, recognizable but in each iteration uniquely configured in relation to the media employed, transformed the Cyclops from an artwork into an entity.

I had already begun the process of canonizing my mythos into the form of a graphic novel, and as such I had begun to produce the aesthetics of new characters in the mythology that had not yet been publicly performed. One of these characters was the aforementioned androgynous God(dess) referred to by different names, such as *Rya*, *The Genetrix*, *Methuzaiia*, and *the Mother of Clones*. I noted in my making process that this god-form bore an archetypal resemblance to the "Fish M/Other" I had been performing over the *Fish Cycle* of performances. Having newly codified the Mother of Clones as a bald, multi-breasted, androgynous being, painted turquoise with varied fluorescent pink designs across their skin, I decided to perform the latest iteration of the Fish Cycle *as* the Mother of Clones. I knew that images of this performance would appear in publications *nested* alongside drawn images from the Hypericons, to produce a texture of continuance of the character.

Like the previous Fish Cycle performance, my chanting for *Fish Scroll* was augmented by a wireless lapel microphone, connected to a vocal modulator, which was transmitted via signal to a high-quality sound-system and played across the entire gallery space. The chant I was performing was no longer in my invented language, but rather a psalm I had composed in English that had been spoken by the *Mother of Clones* xyrself in comic bubbles in the graphic novel. As my canonized comic was not yet publicly available, the audience encountering the performance had no frame of reference for my transmedial nesting, yet I was aware that the performance documentation would be archived alongside of the graphic novel, artifacts and other materials derived from the same source, and presented together in my portfolio of PhD work.

Over the course of my long-term collaboration with AA Bronson I was exposed to strategies of overt media manipulation through the production of artworks as medial commodities. Since the death of his collaborators in General Idea, and forced to exist as an independent artist, Bronson has been interested in pluralizing the positionality of "the art star" by turning the platform of solo-exhibitions in commercial galleries and museums into performative group exhibitions that he – not the gallerists, or

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[186] B. Catling. *The Vorrh*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2015).

curators – administrates. This was also a method of queering an artworld centred around the cult of the individual genius, by pluralizing and creating a 'School' instead of a solo show.

AA Bronson's School for Young Shamans continues to exist as a media virus. AA has produced a Facebook page that to date has 165 members which explicitly states that "new students are being accepted." While there is no physical space the *School for Young Shamans* operates out of, it is a *fictioning* and a pedagogical social sculpture through which Bronson facilitates mentorship relationships with young queer artists interested in religion, myth and the occult. As a student of Bronsons' school, and a member of the first class, I have been able to study and develop my skills as a maker of viral media and a cultural engineer through my participation in a series of high-profile exhibitions transformed into live classrooms for the education of a new generation of young artists/shamans. As a battlestance disguised as a dance step, Bronson hacked the artworld to make blockbuster exhibitions into training labs for young cultural engineers.

AA Bronson *Healer,* CD, Media Guru Recordings, 2004

SELF-INVENTED MEDIA CONSTRUCTIONS

"Although I am not a fan of celebrity culture, it does give us an opportunity to mimic and parody its forms and codes. In a way that was what Warhol was already doing, although he did it rather more seriously. In the artworld I am particularly distressed at the cynical practise of turning artists into instant stars, and then dropping them when the moment is no longer ripe. In the current recession, there are many younger artists who have been abandoned by their galleries because they are no longer seen as 'hot.' Those of us who mimic celebrity are never really put into that situation, since our 'hotness' has no relation to the marketplace. We are self-invented media constructions."

-AA Bronson[187]

Following my participation in the *School for Young Shamans*, and in my early *imitation* of Bronson, I began to conceive of myself as a "self-invented media construction," and upon returning from New York, I promptly branded myself MICHAEL DUDECK WITCHDOCTOR as a student of AA BRONSON HEALER. I wanted to *mimic* Bronson's use of HEALER as a medial "credential" that could pre-shape the discourse my work would invoke through my presentation as someone holding obscure spiritual office. Bronson, like Breyer P-Orridge, references Warhol, and his self-invented media construction in many ways parallels what Genesis referred to as a cultural engineer. I wanted to produce an avatar that spoke to the unique configurations I was interested in producing as an artist. I was drawn to WITCHDOCTOR for three principal reasons:

1) the combination of terms Witch and Doctor was a queer, androgynous, and therefore alchemical hybrid that merged connotations of the feminine(witch) and the masculine(doctor) into a unified whole,

2) both 'witches' and 'doctors' were practitioners of healing and magickal arts, the key difference being that one was institutional, and inherently patriarchal (doctor) and the other was anarchic, anti-establishment, and a format that anyone, male or female could claim (witch.) One was aligned with the Church, the other was distinctly anti-Christian.

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[187] Cyril Duval & AA Bronson. "AA Bronson", AnOther Man Magazine, London, issue 9, Autumn/Winter, 2009, 251.

3) rather than using the racially charged 'Shaman,' witch-doctor at least was a combination of terms in English used to describe a vast array of practitioners in various cultures and as such had less potential to perpetuate the violence of colonization.[188]
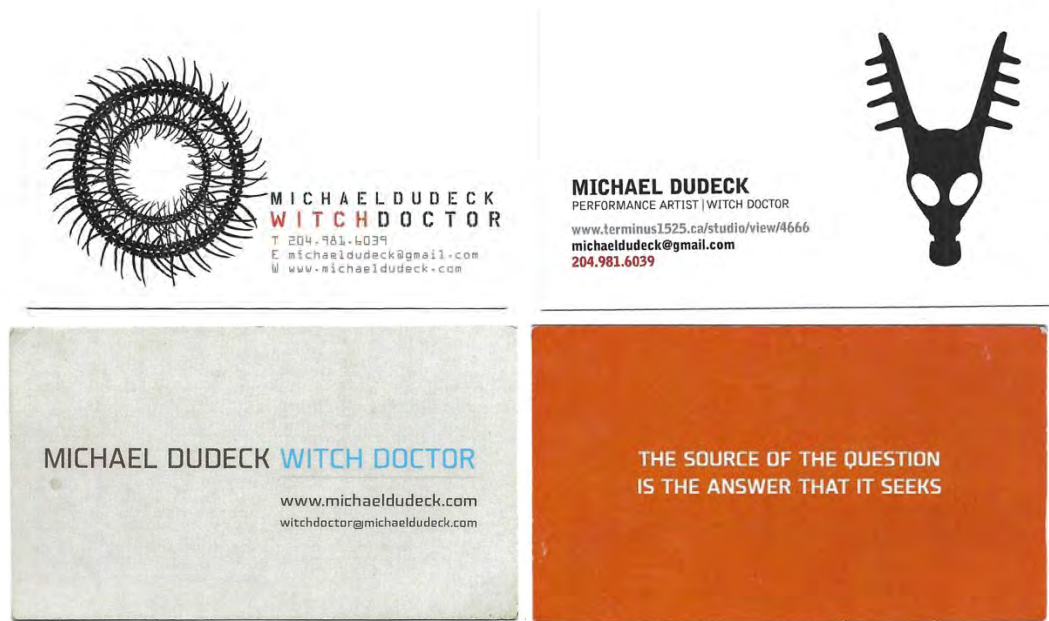
[M]Dudeck, *Witchdoctor Business Cards,*8.9 x 5.1cm, 2008-2010.

Like my mentor, I printed business cards, made a logo, flags and T-shirts, designed a website and made my email address witchdoctor@michaeldudeck.com. I used the media construction to initiate a media virus of my own, and it worked. I was regularly promoted by institutions as a WITCHDOCTOR, and sought-after artists, curators, art historians and celebrities I would meet in New York, remembered me as the WITCHDOCTOR, even if they didn't remember my name, and referred to me as such. When I applied to be one of the reperformers for Marina Abramovic's retrospective *The Artist is Present,* Abramovic asked Bronson directly if he could personally attest to whether or not I was a "real" Witchdoctor. Bronson affirmed my spiritual capacities, and I was subsequently invited to join Marina's team. It remains my email address and I am continually approached by museums and galleries to present projects under its moniker.

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[188] Amber Dawn Bear-Robe. "Everything in My Life is Appropriated: A Look through the Witchdoctor", in PaperWait Vol. 13, 2010, (Winnipeg: AceArt Inc.) https://www.aceart.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/paperwait-2010-11.pdf

RELIGIONVIR.US

In 2009, thanks to the cultural currency gained through my involvement with AA Bronson in New York, I was approached by a prominent commercial gallery in Toronto to produce my first solo exhibition. The gallerist made clear that the exhibition would be accompanied by a ritual performance by "the witchdoctor." I called the exhibition *Parthenogenesis*, which combined sculptural effigies, drawings, photographs, video, and ritual performance with a publication of poetry with the same name. The transmission attracted a number of reviews from the Canadian Art Press, and media opportunities on Canadian Art television, but the most insightful and transformative response came from an article penned by an independent art critic named Marisa Neave entitled "*Who is Dudeck's Messiah?*", on a website that has long since expired. Following her concise introduction to the symbiotic relationship between Religion and Art, her critical analysis of the artistic strategies employed in my exhibition, and an ethnographic description of the performative 'sacrificial' ritual I performed, Neave concluded that

> "Dudeck's body of work is the neo-Goth, neo-colonial traipse
> of a pan-theological observer who has plucked the tropes of rituals
> and rites to exoticize a religion of his own."[189]

At the time of this exhibition, I had not knowingly intended to produce my own religion, but rather to produce a mythology that had religious dimensions. Upon reading Neave's words, the critical feedback loop initiated me to begin to consider: *what if I were to create my own religion as art* ? Thus, RELIGIONVIR.US as an apparatus was born through the mirroring back of my practise from a relatively unknown art critic who has since given up writing about art. Most critically, it showed me the importance of the fourth and final stage of the Reconstruction process as identified in my Introduction: (1) deconstruction (2) re-construction, (3) transmission, and (4) *the analytical interpretation of the new configurations and their affects in relation to their referents*. The feedback loop that passed between my exhibition, to the critic, back to me, initiated the next stages of my project's development. In this spirit I carefully consider the responses my work provokes when addressing the next passages my works will undertake.

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[189] Marisa Neave. "Who is Dudeck's Messiah ?" The Last Place on Earth you Probably Want to be (blog) April 12, 2009 (closed.)
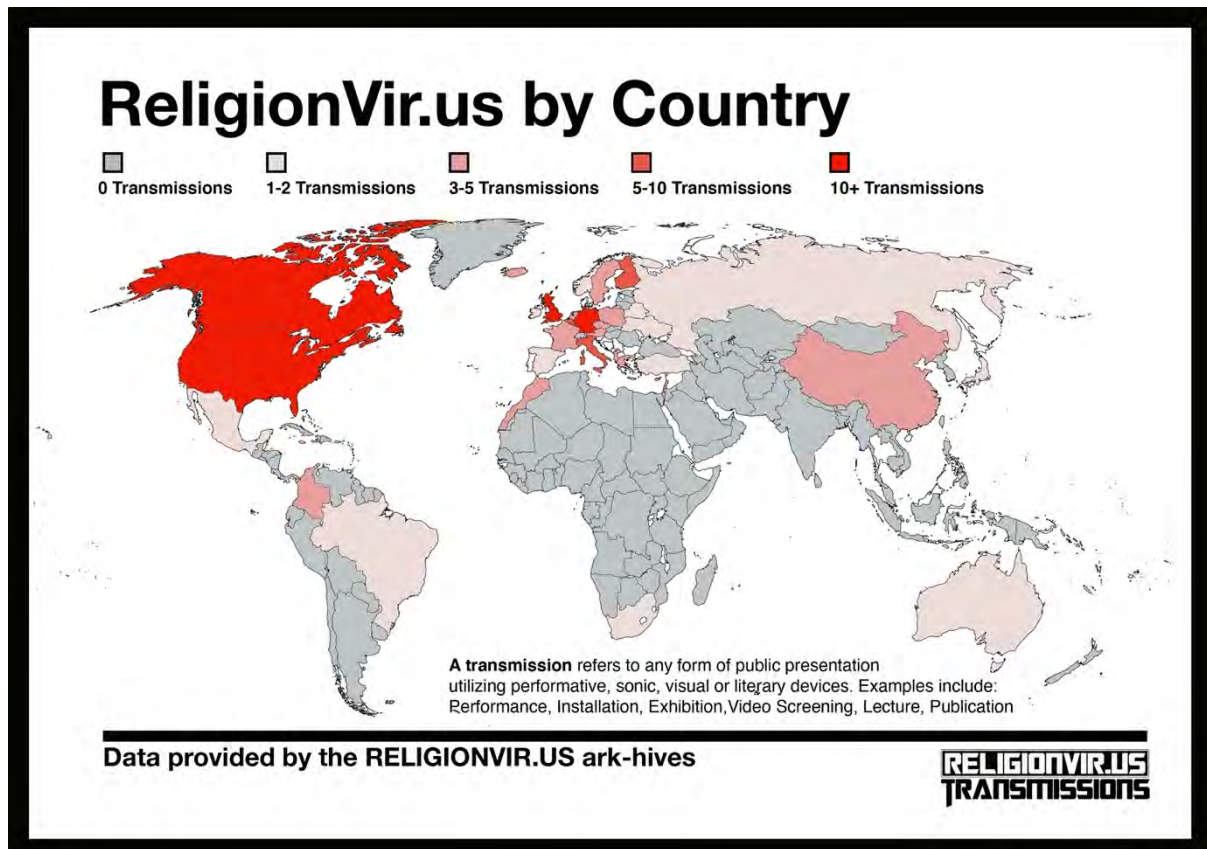
[M]Dudeck, *ReligionVir.us By Country,* digital image, dimensions variable, 2020.

RELIGIONVIR.US TRANSMISSIONS

RELIGIONVIR.US has been performed, exhibited, screened, and otherwise presented in over 25 countries and in over fifty transmissions worldwide. I use the term *transmission* to refer to "any form of public presentation utilizing performative, sonic, visual, or literary devices" and these include performance, video screenings, lectures, publications, exhibitions, published articles and most recently web-based art. Composing this PhD during the onset, lockdown and worldwide pandemic of Coronavirus (CoVID 19) made the viral metaphor far more palpable, and as such I began to recognize an emergent 'pandemic aesthetics' that I read as a new form of viral media.

As such I have begun to produce a series of artworks that track the trajectory of RELIGIONVIR.US transmissions from country to country and then list the transmissions by country in a similar vein. I have also mapped the episodes of RELIGIONVIR.US into four distinct groupings, which I am referring to as RELIGIONVIR.US mutations (See appendix, 1). Each group of works is presented as a

new variant that has emerged from the gradual development and infective processes the project undertakes. *The Temple of Artifice*, produced as a climaxing point of this Practise-led thesis, is the first work produced in what I am referring to as *the Fourth Mutation*. The reflective and critical processes I have employed in this PhD have caused significant variants in the overall Virus and as such contribute to give birth a radical new mutation, of which this thesis marks the genesis of.

[M]Dudeck, *ReligionVir.us Transmissions logo*, digital image, dimensions variable, 2021.

RELIGIONVIR.US appropriates the aesthetics of sci-fi franchise culture through the creation of a logo in the manner of General Idea's *Imagevirus* and Genesis Breyer P-Orridge's Psychic TV. I expand this by structuring each transmission as an 'episode' in an ongoing space opera. The Fourth Mutation involves a transition away from the cult of the individual artist, (from works "created" by [M]Dudeck, or Michael Dudeck, or Michael Dudeck Witchdoctor) towards the idea, developed within this thesis, of religions as a form of multimedia productions, and as such authored collectively by production teams. Thus, in the finals stages of this dissertation I have established my production company as RELIGIONVIR.US TRANSMISSIONS – a social sculpture like Bronson's Shaman School that is both a fiction and an entity in its own right. Productions like *Temple of Artifice* (featured as Religious Prosthetic V) involving teams of individuals working under one banner are now to be presented not unlike how Lucasfilm Productions produced Star Wars. In further imitation of Bronson I am interested in hacking the artworlds emphasis on individual genius by pluralizing production into an entity that is harder to define than a solo or individual artist. This furthers my suggestion of Religion as a form of multimedia production through the assemblage of a team of specialists to produce this religion as they would a feature film.

RELIGIOUS PROSTHETICS III

PSALMS

[M] Dudeck, *Psalms Prototype*, ink on paper, 24cm x 24cm, 2019.
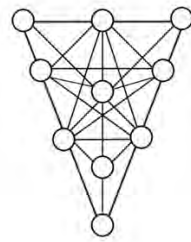
IMMATERIALITY

In September 2019, I received a postgraduate scholarship to present my lecture/performance *The Temple of Artifice: Constructing a Digital Religion* at the British Association for the Study of Religion's annual conference *Visualizing Cultures: Media, Religion and Technology* at Leeds Trinity University. My technosermon centred around the question of whether religious experiences could be manufactured through art, presenting transmedial segments from my *Temple of Artifice* and proposing my thesis of religion as a form of multimedia production. Following my performance, I was approached by three modest and inquisitive theologians, who congratulated me on my lecture/performance and with pen and paper in hand, asked me:

> "In all of your experience working in different disciplines, what media have you found to be the most effective for producing religious experiences ?"

I had never formally considered their proposition. I have always resisted hierarchies, favouring instead rhizomatic models that read my work and my worlding as inherently polyphonic. By its very nature my work denied the implication that any one media, save for performance (which itself is a container of a host of media) might be dominant. But an answer to their question came out of my lips faster than I could think it, and I said aloud to them something I seemed somehow to "know" with total certainty, only it appeared as news to me:

> "Music...With dimmed lights and a pair of speakers, or a microphone, or even just my voice, I could manufacture a religious experience. "

My response surprised me. I had long considered religion to be an ancient struggle between word and image, and as a trained visual artist I would have thought that the device most seductive and applicable would be graphic in nature. But, it occurred to me that in all of the performances, installations, and time-based work I had produced over the past twelve years, music had played a central role in *all of them*. From the onset, all of my performances were accompanied by originally composed sound-scores, arranged and recorded by myself or in collaboration with other artists. Being a classically trained vocalist, I would use my singing voice as a tool in virtually every

performative work I had ever undergone. This included chanting, wailing, roaring, or singing songs, psalms, hymns or mantras. And whilst a great number of diverse medial devices were and are regularly employed – including my own artists' body painted and adorned with vestments, headdresses, props, projected visual material, smoke machines, designed lighting, and interaction with invented artifacts – I could never imagine producing a work, or a *world* without music or sound.

In 2016, the curatorial team of Katarzyna Kolodziej, Magdalena Komornicka and Stanislaw Welbel, from the *Zacheta National Gallery of Art* in Warsaw Poland conceived of an evening of musical performances called simply *THE ARTISTS*, for which I was invited to perform a 20 minute 'set' of my Psalms. This was the first performance centred entirely around RELIGIONVIR.US "music." I was being asked to perform a concert, creating a *world* entirely through "song" in their curatorial concept of music made by visual artists. I had at my disposal a projector with 'visuals', stage lighting typical for a pop singer's concert, and the performance was set in a large performance venue as a satellite performance produced by the Museum. I performed my "set" of Psalms, which had only ever been presented in segments, in an artwork that appropriated the aesthetic of a rock concert as a site-specific work. My *Psalms*, assembled together, composed a non-linear story, and I revived an ancient fascination with the model of the rock opera, like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, as a way to further imply religion as a form of multi-media production. Technical devices and models utilized in the performance of *Psalms* at the *Zacheta National Gallery of* Art would later be replicated with *Temple of Artifice* as a liturgical/rock opera/web-based temple performed in the oldest church in Hamburg four years later.

[M]Dudeck, *Psalms,* digital performance documentations, dimensions variable, 2016.

[M]Dudeck, *Amygdala*, digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, 2011.
Photograph by Karen Asher.

[M]Dudeck, *Thus Spake Amma Syncletica*, digital performance documentation,
dimensions variable, 2014. Photograph by Kaoru Suzuki.

[M] Dudeck *The Messiah Complex 5.0*, video still, dimensions variable, performed at PROGRESS Festival, 2015.

[M] Dudeck, *The Genesis Complex*, digital performance documentation, dimensions variable, performed at The Glasshouse, 2012. Photograph by Eyal Perry.

SACRED SYNTH

I was born in 1984, and my sonic imagination was infiltrated by early electronic music and visionary sci-fi soundtracks, such as David Lynch's *Dune* (composed in collaboration by Toto and Brian Eno) and *Blade Runner*, directed by Ridley Scott with a soundtrack composed by Vangelis. Both of these sound-worlds merged Orientalist mystic chant, resurrected from 1960s counterculture, augmented with the advent of futuristic synth-scapes, provided by new technologies and special effects that made the cosmos appear audibly recognizable. I felt these musical artists in the early eighties were composing the soundtrack of our future as a space-faring race.

At the dawn of the Fourth Mutation of RELIGIONVIR.US I found myself increasingly drawn to synthesizers, vocoders and vocal modulators, tropes and devices that were popular in original sci-fi soundtracks (OSTs) as well as generic pop music of the era I was born into. Using retro 80s sci fi sounds was another intentional strategy to imbue my religious music with emotional nostalgia.

The *Temple of Artifice* would be the first major *gesamtkunstwerk* of the Fourth Mutation exploring the concept of religion as multi-media production, and so I decided to produce an original soundtrack (OST) that would look and feel like a blockbuster film production. This would involve oral recitation of *The Invocation* diagrammed and presented in *Religious Prosthetics I,* which would be recited and recorded by a voice actor in both English and my invented language. I wanted to build an ethereal sound score featuring tracks sung by myself and long-term RELIGIONVIR.US collaborator, German opera singer Annete Elster, in my invented language, layered overtop of one another to produce the sound world that the Temple would reside within. These were combined and produced in collaboration with German composer Uwe Storch and Canadian electronic media artist, Brandon Gibson DeGroote.

THE INVOCATION

As a religious prosthetic, I wanted to produce a core chant that would have recognizable religious connotations for the public as soon as they heard it. Having worked with 'found' Gregorian Chants in the earlier *Liber Meta* performances, I decided to appropriate the 7th century Latin hymn *Da Pacem Domine*, , as performed by Ensemble Organum & Mercel Peres on their album *Le Chant des Templiers XII Siecle* as source code.[190] I sent an .mp3 of the original recording to composer Uwe Storch, who transposed it, and scanned me his hand-written musical notation to begin to re-code as a religious prosthetic.

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[190] Marcel Peres & Ensemble Organum, *Le chant des Templiers*, Harmonia Mundi, 2019. CD.

[M]Dudeck, Annette Elster & Uwe Storch, Transposed Templar Chant

The next stage involved a hybrid method of transliteration, wherein I replaced the original Latin words with words from my invented language, directly onto the sheet music Uwe had recorded. I then flew to Neuss, Germany, where Annette Elster and Uwe Storch were based, and during a short residency at the *Musikerhaus* of the *Museum Insel Hombroich*, we began to develop the psalm further, accentuating it by holding certain notes for longer, repeating select verses multiple times, and adding eighth notes, in order to produce a new Psalm that bore resemblance to its source material but simultaneously obscured it. Annette Elster and I also experimented with altered vocal arrangements, in a typical Medieval style, wherein I held a background note for a sustained period while she improvised, summoning Eastern/North African vocal techniques she had studied in her career as a professional opera singer. We then travelled to Uwe Storch's studio, the home of *Orphid Code Productions*, to lay down the tracks and begin digital alchemical alterations.

Following the first recording, Uwe Storch worked with vocal modulation devices in post-production to amplify and pluralize both of our voices to produce four different sequences, each one unique. In the fourth and last sequence Uwe used tonal configurations to transpose Annete's soprano operatics into tenor, layering twenty versions over top of one another so that she could sound like a choir of androgynous monks. I then sent the recorded and re-mixed tracks to the electronic composer/sound engineer Brandon DeGroote in Toronto (part of a musical duo famous for making 80s retro new wave music in Canada), who then built into the

vocalizations a sci fi sound-score reminiscent of synth-infused 80s sci fi soundtracks. The source code then broadened as I asked Brandon to invoke the technological sublimity of the opening sequence of Blade Runner.

Vangelis underwent a similar creative process in the vocalizations he composed for the *Blade Runner* soundtrack, which were performed by Egyptian singer Demi Roussos, who had long trained in Arabic vocalization styles. Vangelis was

> determined to create a world of incomprehensible strangeness that, while the lyrics sound similar to Arabic words, all are corrupted into meaninglessness with the exception of just two lines which translate as: "Tell me my dear? Tell me my mother?"[191]
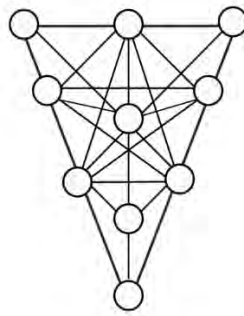
Vangelis used the sonic language of ancient Semitic music, by choosing a performer trained in the medium, but replaced the known languages she had studied with an altogether incomprehensible language in order to add space, and dimension to his worldbuilding. This strategy of utilizing invented languages that bear connection to recognizable languages, detectable only to the adepts versed in the peculiarities of the languages referenced – has been used by several televisual productions in the domain of science fiction and fantasy and a number of these strategies are discussed in Religious Prosthetics I.

For Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, Grammy award-winning recording artist Enya, known for her ethereal and otherworldly music and haunting voice, produced three tracks which were sung entirely in Tolkien's Elvish. The soundtrack, composed, orchestrated, conducted and produced by Howard Shore featured several leitmotifs that were used for mystical moments involving the otherworldly Elves. Of these, the most prominently reoccurring and repetitive Lothlorien theme, established by a women's chorus, presented a mysterious motif in a minor key which appeared whenever the elves were summoned or accessed in the film trilogy.

The original soundtrack (OTS) of Temple of Artifice is simply one long track but track that is roughly 14 minutes long and is played on loop when one visits the digital temple, or can be listened to in its own via Soundcloud. This experience has led me to imagine a future production of a feature-length RELIGIONVIR.US synth rock opera, performed entirely within my own invented language. For now, I am interested in referencing the aesthetics of 80s sci fi soundtracks and merging that with recognizable religious music re-mixed and re-mastered to produce hybrid, ethereal, retro, hallucinatory soundscapes. I aim in the future to work with choirs singing in my invented language and creating symphonic works with invented instruments.

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[191] Nick Soulsby. "The myth and majesty of Vangelis' timeless Blade runner soundtrack." Oct. 4, 2017. The Vinyl Factory. https://thevinylfactory.com/features/blade-runner-soundtrack/

CHAPTER FOUR
THE INVENTION OF RELIGION

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE

The word "religion" descends from the Latin *religio,* which was first recorded at the onset of the Roman Empire. Its first recorded usage is attributed to Cicero in *De natura deorum (2.3-4)*[192] wherein he defines it as "the scrupulous or strict observance to a set of traditional rules."[193] It is tempting to imagine that this was the birth of *religion* as we know it, but like many concepts that migrate across time, its meanings have mutated along various cultural and historical vectors. According to religious studies scholar Daniel Dubuisson, the Romans themselves did not have "Religion" in the way that it is understood today. They were,

> without revelation, without revealed books, without dogma, and without orthodoxy. The central requirement was, instead, what has been called 'orthopraxis', the correct performance of prescribed rituals.[194]

These rituals, according to Dubuisson, were devoid of the moralistic, or communal precepts embedded within the concept of *religion* in its modern usage. Orthopraxis provided a set of recipes for producing pre-set intended results that were neither right nor wrong, but rather inherent to their social conditions, pluralistic and non-

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[192] Daniel Dubuisson. *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge and Ideology*. Trans. William Sayers, (London: Johns Hopkins University Press), 2003, 15.
[193] Ibid, 15.
[194] Daniel Dubuisson. *The Invention of Religions*. trans. Martha Cunnungham, (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2020), 11.

distinctive. Prior to Judaism and Christianity, within ancient Greek, Roman, and other Near-Eastern worldviews, there was also no such thing as a 'false religion' – in part, because there was no such thing as religion.

If we follow Dubuisson's line of thought, we can infer that the modern/ contemporary grafting of "religion" onto historical phenomena outside of the Judeo-Christian matrix can be read as a form of imaginative speculation. In the modern era, Religion occupies a singular, designatory and ideological domain, detached from other aspects of social and political life. Dubuisson proposes that religion as a distinctive category was an invention of what we now call the Academy, and that "if a History of Religions exists, it is in fact because in the eyes of its founders it was possible to isolate discrete units called "religions."[195] Religion has become a universalist category that includes a vast panoply of worldviews, cultural and belief practises that function in the contemporary West as forms of self-identification, cultural identity and support networks of shared supernatural belief. Dubuisson claims that the modern usage of the term "religion" infers "an atemporal notion or indestructible essence" that is, in his view,

> "the result of a discriminatory act performed in the West and there
> alone. If it ended up occupying such a central dominant position, it
> is because it defined itself from the very outset in opposition to
> everything it judged not to be itself."[196]

Dubuisson makes the claim that the study of religion is, historically a "Christian Science", that began in the late 19th century with western expansion and colonization, wherein European scholars "discovered (or rather, "invented") religions everywhere, whose Western and Christian version evidently represented to them the ideal prototype"[197] Thus, he argues, the early field of study that 'created' World Religions, was born out of imperialist assumptions rooted in a Judeo-Christian worldview that later conspired to give birth to what we now call religious studies.

Yet, despite being rooted within a Judeo-Christian world-view, the very concept of religion hosts another fatal flaw. According to Dubuisson, Jesus could not have imagined himself as creating or having been a part of a religio(n) "since the thing itself and the word that accompanied its future Christian acceptance did not exist at the beginning of our era."[198] Ancient Greek, which the New Testament was penned in, has no word for "religion", and therefore when the Christian Bible was translated into Latin, two Greek terms, *Eusebia* and *threskeia* were "rendered" as religion in

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[195] Ibid, 9.
[196] Daniel Dubuisson. *The Western Construction of Religion: Myths, Knowledge and Ideology*. Trans. William Sayers, (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 15.
[197] Daniel Dubuisson. *The Invention of Religions*. trans. Martha Cunnungham, (Sheffield: Equinox Publishing, 2020), 9.
[198] Ibid, 10.

these early translations. *Eusebia* has remained consistently aligned with what in Latin is referred to as *piety*, while *threskeia* is a much more contested term that appears to have several connotations that differ in accordance with historical timelines.

Thus, when a layman or a scholar reads the New Testament and encounters either in Acts, Colossians or the Book of James the word "religion", they are manipulated by inference that this concept inscribed in ancient scripture is the very same phenomenon that allegedly unites the entirety of human experience under one banner. Dubuisson claims that these 'deliberate abusive translations' tend to imply that

> religion as a phenomenon is universal, since every great culture possesses an equivalent of the Christian term. The reader who does not have a solid training in philology would imagine in good faith that religions exist everywhere since words exist everywhere that are translated by and correspond to our indigenous term. At the same time, the originality of every culture is erased in favour of a uniform, fundamental "religious" version of humanity that conforms to the unique and universal model imposed by the West.[199]

My experience presenting RELIGONVIR.US in a vast array of cultural environments has shown me that the vast the majority of people I have encountered – educated or not – do indeed "imagine in good faith that religions exist everywhere." This is a standardized assumption that rarely if ever gets confronted with the reality that what is thought of as religions has been pre-shaped by the Judeo-Christian ideal. RELIGIONVIR.US seeks to expose this problem to audiences without overtly saying so, initiating reflective processes that allow members of the public to muse on the possibility that religions are in no way universal.

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[199] Ibid, 14.

RE-IMAGINING RELIGION

"If we have understood the archaeological and textual record correctly, man
has had his entire history in which to imagine deities and modes of interaction
with them. But man, more precisely western man, has had only the last few
centuries in which to imagine religion...That is to say, while there is a stagg-
erring amount of data, of phenomena, of human experiences and expressions
that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another,
as *religious* – there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation
of the scholar's study."[1]

-Jonathan Z. Smith
[Smith (1982), xi][200]

In the Introduction to his 1982 *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown*,
celebrated American religious studies scholar Jonathan Z. Smith refers to religion as
a conceptual tool "created for the scholar's analytical purposes by his imaginative
acts of comparison and generalization" and, as such "...has no independent existence
apart from the academy."[201] In allegiance with Smith, renowned post-colonial scholar
Talal Asad claims that there cannot be a universal definition of religion, "not only
because its constituent elements and relationships are historically specific, but
because that definition itself is the historical product of discursive processes."[202]
These processes, emerging from and within a dominant Christian worldview that
developed academic infrastructures to not only study religion but to define it, govern
the scholars who train within its ranks and filter down into religious and secular
publics alike, pre-coding and pre-shaping cultural notions of what is and what is not
a religion, and how to know the difference. My work calls these fluctuating codes
into question, by performing a religion that affirms and then denies the invention of
religion that the academy has produced.

A recent call for papers for the academic journal *Implicit Religion*, produced by the
British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR), asserts that the *concept* of
religion "can be traced to its early roots in the so-called War of Religion and the
Protestant Reformation of the 16th and 17th centuries."[203] As a journal dedicated to
the critical study of religion, it sets out to challenge the boundaries between religion
and 'non-religion' through the examination of various cultural formations that have

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[200] Jonathan Z. Smith. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1982, xi.
[201] Ibid.
[202] Talal Asad. *Geneologies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam.* (London: The John Hopkins University Press), 1993, 29.
[203] CALL FOR PAPERS. Special Issue: *Implicit Religion: The Discourse of Religion in Contemporary Social Formations.* Included in the Appendix.

been excluded from the category "by the gatekeeping practises of the general public, practitioners, the law and even some scholars of religion."[204] Here we have an authoritative institution of religion, the centre of religious studies in Britain, stating overtly that what we call religion is a historical construction roughly 300 years old. As such, the authoritative entity of religious studies is in the process of deconstructing its' own role in perpetuating the metanarratives of religion, and asserting, as Smith and Duboisson have done, that 'the study of religion...invented religion."[205]

I have long felt a collegial and artistic affinity with those who 'study' religion, despite the differences in the outputs of our research. Whereas my inquiry synthesizes information gleaned from the scholarly analysis of religion into what is ostensibly a self-conscious fiction, my work is devoid of the necessity to argue for or against any specific speculative position. My colleagues in religious studies follow different protocols, yet both their practises and my own, as Smith attests, are rooted in the realms of the imaginary. While serving as artist in residence at *The Institute for Art, Religion and Social Justice* at Union Theological Seminary, I had the great privilege of attending classes by renowned New Testament theologian Dr. Brigitte Kahl, alongside seminarians, theologians and religious scholars who were training to become spiritual leaders and educators in their respective denominations and fields.

Kahl is known widely in theological circles as a proponent of what she calls *Critical Re-Imagination*: a pedagogical methodology which "draws on the use of ancient art and architecture to illuminate imperial Roman constructs of power and identity and to show how New Testament texts both reflect and contradict them."[206] Her strategies of Re-Imagination involve performing 'visual exegesis' on remains of visual culture from biblical time-periods, championing a method of speculative and interpretative analysis regularly dismissed as anathema to the logocentric practises common to biblical exegesis. As artist-in-residence I would wrestle with other theologians in Kahl's classes, employing a range of hermeneutical devices to interpret remains of Ancient Near Eastern and Ancient Roman visual culture in relation to their "scriptural" textual counterparts. Despite having an extremely limited theological knowledge base compared to my seminarian peers, I was able to contribute to and enhance the conversation through various modes of speculative and interpretive analysis I had acquired through my training in art history and visual culture. What continues to align me with my peers within this field, I argue, is the imaginal foundations that underpin our vastly different, but strangely unified methods of inquiry into "religion."

[204] Ibid.
[205] Jonathan Z. Smith. *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 234.
[206] Brigitte Kahl. Biography. Union Theological Seminary, online. Date accessed: Sept. 22, 2021. https://utsnyc.edu/faculty/brigitte-kahl/

THE INVENTION OF THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE

"The Religious Experience" is a popular term in both secular and religious publics used to describe a range of events with transcendent or mystical implications. Although fairly commonly invoked in the Western World, like the term 'religion' itself, "the religious experience" is neither timeless, nor universal. Rather it was introduced, and as a framework *invented* by scholars in the early stages of what Dubuisson and Smith describe as the invention of religion in the West. The term itself rose to prominence when Harvard psychologist William James delivered the Gifford Lectures of Natural Theology at the University of Edinburgh in 1901-2, called *The Variety of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature.* Herein, James defined "religious experiences" as

> the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider divine.[207]

James is credited with formally initiating the "turn to religious experience" within the broader study of religion, and whilst he allowed for wide-ranging interpretations of what a religious experience could be, he is also accused of

> privileging sudden, discrete, authenticating moments of individual experience (such as revelations, visions and dramatic conversion episodes) over ordinary, everyday experience or the experience of groups which helped to define a religious experience as inherently grandiose.[208]

Thus, when one in general terms speaks of having had an experience they deem religious, the expectation is that it was an experience of significance or grandeur, rather than a subtle feeling, or a state of mind, such as meditation, or baking symbolic foods, or cleaning the body as purification. Whilst privileging direct experience over religious doctrine, James, insisted that religious experiences could be explained in psychological terms, "while at the same time leaving the possibility that it pointed to something more."[209] James was positioned in between the two predominant schools of thought on the matter, which religious studies scholar Ann Taves refers to as the *sui generis* and *ascriptive* models of religious experience. The key difference is that those who ascribe to the *sui generis* model believe that there exist uniquely religious (or mystical or spiritual) experiences, emotions, acts or objects, whereas the

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[207] William James. The varieties of religious experience. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1902/1985), 34.
[208] Ann Taves, Religious Experience Reconsidered: A Building-Block Approach to the Study of Religion and Other Special Things, (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 5.
[209] Ibid, 5.

ascriptive model claims that religious, mystical, spiritual or sacred "things" are created when religious significance is assigned to them.

Taves makes the distinction between *simple ascriptions*, wherein an individual experience is set apart as special, and *composite ascriptions* in which "simple *ascriptions* are incorporated into more complex formations, such as those that scholars and others designate as spiritualities or religions."[210] *Simple ascriptions* can refer to relatively minor religious experiences that have the potential to join with others of their like to become what she refers to as a *composite ascriptive formation*, an event, shared and experienced by a public and viewed as *originary* which becomes recreated in the present. Ultimately Taves argues that experiences deemed religious (*simple ascriptions*) become building blocks to create more complex formations (*composite ascriptions*) that we typically refer to as religions or spiritualities. A series of religious experiences shared amongst people can lead to the construction of new religions.

Like many scholarly terms and devices explored within this text, the term "religious experience" is used by members of the general public alongside scholars and religious practitioners even though many don't realize its unique history as a disciplinary construction. As mentioned in the introduction, I was awed by the amount of secular individuals who approached me to confessing having had "religious experiences" inside of RELIGIONVIR.US transmissions, particularly those who approached my production with suspicion, hesitation or contempt. It is also regularly used amongst my so-called "secular", or atheist peers to describe transcendental encounters, many of which lack the historical knowledge to be aware of what they are referencing. In my experience, it appears that the popular notion of what constitutes "a religious experience" in the new millennium is precisely what James was accused of: a revelatory, ecstatic, at times psychedelic moment in or out of time, where the spiritual enters one's reality, in many cases despite their best intentions. As such, it is something I believe can be intentionally manufactured by artists who wish to produce such a result in the public, because it has already been pre-formed as a concept in the collective unconscious. I exploit this programming intentionally in my attempt as an artist to engineer religious experiences.
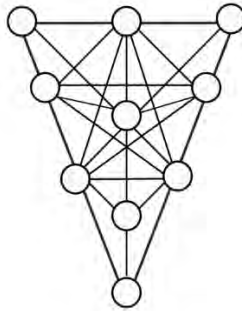
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[210] Ibid, 9.

RELIGIOUS PROSTHETICS IV

HYPERICONS
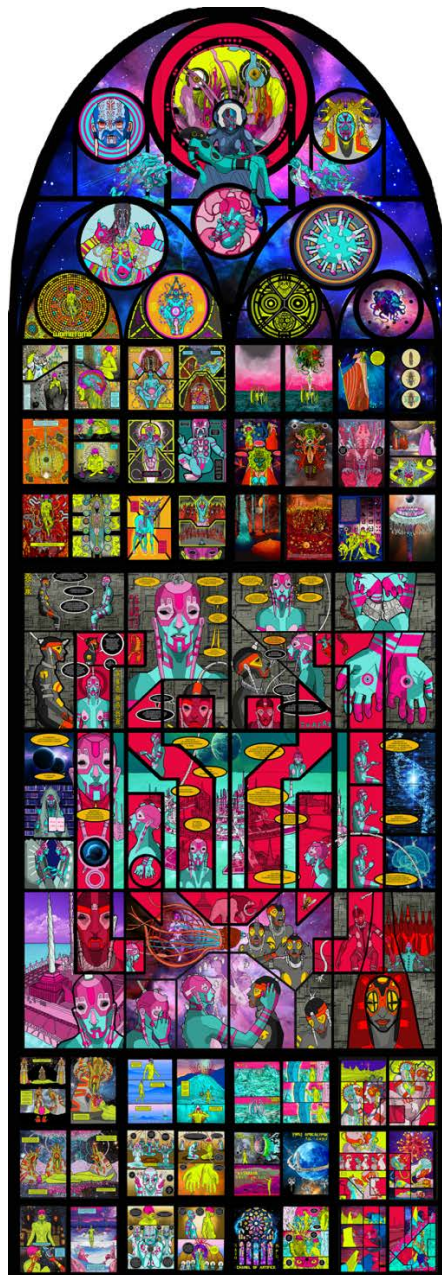
[M]Dudeck, *Hypericon Ten: The Growing of a God*,
digital print in lightbox, 48cm x 152cm, 2020.

ICONS & ICONOGRAPHIES

In Greek Orthodox Christianity, an *Icon* is usually a depiction of Christ, or the Virgin Mary presented as a two-dimensional painted artwork featuring symbolic imagery and produced as an object of religious devotion. *Icons* are not simply paintings, they embody divinity. They were made by believers and that belief is embedded in their materiality and the religious aura they carry.

Iconography, the field of art history dedicated to the identification, interpretation and description of elements within images, and *Iconology*, the analysis and attribution of meaning to those elements of visual content, are both rooted etymologically in the ancient Greek words for "ikon"(εἰκών) meaning "image" and (γράφειν) meaning "to write or to draw." Thus an iconography is a set of images upon which ideas have been inscribed. Both of these disciplines are now autonomous ontological practises, but their etymology descends from a time when what we now refer to as art and religion were inseparable.

Religious Iconography broadly refers to the use of imagery by artists or cultural producers to convey religious concepts and ideas, or to depict religious events. It infers the repetition of symbolic motifs whose meanings and interpretations have been codified within a lexicon that defines their mythological parameters in religious terms. "Religious iconographies" is now a term used to describe the repetitive use of symbolic imagery depicting specific religious content or events from a broad range of religious worldviews, no longer exclusively Judeo-Christian. Every "religion" that produces visual culture, therefore, has its own iconography.

In contemporary art, it is commonplace to re-mix established religious iconographies and re-position them in the midst of modern contemporary life. These viral iconographies survive through endless repetition and re-application to different worldviews and historical contexts. In order to "host" an iconography, the artist need not be widely read in art history or theology, they can easily cite the iconographic format instinctually after encountering its various mutations in art, popular culture

or literature. In some cases, an artist may even perpetuate an iconographic impulse unwittingly, by incorporating a gesture or a symbolic motif without overt knowledge of its referent. Performance provides a compelling eample of how iconographic postures may be unconsciously activated without conscious intent. I recall in an undocumented performance in 2012, I ritually dismantled/dismembered a sculpture of a *Chimaera* I had built out of styrofoam and glue. After hacking it to pieces, intuitively I picked up two large rectangular slabs and held them up as I stood, remaining a statue for a few minutes. It was only after when viewing the documentation that I saw I had assumed the recognizable motif of Moses bearing the tablets of the Ten Commandments following his descent from Mount Sinai in Exodus (Moses also happens to be my Hebrew name.) In *The Scandal of The Speaking Body*, Shoshana Fellman writes that "the scandal consists in the fact that the act cannot know what it is doing."[210.5] Iconographic viruses can be transmitted by asymptomatic cultural producers, who only become aware of their contagion following a transmission they perform.

15.9cm Pieta and Michelangelo decorate statue figurine, bianco. 19.3 x 18.3 x 20.1 cm, *Amazon.it* https://www.amazon.it/Michelangelo-decorative-statue-figurine-bianco/dp/B00KVTMIS2

CONTEMPORARY STRAINS OF RELIGIOUS ICONOGRAPHY

One of the most prominent Judeo-Christian iconographies to be re-mixed under the auspices of contemporary art is *The Pietà*. Here, the Mother Mary is depicted holding the lifeless body of the Son of God, represented by Michelangelos' 1498-99 marble sculpture of the same name. Contemporary remixes include (and are by no means limited to) David Lachapelle's 2009 *American Jesus* (where Christ is performed by a Michael Jackson look-alike being held by an actor depicting Jesus in

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[210.5] Felmann, Shoshana. *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, (San Francisco: Stanford University Press),1980. 67

the position of the Mother Mary), Marina Abramovic and Ulay's 1983-2002 tableaux vivant *Anima Mundi (Pieta),*where the performance art duo re-genders the Pietà with Ulay dressed in white lain across the lap of Abramovic in red, and performance artist Guillermo Gomez Pena's *The Death of the Avant-Garde: Post-Colonial Pieta #69* wherein the body of Jesus is replaced by that of a woman of colour, and Gomez-Pena in his ritual regalia performing as the Virgin Mother, as a stand-in for the extinction of the avant-garde within Contemporary American Art. All three of these works re-code the original religious meaning of the work by appropriating it's heavily charged symbolic associations as fuel for articulating new iconographies, and manufacturing new meanings.

David LaChapelle, *American Jesus: Hold Me, Carry Me Boldly,* C-Print, 137.2 x 61cm, 2008, (David LaChapelle studio) in *Art & Religion in the 21st century* by Aaron Rosen, London: Thames & Hudson, 2015, 66.
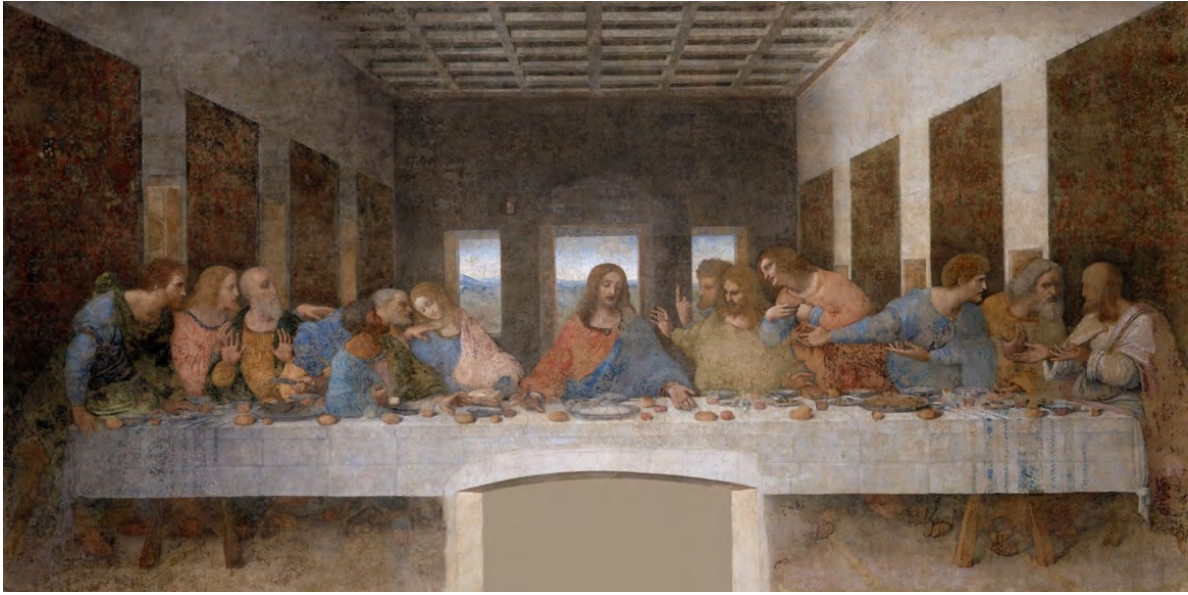
Marina Abramovic and Ulay, *Anima Mundi* (Pieta), videostill (Marina Abramovic Archives and Galleria Lia Rumma Milano/Napoli), 1983-2002.

Guillermo Gomez Pena. *The Death of the Avant-Garde: Post-Colonial Pieta #69, (* GP & Nic Lyons at Left Space, San Francisco) Photo by RJ Muna, 2010.

Leonardo da Vinci. *The Last Supper*, tempera on plaster, 1495-1497, (Milan, Santa Maria delle Grazie Refractory) in *Leonardo da Vinci: The Complete Drawings*, Frank Zollner, (Koln: Taschen, 2003), 126.

Another popular iconographic re-mix in contemporary art and popular culture is DaVinci's *The Last Supper*. Here, Christ ingests his last ritual meal surrounded by his apostles on Passover before being crucified. Among the most notable to use this image as source code are Israeli artist Adi Nes' *Untitled 1999* –depicting young Israeli soldiers eating together in a mess hall, animating themes of self-sacrifice in the mandatory-military culture of the Jewish State, Yinka Shonibare Mbe's *Last Supper (after Leonardo),* with his signature headless figurative sculptures dressed in vibrant 18th century outfits, feasting over a 'banker's bacchanal' prior to their 'crucifixion in recession', and Samoan artist Greg Semu's *Auto Portrait with 12 Disciples*, from his series "*The Last Cannibal Supper*" depicting himself in the position of Christ, overtop of a table of skulls and roasted animals, surrounded by Kanak tribesmen in ritual regalia feasting on their last cannibalistic meal "cause tomorrow we become Christians."[211] In contemporary science fiction, the Last Supper became the architecture for the iconic poster of the 2004-2009 remake of *Battlestar Galactica*, based upon a Mormon-inspired re-mix of the biblical story of exodus, re-imagined by Glen Larson.[212]

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[211] Aaron Rosen. *Art & Religion in the 21st Century.* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015), 55.

[212] Kevin Whetmore. The Theology of Battlestar Galactica: American Christianity in the 2004-2009 Television Series. (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2012.)

Adi Nes, *(Untitled 1999),* Colour photographic print, 89.7 x 149cm, (Jack Shainman Gallery, New York) in Art & Religion in the 21st century by Aaron Rosen, London: Thames & Hudson , 2015, 57.


Yinka Shonibare Mbe, *Last Supper (after Leonardo),* 13 life size mannequins, wax printed cotton, wood table and chairs, silver cutlery and vases, antique and reproduction glassware and tableware, and fibreglass and resin food, 158 x 742 x 260cm, 2012, (Yinka Shonibare Studio, London) in *Art & Religion in the 21st century* by Aaron Rosen, (London: Thames & Hudson , 2015), 54.

Greg Semu *Auto Portrait with 12 Disciples* Digital C print, 100 x 286cm, (courtesy of the artist and Alcaston Gallery Melbourne) in *Art & Religion in the 21st century* by Aaron Rosen, London: Thames & Hudson , 2015, 55.

Battlestar Galactica, Last Supper promotional poster, 20 x 40" artist unknown.
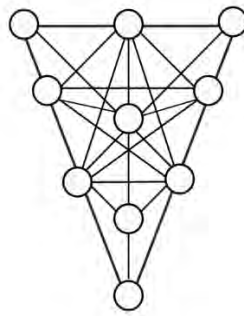
RELIGIONVIR.US ICONOGRAPHIC REMIXES

RELIGIONVIR.US employs iconographic re-mixing as a central apparatus in the production of religious experiences, through the production of religious prosthetics. I intentionally activate religious associations by appropriating recognizable religious motifs and re-positioning them into hybrid transmedial configurations. Re-mixing involves not only re-positioning the visual language of the iconography, but also the accompanying textual component presented in the title of the work, and sometimes transplanting the work from one media to another. This technique was applied when I converted Caravaggio's *St. Jerome Writing* into the performative *Liber Meta 2:0*, as discussed in *Religious Prosthetics II*. In this instance, the transformation kept many of the iconographic signifiers intact (including the red robe, the skull on the table, the stark lighting) but transposed from a painting into a performance. As well, my addition of prosthetic breasts in place of a beard, and a resin cast of an elongated skull in place of the human skull in the original work were subtle iconographic alterations that slightly repositioned the symbolic aperture of the work. *Liber Meta 1:0* and *2:0*, as well as *The Neon Bible*, are the only exclusively performative iconographic re-mixes I have undertaken. The remainder are in 2d and 3d media.

The following is a sample of six diverse Iconographic remixes I have employed as part of this Practise-based PhD, as well as past re-mixes that influenced the direction of those in this thesis.

ICONOGRAPHIC RE-MIX 01

Title: The Crowning with Horns
Original Title: The Crowning with Thorns
Artist: [M]Dudeck / RELIGIONVIR.US
Original Artist: Caravaggio
Dimensions: 80" x 80"
Original Dimensions: 127 x 166cm
Media: Inkjet Print on Rag paper
Original Media: Oil on Canvas
Date Produced: 2012
Original Date Produced: 1602/03

The Crowning with Horns performs a re-mix through syntax which translates into symbolic transposition. The source code is based upon Caravaggio's rendition of the moment where Christ is crowned with thorns. In the 1604 painting, the redeemer is surrounded on either side by the torturers, who are fastening the crown into place with an exerted downward thrust. On the left of Christ is a public official, leaning in what appears to be a slouched position, while Christ's contorted body, bearing splatters of blood but unflinching in its authority, overtly references the *Belvedere Torso*[213] as source code.

Within the RELIGIONVIR.US mythos, at the end of the Third Age, a prophet known as the Language Bearer is tetrified[214] and in preparation he is *horned* for the ritual. By replacing "thorns" with "horns" I maintained an aural reference to the original work, while also drawing attention to the horning of Moses, described in greater detail in Chapter Two. Another critical re-mix was to illuminate my subjects in bright white light in contrast to the chiaroscuro Caravaggio is famous for. I added a fourth figure to the right of the central messiah, which aligned with my own mythological structure. In Caravaggio's original painting, Christ is clutching within his fingers a stick of bamboo not unlike those being used by the soldiers to bind the crown atop his head. In my *Crowning with Horns*, my Messiah is clutching a *baculum*, the penis-bone of a walrus, which I acquired during my travels in the high Canadian Arctic. This also relates to the larger body of work that Crowning with Horns is presented within, referred to as *The Baculum Cosmogony*.

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[213] The Belvedere Torso is a fragmentary marble statue of a male nude held in the possession of the Vatican Museum. The contorted torso had a significant influence on the Renaissance, most notably admired by Michelangelo and Raphael.
[214] *Tetrifixion* is a made-up term from RELIGIONVIR.US mythos that describes a person being flayed and stretched out on a giant X-shaped cross, in the manner of St. Andrew's crucifixion on Nov. 30, 60 AD.

Caravaggio. *The Crowning with Thorns,* oil on canvas, 127 x 166cm, (Vienna, Kunsthistoriches Museum, Gemldegalerie) 1602/03 in *Caravaggio: The Complete Works*, Sebastian Schutze, (Koln: Taschen, 2015), 171.

[M]Dudeck, *The Crowning with Horns*, inkjet print on rag paper, 80" x 80", 2012.
Photograph produced in collaboration with Larry Glawson

ICONOGRAPHIC RE-MIX 02

Title: The God Shepherd
Original Title: The Good Shepherd
Artist: [M]Dudeck / RELIGIONVIR.US
Original Artist: Various Artists
Dimensions: Dimensions Variable
Original Dimensions: Dimensions Variable
Media: Digital Iconography
Original Media: Painting, Sculpture, Drawing
Date Produced:
Original Date Produced:

Growing up Jewish inside of a Christian-dominated culture, I was exposed to several strains of religious iconography that had no basis in Jewish source code. I often encountered these symbolic repetitions in culture but remained ignorant of their meanings until I began an investigation, or was otherwise informed. This was the case with the iconography of *The Good Shepherd*, wherein Christ is depicted carrying a lamb atop of his shoulders, sometimes standing watch over top of a flock of sheep.

I did not become consciously aware of the iconography until I saw a mutated version of it appear in Matthew Barney's durational 5-hour feature length film, *The River of Fundament*, in New York in 2014. Barney's gesamtkunstwerk uses Norman Mailer's 1983 novel *Ancient Evenings* as primary material, following a fictional Mailer through several reincarnations inspired by the Egyptian Book of the Dead. In one pivotal scene, two Egyptian Gods, Set and Horus, re-mixed in contemporary garb, are performed by actors in a Brooklyn Navy yard in competing processions surrounded by mummers. The God 'Set' is portrayed by an actor carrying a dog across his shoulders in the precise manner that Christ is depicted in the iconography carrying a lamb.

Being initially ignorant to the source, at the time I assumed the iconography was in reference to ancient Egyptian religious symbolic codes, and that was why it was familiar to me. A few years later, while undergoing this PhD, I travelled to the Ashmoleon Museum in Oxford to view an exhibition entitled *Imagining the Divine*, wherein I encountered the symbol again but this time in its Pre-Christian shape. It was in the form of a sculpture called *Statue of Kriophoros(ram-bearer)* dated to 200-400 AD, representing a beardless youth with a ram on his shoulders. In Ancient Greece and Rome, a variety of ancient cults utilized the iconographic motif of the

kriophorous or *ram-bearer* to depict a standing adolescent male bearing a ram stretched across his shoulders. In his 2nd century text *Descriptions of Greece*, the ancient writer and scholar Pausanias recounts a story wherein Hermes, the messenger god:

> averted a pestilence from the city by carrying a ram around the walls; to commemorate this Calamis made an image of Hermes carrying a ram upon his shoulders. Whichever of the [male] youths is judged to be the most handsome goes round the walls at the feast of Hermes, carrying a ram on his shoulders.[215]

Thus, *the Good Shepherd* was a Christian re-mix of pre-Christian iconography, and its symbolic aperture was altered through the conversion of the *ram* into a *lamb*. Matthew Barney took this promiscuous icon that had travelled through multiple religious worldviews and re-positioned it as a contemporary artifact, hybridized as an ancient Egyptian iconography displayed in contemporary codes. Within this iconography I bore witness to three significant mutations over a period of nearly 2,200 years.

Within the parameters of RELIGIONVIR.US iconographies I sought to add another layer of re-mix to the cauldron, wherein ram/lamb would be replaced with a fawn. While I have not yet composed the entire mythological basis for this format, I have undergone preliminary illustrations that portray one of the myths protagonists – a eunuch priest named Ah'Ma – carrying it atop of their shoulders. In future transmissions of the RELIGIONVIR.US I intend to perform as Ah'Ma carrying the deer fawn in a religious procession, referencing Barney's Cremaster, the Christian Good Shepherd and the Greek kriophorous all in one gesture. The current depiction provided is a digital sketch, the first of a series of iconographies that The Good Shepherd has inspired. In the manner of *The Crowning with Thorns/The Crowning with Horns*, I have re-named this iconography *The God Shepherd* – erasing one 'o' to change *'Good'* into *'God.'*

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[215] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, vol. 4, trans. William H. S. Jones, (Cambridge MA: 1935), 265.

Statue of Kriophorous (ram-bearer), AD 200-400, Found at Zubeir Iraq, carved marble, 61cm (London: The British Museum) in Imagining the Divine: Art and the Rise of World Religions, Jas Elsner, Stefanie Lenk, (Oxford, Ashmoleon Museum, 2017), 50.
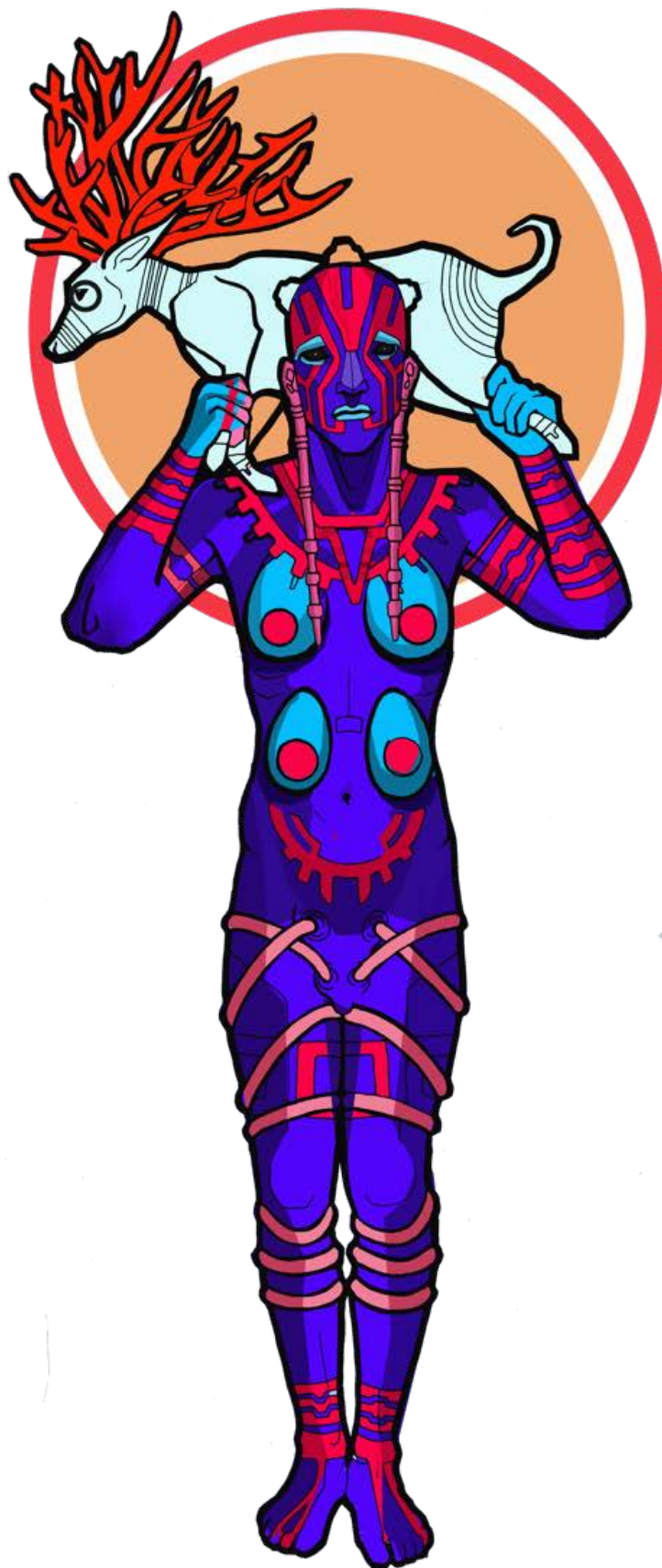

Christ the Good Shepherd Icon, Orthodox Ministry Icons (online), artist unknown. https://orthodoxmonasteryicons.com/products/christ-the-good-shepherd-icon-1

Matthew Barney, *River of Fundament* (film still), in *Matthew Barney: River of Fundament*, Okwei Enwezor, (Munich: Haus der Kunst Publications 2014), 167.

[M]Dudeck, *The God Shepherd*, digital image, dimensions variable, 2021.

ICONOGRAPHIC RE-MIX 03

Title: The Third Apocalypse of Aion
Original Title: The Fall of the Damned
Artist: [M]Dudeck / RELIGIONVIR.US
Original Artist: Paul Rubens
Dimensions: 286cm x 224cm
Original Dimensions: 286cm x 224cm
Media: Digital Image, Dimensions Variable
Original Media: Oil on Canvas
Date Produced: 2021 (in process)
Original Date Produced: 1620

I encountered Paul Ruben's 1620 painting *The Fall of the Damned* in all three seasons of the original Netflix sci-fi series *DARK*. Here it was repetitively presented as a centrepiece in the underground headquarters of a group of time travellers called *Sic Mundus* who are charged with a vision to bring about the end of time. No doubt I had encountered the painting before in studies of Art History and in popular culture, but it's strategic and symbolic placement in the series me to perform exegesis upon its meaning. *The Fall of the Damned* is an iconographic depiction of the defeated armies of Satan being hurled into the abyss after their battle with the archangel Michael.

In the First Age of the RELIGIONVIR.US mythos, the originary planet of the Archons, called Aion, undergoes three catastrophic Apocalypses – and I was looking for an iconographic mode through which to depict the third and final apocalypse. I began by acquiring a high-resolution digital scan of Rubens' painting and digitally traced each of the figures, then re-coded them as characters within my own mythos. The work is not yet finished, although segments of it appear on Panels 7-10 of my digital illustration for the Skin Scrolls entitled *The Third Apocalypse of Aion,* as well the figures falling to their doom flank either side of *The Mother of Clones* (Pieta) at the top of *Hypericon Ten.*

Peter Paul Rubens, *The Fall of the Damned*, oil on canvas, 286 x 224cm, 1620
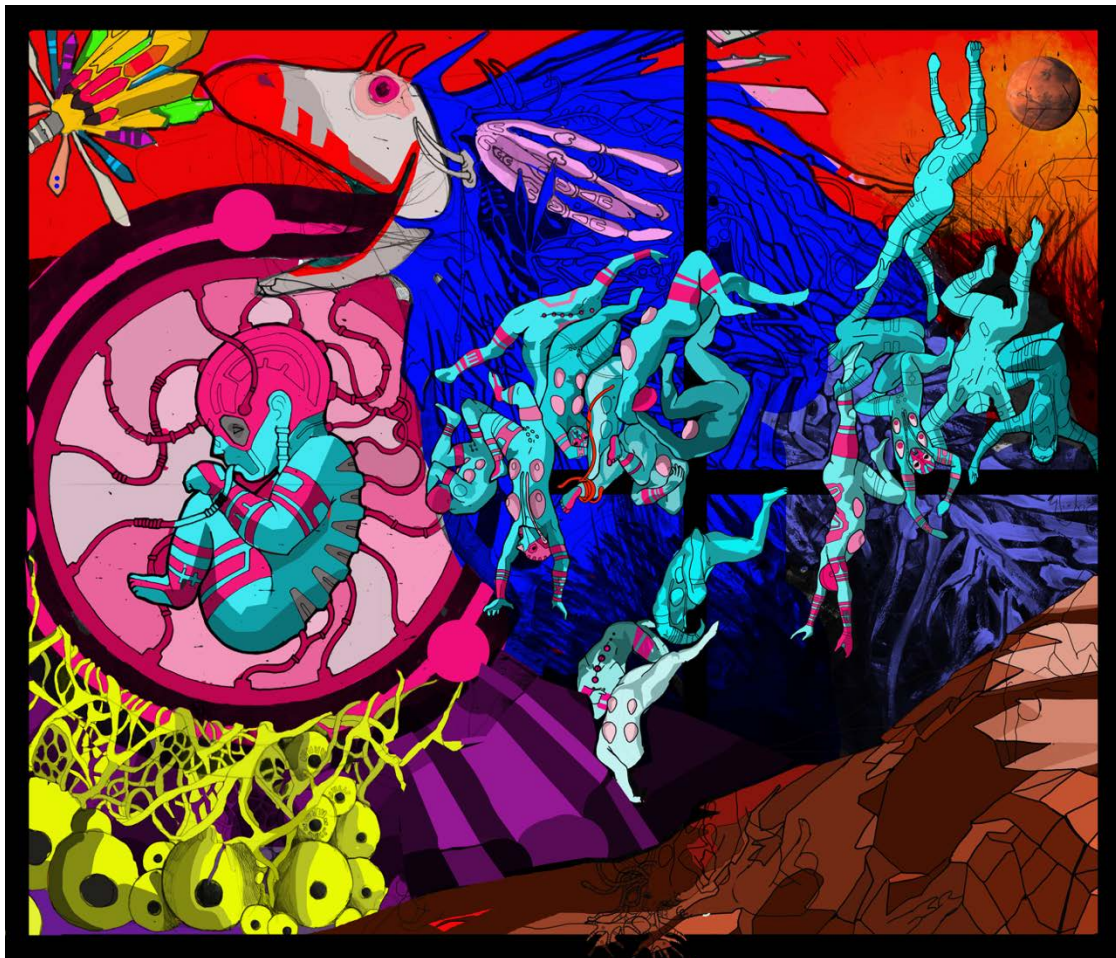(Alte Pinakothek, Munich). https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Fall_of_the_Damned

[M]Dudeck, *Third Apocalypse of Aion* (process image), dimensions variable, 2021.

[M]Dudeck, *Hypericon Ten: The Growing of a God (Detail)*, digital print in lightbox, 48cm x 152cm, 2020.

[M]Dudeck, *Third Apocalypse of Aion* (detail)graphite and ink-based digital image, 29cm x 132xm, 2021.

ICONOGRAPHIC RE-MIX 04

Title: The Mother of Clones
Original Title: The Pieta
Artist: [M]Dudeck / RELIGIONVIR.US
Original Artist: Michelangelo
Dimensions: Dimensions Variable
Original Dimensions: 174cm x 195cm
Media: Digital Image,
Original Media: Marble Sculpture
Date Produced: 2021 (in process)
Original Date Produced: 1489-1499

All four ages of the RELIGIONVIR.US mythos centre around an Archon or genetic engineer god named *Methuzaiia*, also referred to as *The Mother of Clones*. Following the *Third Apocalypse of Aion*, *Methuzaiia* gathers twelve of her genetic progeny and departs xyr home-planet planet before it explodes. During xyr exodus, Methuzaiia's first genetic offspring, named Athyra, is killed in the chaos of the planet being destroyed. Methuzaiia takes the body of Athyra into the stars and resurrects xyr fallen clone. I wanted to depict the scene of the *Mother of Clones* holding xyr dead infant in the manner of Michelangelo's Pietà. This is the first draft of what I hope will eventually become a life-size 3D printed sculpture in its own right. The form of the original is kept intact, a near-replica is produced, although it is depicted in 2D illustration instead of 3D sculpture. In my Pieta, *Methuzaiia* is wearing an astronaut suit and Athyra, a multigendered hybrid lying in the position of Christ, is depicted wearing a gas mask with a ventilation tube. As many of these preliminary icons are prototypes, this is the blueprint for future versions of the Mother of Clones/Pieta re-mix that will occur in future iterations.

[M]Dudeck, *Hypericon Ten: The Growing of a God (Detail)*, digital print in lightbox, 48cm x 152cm, 2020

ICONOGRAPHIC RE-MIX 05

Title: The Standing Bones
Original Title: The Callanish Standing Stones
Artist: [M]Dudeck / RELIGIONVIR.US
Original Artist: Unknown
Dimensions: Dimensions Variable
Original Coordinates: 58'11'51"N 6'44'43"W
Media: Digital Image,
Original Media: Lewisian gneiss
Date Produced: 2021 (in process)
Original Date Produced: Neolithic, Bronze Age

The iconographic referents RELIGIONVIR.US samples are not limited to Judeo-Christian iconographies. In a project that merges sci-fi aesthetics with psychedelia and religious referents, I knowingly appropriate dominant pagan and polytheistic referents alongside of, and interspersed with the Judeo-Christian source code. This is the case with the megalithic stone circles, which, like the pyramids, are scattered throughout the globe, with their largest concentration in Britain and Ireland hosting just over 1,300 of them. In this case, I took the recognizable aesthetic of the ring of stones, and converted the monoliths into large bones. These *Standing Bones* feature in the first seven Hypericons (of which Hypericon 5 is entirely dedicated to) and depict a particular Bone Circle which in my mythology is a portal for interdimensional travel and is used by my protagonists to travel to other worlds.

As part of the PhD, I underwent a series of pilgrimages to Avebury, Stonehenge, Stanton Drewe, the Stones of Stenness and the Brodgar Stone Circle, but ultimately chose The Callanish Standing Stones for the template of the Standing Bones. While undertaking a month-long residency in the Moroccan Sahara as part of *Alchemy Film & Moving Image Festival* residency, I made a sculptural template out of donkey ribs culled from the desert sands. I then photographed this sculpture, digitally traced and coloured it, and then in collaboration with designer Javi Acevedo, made a 3d template to be used in future animations. I then re-traced the template and made it into an image, which appears on the final four panels of *The Third Apocalypse of Aion.*

[M]Dudeck + Javi Acevedo, *The Standing Bones*, digital image, dimensions variable, 2021.

ICONOGRAPHIC RE-MIX 06

Title: Ten Worlds
Original Title: The Ten Sefirot
Artist: [M]Dudeck / RELIGIONVIR.US
Original Artist: Kabbalah
Dimensions: Dimensions Variable
Original Dimensions: Dimensions Variable
Media: Digital Image,
**Original Media:** Marble Sculpture
Date Produced: 2021 (in process)
Original Date Produced: 1489-1499

In addition to referencing figurative artworks and megalithic sites, iconographic re-mixing also takes the form of reconfiguring symbols, logos and diagrams, in the manner in which Genesis Breyer P-Orridge produced the Psychic Cross by using the Christian cross as source code. The mythology of RELIGIONVIR.US is heavily influenced by Gnostic and Kabbalistic mysticism, and in order to make and map the 10 central planets that the Fourth Age of my mythos is based upon, I used the recognizable diagram of the Ten Sefirot from Kabbalah to produce a diagrammatic symbol that I consider to be semi-recognizable.

The transformation process employed is less overtly recognizable than the earlier examples, and the average viewer might not at first make the connection in the manner they might with the Pieta, or the Good Shepherd. But for those who are aware of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, this icon is an expression of the mythological transformation that occurs in the heart of the mythos itself. Inspired by the Ten Sefirot and the cosmological map of existence, I structured the ten worlds of my mythos in relation to the themes embedded within each of the ten Kabbalistic spheres. I used this as a conceptual template for the story and the mythos and as an iconic symbol that is repeated throughout this thesis and throughout various segments of the mythos itself. Like the Bone Circle, it is depicted on the final panels of *The Third Apocalypse of Aion*, and a version of it appears on the poster for the Temple of Artifice and on the digital temple itself.
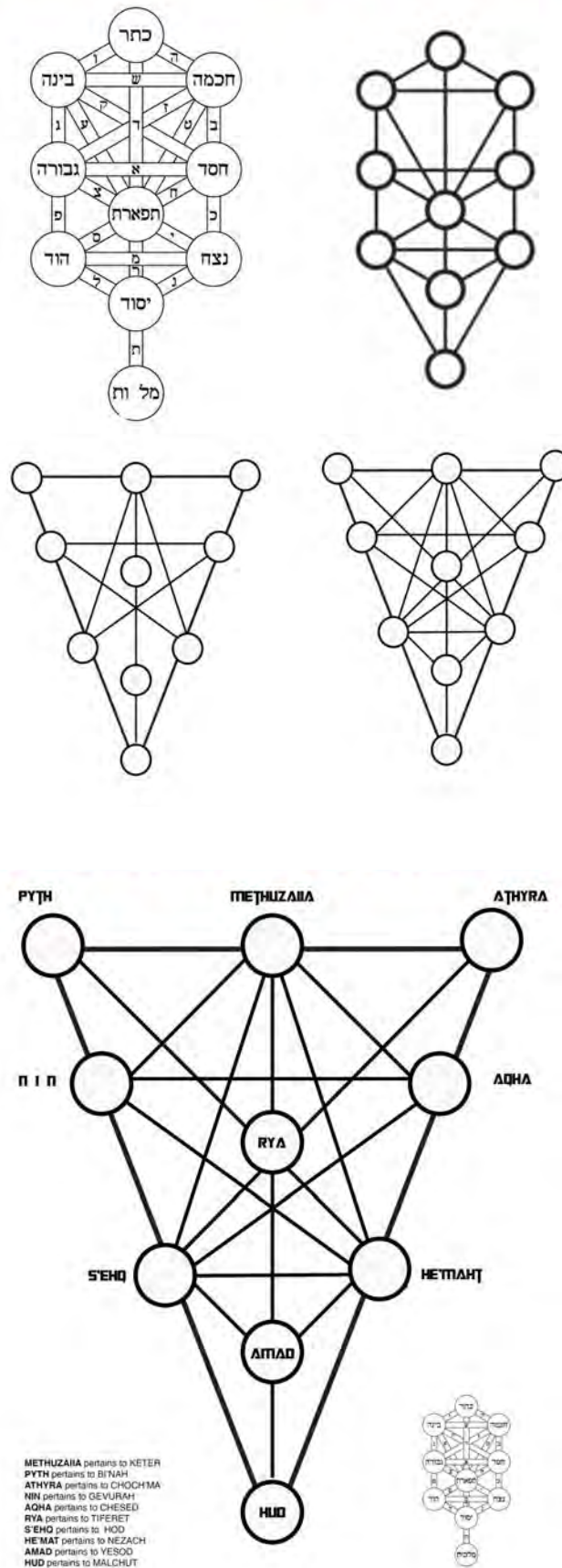
[M]Dudeck, *Ten Worlds*, digital diagrammatic illustrations, dimensions variable, 2020.

HYPERICONS

Art in churches and places of worship has long served an educational purpose. Even after the invention of the printing press and the bible becoming a household item, not all who sought refuge in the myths and stories of religion were literate and able to read themselves. As such art and religious iconographies were displayed to contextualize the passages of scripture that were presented in liturgies and sermons. Like proto-power-point, religious art was pedagogical multimedia learning.

The Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563 in Trento, Northern Italy was the 19th ecumenical council of the Catholic Church, which gathered to address and define the Counter-Reformation and what it regarded as the heresies of Protestantism. The Council addressed the role of art during its twenty-fifth session in December 1563 and on the subject of Sacred Images, collectively stated:

> "...Let the bishops teach that by means of the stories of the mysteries of our redemption portrayed in paintings and other representations the people are instructed and confirmed in the articles of the faith, which ought to be borne in mind and constantly reflected upon."[216]

As a visual and performing artist producing a religion as art, I was interested in activating environments and turning white cube galleries into temples. I wanted my installations to be able to tell aspects of the religious mythology for audiences outside of the performances, and employed similar pedagogical strategies as the early church. Struck with the problem of how to convert sterile museological spaces into convincing sites of ritual encounter, one of the most immediate strategies I could access was to dim or darken the lights. As Karen Armstrong writes in *A History of God*,

> "There is a linguistic connection between the words 'myth', 'mysticism' and 'mystery.' All are derived from the Greek verb *musteoin*: to close the eyes or the mouth. All three words, therefore, are rooted in an experience of darkness and silence."[217]

Darkened spaces were ideal ground for ethereal otherworldly performances, and afforded the use of projectors and light-boxes as devices used to shed light and reveal artworks at the same time. I became increasingly interested in the aesthetic of the stained-glass window, as a highly recognizable visual referent but also as a device

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[216] *The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent*, ed. the Rev. H.J. Schroeder, OP (Rockford: TAN Books, 1978), 216. The full text of this decree is also accessible online in an edition of the Council documents edited and translated by J. Watworth (London: Dolman, 1848) http://history.hanover.edu/texts/trent/ct25.html.

[217] Armstrong, Karen. A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 107.

through which to transform darkened galleries into hybrid temples. I trained in the traditional methods of stained glass design for two weeks in Bristol, which enhanced my appreciation for the kinds of line-work and cuts required to hold independently cut pieces of glass in place. But as a media artist I wasn't interested in re-producing relics of this sort. I began to imagine how I could reproduce the effects of the stained glass window using time based media of animation and video projection and 2d media of lightboxes installed in darkened spaces. I decided to christen these particular religious prosthetics (Hyper)Icons, or *Hypericons*.

My first *Hypericon* referencing the aesthetic of the stained-glass window was produced as part of *Alchemy Film and Moving Image Festival* in Hawick, Scotland, curated by Michael Pattison in 2018. ICON::‖(DESERT [M]OTHER)) was a video installation presented in the manner of a vertical stained-glass window, featuring in The Mother of Clones surrounded by eight small, animated vignettes. The entirety of the animation was hand illustrated and digitally animated, with the exception of the face of the goddess, which was performed by me, shot against green-screen and merged with the illustrated template of the Hypericon.

The sound for the work was a chant sung in my invented language and my painted face can be seen lip-syncing the words. The site of the installation was the interior of a 500-year-old tower, the oldest standing building in Hawick, built at the time of the Borders Reivers. The dark, ruinous circular site was barely lit save for the light emanating from the Hypericon video projected against the granite bricks of the medieval Tower. Much like *Liber Meta 1:0* and *2:0* and *The Neon Bible*, many festivalgoers returned again and again to the installation, many to retreat and re-charge perceiving it as a mediatic Chapel or Sanctuary. The combination of music sung in my invented language, vocally modulated but bearing familiarity to Gregorian Chant, and the aesthetic of the Stained Glass inside of such a storied building, produced a religiosity by creating a prosthetic digital stained-glass window in a tower where it could at one time have naturally been.

[M]Dudeck, images documenting stained glass process, 2019.

[M]Dudeck, *icon::||::(DESERT [M]OTHER)),* video installation, dimensions variable, 2018.
Photographs by Michael Pattison.

The second series of Hypericons were commissioned by the late Dirck Mollmann, Stadtkuratorin for the City of Hamburg, as part of the international public art festival *Hamburg Maschine*. They were conceived as a central node within the larger conceptual/transmedial public art-project *Temple of Artifice*, which is discussed in greater detail in *Religious Prosthetic V.* I had been in the early stages of drafting a graphic novel that depicted the cosmogony of the RELIGIONVIR.US mythos. After a series of dialogues with Mollmann, I decided to fabricate a new mode of Hypericon that combined the stained glass window with the graphic novel as a hybrid form of illuminated manuscript into one total artwork. I conceived of a new format which I am continuing to focus upon, wherein the *Hypericons* become portable, modular lightboxes whose panels portray a sequence of pages from the larger graphic novel.

Comic books were and remain holy to me, and my collection of them from adolescence on were treated as sacred relics. I kept them wrapped in their protective plastic casings, taking them out and reading them with archival gloves. Of all the comics I read as a youth, the most prevalent for me was *The Uncanny X-MEN*. As a child I could not comprehend the depths of the psycho-spiritual projection I placed upon these mutants, who produced themselves as avatars, trained in a school for other mutants like them in effort to heal from a world who saw their powers as defects that needed sedation and corrective treatment. I can now recognize the queer metaphors embedded within the narrative. I even felt, in my adult life, that I *was* a Mutant enrolling in a version of *Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters* when attending art school, for undergraduate and postgraduate all the way up to this very PhD, and being part of AA Bronson's fictional *School for Young Shamans*. My own lines of make believe and make believe are blurred. X-Men became the story of my life, and influenced the aesthetic dimensions of my graphic novels and Hypericons.

Later, in my adult life, I looked to more complex comic material, including Alan Moore's *The Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta* and *Promethea*, Alejandro Jodorowsky's early collaborations with Moebius including *The Inkal*, *The Metabarons* and the *Techno Priests*, as well as more recent comics merging religion, myth and science fiction such as *Saga*, Douglas Rushkoff's *Testament* and Grant Morrisson's chaos-magic inspired *The Invisibles*. The most visually relevant and inspiring to my new-found aesthetic came in the form of *The Invisible Kingdom*, written by G Willow Wilson and illustrated by Christian Ward. Wilson is a feminist Muslim writer, and developed an SF religious quest featuring a priesthood of "Nones" who have been corrupted by an intergalactic corporation called LUX. Ward's psychedelic illustrations, merged with Wilsons' theological commentary produce a world that most resembled that which I desired to produce, and influenced my illustrative style for Hypericons 1-7 and 10.

G. Willow Wilson & Christian Ward, *The Invisible Kingdom, Vol. 1: Walking the Path,* (Milwaukie: Berger Books, Dark Horse Comics, 2019), cover.

The following Hypericons present a kaleidoscopic, psychedelic immersion process that changes depending on how far away one stands to look upon it. From the distance, one views the Hypericon as an illuminated lightbox that very obviously resembles the aesthetic of the stained glass window, but as the viewer approaches and first glimpses the speech bubbles, then the captions containing text, they begin to perceive how the shapes are broken down into recognizable horizontal and vertical comic book frames, and grasp that what they are witnessing is not just a selection of images, but a graphic novel in image form.

For the *Temple of Artifice*, in collaboration with LU'UM Kollectiv, I produced seven *Hypericons*, which functioned as portable lightboxes and were installed in a Church, carried through the street and installed in a gallery. *Hypericon Ten* (Codex) brings together all seven of the Hypericons , and adds an eighth thus far unreleased Hypericon, embedded with a series of new panels. The individual pages of the graphic novel, depicted in Hypericons 1-10, are presented as a stand-alone comic book and are included in full in the portfolio of this thesis and can be read online during your visit to www.templeofartifice.com.

M]Dudeck, *Hypericon One: Wombtomb*, digital print in lightbox, 114cm x 40cm, 2019.
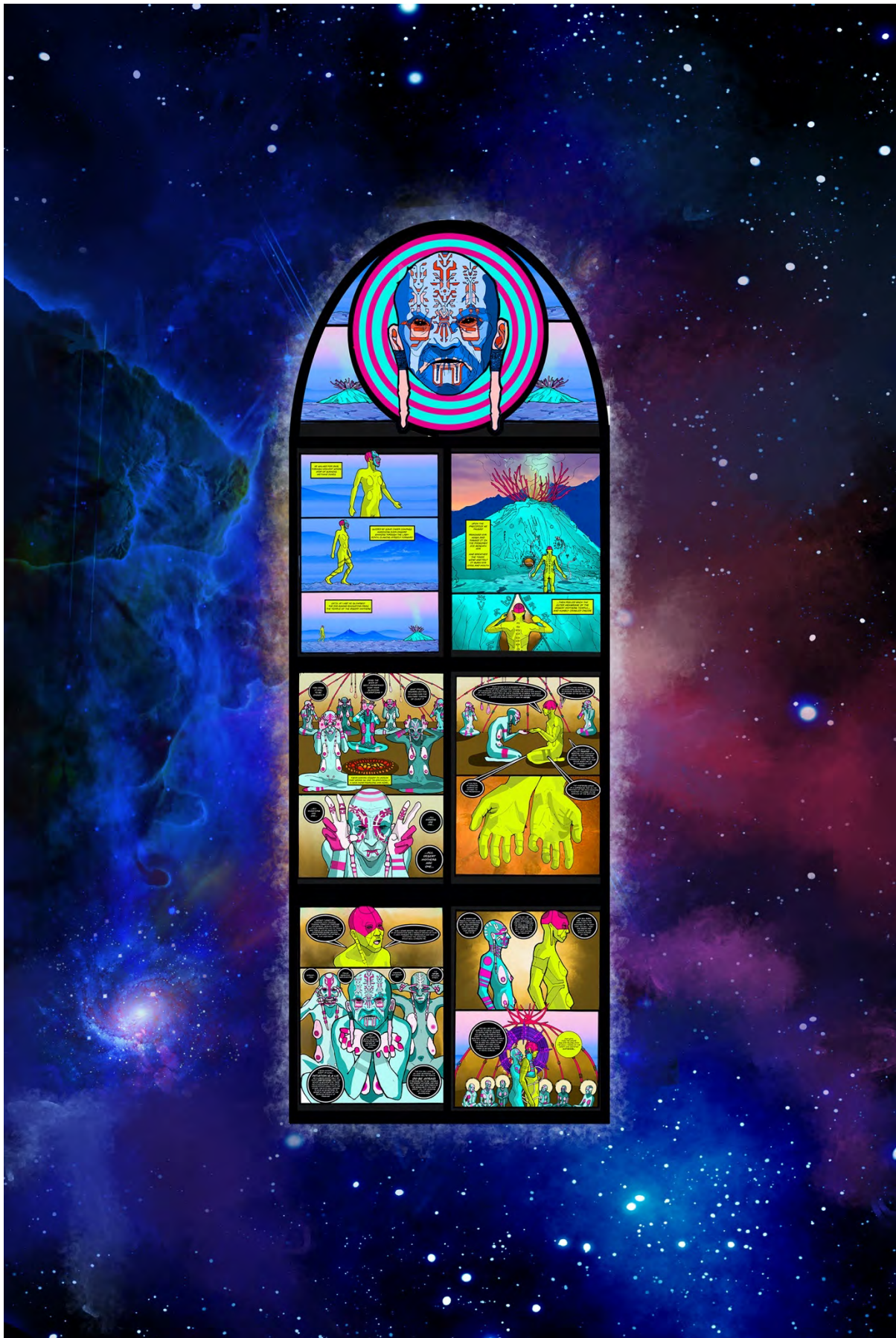
[M]Dudeck, *Hypericon Two: Deliverer*, digital print in lightbox, 114cm x 40cm, 2019.

[M]Dudeck, *Hypericon Three: Star Shrines*, digital print in lightbox, 114cm x 40cm, 2019.

[M]Dudeck, *Hypericon Four: Desert Mothers*, digital print in lightbox, 114cm x 40cm, 2019.

[M]Dudeck, *Hypericon Five: The Standing Bones*, digital print in lightbox, 114cm x 40cm, 2019.
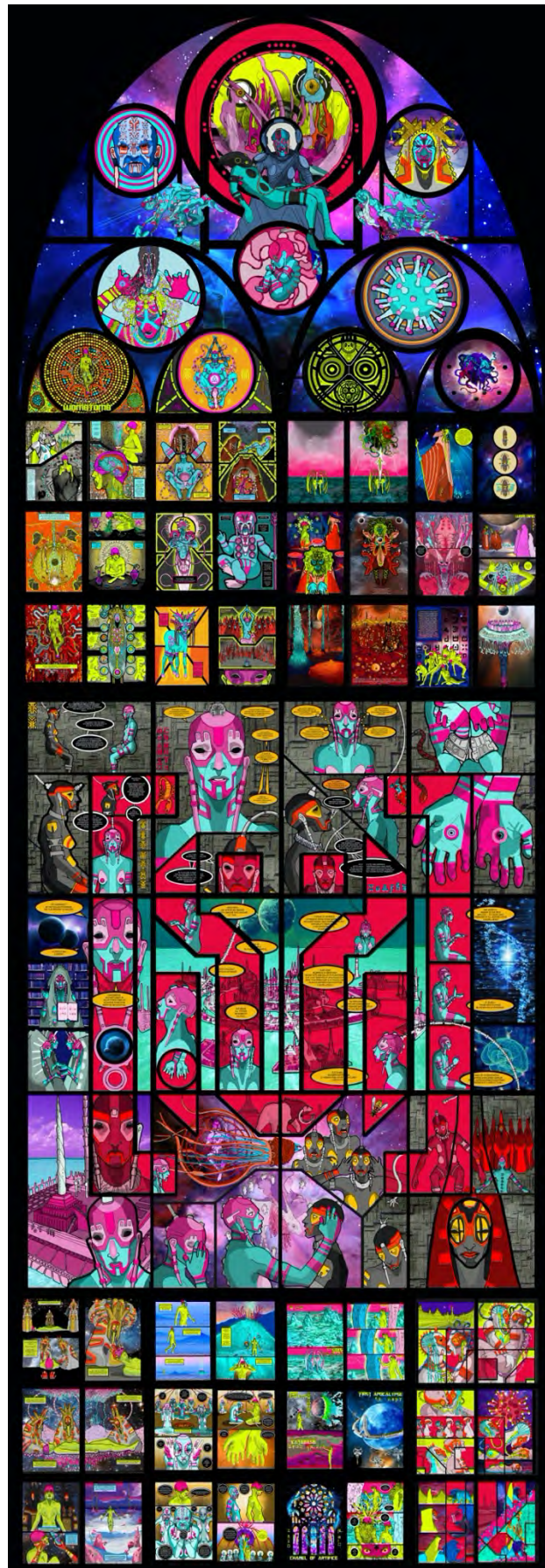
[M]Dudeck, *Hypericon Six: Treeship*, digital print in lightbox, 114cm x 40cm, 2019.
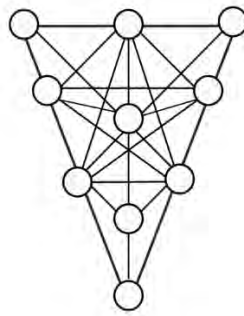
[M]Dudeck, Hypericon Seven: God-School, digital print in lightbox, 114cm x 40cm, 2019.

[M]Dudeck, *Hypericon Ten: The Growing of a God,* digital print in lightbox, 48cm x 152cm, 2020.

CHAPTER FIVE
INVENT YOUR OWN RELIGION

SF AS COUNTER- HEGEMONICAL SCRIPTURE

The majority of inspirational texts used as scripture or source material for invented religions generally fall within the precincts of speculative or supernatural fiction. They use all mainstream media including novels, comic books, films, and television series, among others. Berger, Hexham and Powe all describe central processes of world-construction, or world-building that occurs when a narrative is told and retold and through its repetitive re-tellings becomes either true or real. But what kinds of stories in particular are able to spawn the kinds of belief that have historically been relegated to the domains of myth and religion ?

Carole Cusack claims that "fake religions, like folk religions, or the beliefs of people that were incompletely Christianized in the Middle Ages [are] *popular*, and this means that people make them themselves on the ground."[218] Cusack observes how the 'bricolage' technique is rampant across the entire spectrum of fiction-based religions, and how many of these movements contain anti-hegemonical impulses that ultimately use the conflicts or dramas of the principle texts as a means of empowering themselves in the midst of dominating cultural and political forces. Religions based on fictions are inherently interpretative, and therefore permit the believer to mix and match their own selective belief systems.

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[218]Carole Cusack."Fake Religions, Fake News and the Allure of Fiction" Youtube. Division of Humanities, University of Otago. Nov. 13, 2017. Date accessed: April 14, 2020. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_XwubVQ4-Fc

In the following section, I present a series of narratives that tell the story of three interdependent invented religions – Tolkien Spirituality, Matrixism and the Cthulhu Cult of Chaos Magick – woven together through strands emanating from Timothy Leary's 1967 manual *Start Your Own Religion.* I propose Leary's text as a specimen of cultural engineering and connect the three case studies through Leary's advocacy for the use of LSD as sacrament. I propose Leary's *Start Your Own Religion* monograph as an artifact in the study of invented/fiction-based and hyperreal religions, particularly his early advocation of the need for new religions to bind themselves to selective pre-existing narratives. In all of my research regarding invented religions I have yet to encounter any mention of Leary or this text foreshadowing many of the IR's that emerged from the late 1960s onward. I hope this can expand the dialogue in the field and illustrate the difficulty in tracking and tracing works of cultural engineering. whose designers are often not credited with the changes they provoke.

What follows is a tapestry of invented religions, a invented history of cultural engineering, mapping three of the religions that have influenced my own religion profoundly. I attempt to introduce the cultural conditions that contributed to the gestation of these case studies, though my aim here is neither to be exhaustive or unbiased. I want to tell a story that tells a story about why we invent our own religions. The section is followed by my *Invent Your Own Religion Workbook*, which I have presented at conferences and workshops and will be published in the peer-reviewed journal *Ecumenica* in Spring 2021. Please feel free to try the workbook and fill your answers directly onto the pages.

THE MARSH CHAPEL EXPERIMENT

In 1962, at Boston University's Marsh Chapel, a young doctoral student in Philosophy of Religion named Walter N. Pahnke, under the supervision of Dr. Timothy Leary, and Dr. Richard Alpert, facilitated what would later be referred to as the March Chapel or Good Friday Experiment. Here, hallucinogenic dosages of psilocybin were administered to a group of 20 divinity students inside of the University Chapel. This experiment was designed to ascertain if "transcendent experiences reported during psychedelic sessions were similar to mystical experiences reported by saints and famous mystics."[233] This was at a time *before* Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert would drop out of Academia and step into their roles as leading figures of the 1960s counterculture, in the guise of *The High Priest of LSD* and *Ram Dass*, respectively. In the experiment, all 20 divinity students were led into the Chapel and divided into five groups of four persons, with each group being assigned two guides with considerable psychedelic experience. After a short inspirational speech by the Dean of the Chapel, all 20 participants were 'administered' the sacrament. Two members of each group (along with one of the two guides) were given 30mg of psilocybin while the remaining two subjects and the second guide received niacin, a placebo that produces clear physiological changes following ingestion but no hallucinogenic experience. Neither the participants nor the guides were aware who had received psilocybin and who had not.

All those who were administered psilocybin reported having had profound religious experiences on varying level of intensity, including Huston Smith, who would later become the author of several textbooks on comparative religion. He described the experience as "the most powerful cosmic homecoming I have ever experienced."[234] The positive results of the survey led Timothy Leary to move forward with evidence for his hypothesis that psychedelics could produce religious experiences, that "with adequate preparation, and in an environment which is supportive and religiously meaningful, subjects report mystical experiences significantly more than placebo controls."[235]

In 1960, two years prior to the Marsh Chapel experiments, following his preliminary experiments with psilocybin mushrooms, Leary was given a copy of Aldous Huxley's *The Doors of Perception*, which reflected upon the philosophical, psychological and spiritual implications of the authors early experiments with mescaline in the 1950s. Huxley was the first to use the term 'psychedelics', although it was originally coined by psychiatrist Humphry Osman which he then defined as the means "to fathom hell

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[233] Timothy Leary. "The Religious Experience: Its Production and Interpretation," Psychedelic Review 1, no. 3, (1964): 324-46. 326.

[234] Huston Smith. *Cleansing the Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals.* (New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2000), 101.

[235] Timothy Leary. *The Religious Experience: Its Production and Interpretation, 326.*

or soar angelic." Huxley advocated *psychedelics* as facilitators of mystical insight, and sacramental visions. He claimed they offered both individual and communal benefits for science, art and religion.[236] Huxley's synthesis of psychology, science and mystical research proposed a new model for Leary who was imagining how he could use LSD to liberate the souls and minds of Americans, initiating a global, mystical renaissance. As soon as he was able, Leary sought out Huxley and they met. In an early conversation between the two, documented in Leary's autobiography *Flashbacks: a personal and cultural history of an era,* Leary described a pivotal conversation wherein Huxley said to his apprentice, Leary:

> Your role is quite simple, Timothy. Become a cheerleader for evolution... Initiate artists, writers, poets, jazz musicians, elegant courtesans, painters, rich bohemians and they'll initiate the intelligent rich. That's how everything of culture and beauty and philosophic freedom has been passed on...These brain drugs, mass produced in the laboratories will bring about changes in society. This will happen with or without you or me. All we can do is spread the world. The obstacle to this evolution, Timothy,
> is the Bible."[237]

START YOUR OWN RELIGION

"Select a myth as a reminder that you are part of an ancient and holy process. You select a myth to guide you when you drop out of the narrow confines of the fake prop TV-studio set."

-Timothy Leary

Huxley went on to warn Leary to expect opposition from "the managers of consciousness, from the Vatican to Harvard" who are not about to give up on their monopoly on "the religious experience."[239] This conversation and others of its kind had a serious impact on Leary as he rose to become Huxley's anointed *cheerleader of evolution*, most notably when he coined the phrase 'Turn on, Tune In Drop Out" when speaking to a congregation of nearly 30,000 hippies in Golden Gate Park on January 14, 1967.

Leary's concepts were made into applications when he published a manual entitled "START YOUR OWN RELIGION" wherein he defined the purpose of life as "Religious discovery" which could only be attained through forced separation

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[236] Alduous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954).
[237] Timothy Leary. *Flashbacks: An Autobiography, A Personal and Cultural History of an Era.* (New York: Putnam Books.1983,) 44.
[239] Ibid, 44.

(Dropping Out) of what he then referred to as "the dead posturing of robot actors on the *fake-prop TV studio set* that is called American Reality."[241] The way to DROP OUT – to initiate oneself and others, was to TURN ON, where Leary instructed his acolytes to "find a sacrament which returns you to the Temple of God, your own body."[242] This sacrament he described as

> a visible external thing which turns the key to the inner doors.
> A sacrament must bring about bodily changes. A sacrament flips
> you out of the TV-studio game and harnesses you to the two-billion-
> year-old flow inside. A sacrament which works is dangerous to the
> establishment which runs the fake-prop TV-studio and that part of
> your mind which is hooked to the studio game. Each TV-prop
> society produces exactly that body-changing sacrament which will
> flip out the mind of the society. Today the sacrament is LSD. New
> sacraments are coming along.[243]

Leary's 'TURN ON' liturgy was a re-mix of the *Eucharist*, the symbolic ingestion of the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ into one's own body through the representational ingestion of bread and wine. Leary inferred that the origins of religion and psychedelic drug use may be entangled, expounding a theology that emerged from the Marsh Chapel experiment, into a direct correlation between psychotropic drugs and "the religious experience."

In addition to 'sacrament', Leary's gospel of START YOUR OWN RELIGION is littered with multiple occurrences of appropriated terms and phrases used as religious affordances including: *worship, revelation, shrine, liturgy, robes, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Garden of Eden, God, Saints,* and *Gnosis*. There are a few imports from eastern religions outside of the domain of Christianity that are heavily repeated, including: *guru, Kali Yuga* and *Karma*. This fusion at the dawn of the counterculture of the late sixties sought to merge Eastern and Western religious systems into a bricolage that would pave the way for many invented religions to come.

In his *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out* theology, Leary directed young hippies to perceive themselves as spiritual voyagers in the tradition of Lao Tse, Christ and Blake, rather than misfits 'getting high' for kicks. Leary posited that "we are all born divine mutants" but for an "imperfect, artificial, disharmonious social system which robs [us] of [our] divinity."[245] Following the ritual of *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out,*

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[241] Timothy Leary, *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out* (Oakland: Ronin, 1999), 3.
[242] Ibid, 5.
[243]Ibid, 5.
[245] Ibid, 5.

Leary expanded his model by claiming that in order to fully Drop Out, "You Must Form Your Own Religion."[246]

For this he invoked the evolutionary model of *The Clan*: a "small group of human beings organized around a religious goal." These clans, he said, must be small, must be located outside of urban centres, the centre of which (a house, a home) must be converted into a shrine/temple, must involve the invention of vestments or "ritual costumes", such as "Robes", "grey flannel suits", "amulets" or "tattoos", and by following this formula, "step by step all your actions will take on a sacra mental meaning. Inevitably you will create a ritual sequence for each sense organ And for each of the basic energy exchanges – eating, bathing, mating."[247] He instructed his apostles that *The Clan* must gather together to define their (1) Goals, (2) Roles, (3) Rituals, (4) Rules, (5) Vocabulary, (6) Values, (7) Space/time locales and most importantly, (8) Mythic context.[249]

Leary claimed that the mythological figure that sat at the centre of these new religions needed to be someone who had "solved the death-rebirth riddle."[250] He warned against invoking cultural celebrities or famous historical figures, but said to look for fellow spiritual voyagers throughout time and in fiction, who had metaphorically or literally undergone resurrection. Suggestions he offered were Christ, Lao Tse, Hermes Trismegistus and Socrates as "recurrent turn-on figures."[251] The choice to situate a messiah, who is somehow sacrificed only to return anew, at the epicentre of an alternate religious paradigm provided yet another form of mimetic religious recoding – Leary was advocating a constellation of religious affordances that re-wired pre-existing religious cultural codes.

GANDALF FOR PRESIDENT

An unintended consequence to the success of JRR Tolkien's 1957 masterpiece *The Lord of the Rings* occurred during its' first publishing run in America in the early 1960s.[252] At the time, US copyright law stipulated that "a publisher would forfeit copyright if more than 1,145 copies of a book were imported from a foreign

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[246]Ibid, 5.
[247] Ibid, 12.
[249] Ibid, 9.
[250] Ibid, 5.
[251] Ibid, 5.

country."[253] Houghton Milton, the trilogy's first American publisher, ignorant of this decree, failed to establish proper copyright status enabling the American sci-fi publisher *Ace Books*, through this aforementioned loop-hole, to publish "a dirt cheap, royalty-free paperback edition."[254] These paperbacks included new colourful psychedelic images on the cover which appealed to the 1960s counterculture gestating in America, and as Ace was under no copyright stipulations, the price of the book was reduced to $2.25, making it affordable, and expanding its range of circulation. This combination of accessibility and psychedelic cultural appeal garnered significant devotion from "students and young people drawn primarily from college campuses"[255] leading to Tolkien being described as "a campus cult figure"[256] and *The Lord of the Rings* as a "campus religion".[257]

"Frodo Lives" graffiti and t-shirts began to be disseminated, Tolkien started to receive letters from fans who had married each other in ceremonies adapted from the novels, while placards and badges inscribed with 'Gandalf for President' began to circulate in anti-war protests all across the United States. In the United Kingdom, similar combinations of counter-cultural hippie movements and the Middle Earth mythology combined to produce *Gandalf's Garden*, a store-front religious community that published a quarterly magazine. In the *Fellowship of the Rings,* Gandalf ostensibly dies in the caves of Mount Moria, only to return resurrected in *The Two Towers*. This made Gandalf a worthy messiah for Leary's *Start Your Own Religion*, program as clearly he had solved the death-rebirth riddle.

The metaphors in *Lord of the Rings* adapted themselves as visionary manifestations of developing ideologies from late 1960s counterculture beginning in America and extending far beyond. They activated both the mystical, free-loving, drug-using hippies and the emerging, politically minded radical student movements dedicated to racial, environmental and social reform. The Shire, and its "love for nature, distrust in industry, and love for peace and quiet and good meals"[258] echoed the "back to the land" mentality of hippie communes, many of which took their names directly from Middle Earth. Antiwar activists read into Gandalf's inclination to destroy the ring itself rather than use it as a weapon against the enemy, as a direct allegory to the debate surrounding use of nuclear weapons. The dark wizard Saruman's 'mind of metal', ultimately destroyed by The Ents (Treehearders and protectors of the forests)

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[253]Gary Lachman. *Turn off your Mind: The Mystic Sixties and the Dark Side of the Age of Aquarius*. (New York: The Disinformation Company, Ltd, 2001), 77.

[254] Ibid, 77.

[255] Philip W. Helms. "The Evolution of Tolkien Fandom", in Alida Becker (ed.), *A Tolkien Treasury*, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1977), 105

[256] Robert S Ellwood. *The Sixties Spiritual Awakening: American Religion Moving from Modern to Postmodern*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 134.

[257] Philip W. Helms. "The Evolution of Tolkien Fandom", in Alida Becker (ed.), *A Tolkien Treasury*, (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1977), 105

[258] Markus Altena Davidsen, "The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu : A Study of Fiction-based Religion." PhD dissertation, (Department of Sociology, Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands, 2012), 188.

was invoked as a call to arms for environmentalists trying to address the plight of clear-cuts and other environmental catastrophes. The Halflings love of pipe-weed and mushrooms may well have been a starting point of recognition, though Tolkien apparently was never a proponent of marijuana or the use of psychedelic drugs. Yet Timothy Leary went so far as to refer to *The Lord of the Rings* as a psychedelic manual and as "the greatest mythic work of our time."[259]

Markus Altena Davidsen identifies two waves of Tolkien Religionism that have emerged since the books were first published. The First Wave occurred in accordance with the paperback edition circulated in the United States in 1965. Many early First Wave groups in the US, UK and Holland were made up of neo-pagans who appropriated or blended aspects of Tolkien's writings with various other pre-Christian traditions. This was commonly a form of Neo-Paganism adapting Celtic and other pre-Christian practises. These early first-wave bricolage religions approached the writings of Tolkien work principally as metaphor (with a few exceptions), rather than as channelled or prophetic scripture. The First Wave included groups such as *The Elf Queen's Daughters* initiated in 1973, which marked the beginning of *The Elven Movement* which spawned the *Otherkin* movement and *The Silver Elves* initiated in 1975, who are still practicing, and began publishing authoritative texts in the early 1980s.[261]

An exception to First Wave emphasis on Tolkien's writings as metaphor, was described by Robert Ellwood, Professor Emeritus of World Religions at the University of Southern California. He wrote about a group active in 1973, led by Myrtle Reece, a "mystical woman living in the Mojave Desert...convinced that the Lord of the Rings saga was actual history...and..was convinced that the actual site of Gondor was now the Mojave Desert."[262] Apparently, she attempted to lead several excavations but each time they were cancelled. Reece claimed she had been visited by Frodo and other beings throughout her childhood who prophesied to her about the return of the Nine Walkers [the Fellowship] in the contemporary era. She believed that having Celtic blood was necessary for a deep understanding of 'Tolkienesque things", and because Ellwood was part Scottish, she deemed him worthy of initiation. Very little is known about this group save for the above description taken from Davidsen (who emailed Ellwood to gather more insight), but this I believe is the earliest example we have of a group moving past metaphorical interaction, beginning to develop beliefs that *Lord of the Rings* was 'real.'

Ten years later, we have the rise of *Tribunal of the Sidhe*, which bridges the First and Second Wave and remains active today, with over 100 members. Many of these are second generation, making it the largest organization of Tolkien Religionists

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[259] Hope Ridings Miller (ed). "Tolkien on Tolkien" in *Diplomat Magazine*, Vol. XVIII No. 197, October 1966.

[261] Markus Altena Davidsen, "The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu : A Study of Fiction-based Religion." PhD dissertation, (Department of Sociology, Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands, 2012), 191.

[262] Ibid.

worldwide. They synthesize aspects of Wicca, Celtic mythology and Tolkiendom, believing themselves "to be *Changelings*; i.e., fairy beings whose spirits have been incarnated in a human body. Their use of Tolkien's work is legitimised by the claim that Tolkien was a Changeling himself and chose to be incarnated to tell the history of the Changelings in mythic form"[263]

The second Wave that Davidsen describes emerges at the onset of the Information Age, as part of "participatory culture" and social media aligned with advancements in telematics such as CGI and virtual reality. One can glimpse the transition from metaphor to belief as indicative of broad cultural turns that gave birth to participatory economies such as LARP, Cosplay and other expressions of devotional fandom. Many contemporary second wave Tolkien Religionists on social media and other online platforms take names and use profile pictures directly from the narrative itself. This allows them to disguise their regional, individual and cultural identities in favor of the self-fictionalization that the internet allows. Davidsen located 9 online groups that have emerged since the film trilogy was introduced, including *Elven Realities* (1999), *The Esoteric Historians* (2000-2004), *Elende* (2003), *Children of the Valar* (2003-5), *the Middle Earth Pagans* (2004), *The Indigo Elves* (2005) *Tie Eldalieva or The Elven Path* (dates unknown), and *Ilsalunte Balion* (The SilverShip of the Valar) in the early 2000s.[264]

Davidsen notes that "all groups in the first wave of Tolkien spirituality integrated Tolkien's fiction into and subordinated it to other material. In contrast, all second wave groups use Tolkien's writings as the most central texts, and other material is here subordinated to the Tolkien framework."[265] But the majority of Second Wave Tolkien Religionists first accessed the Middle Earth mythos *through* the CGI-enhanced Films, so therefore this may echo the secular, millennial experience of learning the story of Christ first through television and film, and *thereafter* accessing the written texts contained in the bible. Hyperreality in this regard works to deify the originating text as a kind of reliquary, or holy artifact.

Davidsen further identifies three sub categories of Second Wave Religionists : *Middle Earth Pagans* (who claim that the lore *revealed to* Tolkien was essentially Pagan, but that Tolkien Christianised it to fit his own beliefs,"[266] *Middle Earth Christians* (who ground their discourse within an interpretative dimension of Christian theology) and the *Reconstructionist* (a small but devoted group of purists who avoid neo-pagan and Christian interpretations and focus instead on an entirely Tolkien based religion). It should be noted that the latter group is the rarest and the smallest, the trend being bricolage, but nonetheless a small orthodoxy does exist.

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[263] Ibid, 216.
[264] Ibid, 215.
[265] Ibid, 194.
[266] Ibid, 195.

Both Middle Earth Pagans and Middle Earth Christians "use the *Legendarium*[267] as a hermeneutic key or religious perception filter through which they interpret other religious traditions."[268] In this lens, Atlantis and Noah's Flood are taken to be mythological references to the same "real" event, which in Tolkien's terms is called the *Fall of Numenor*, and thus rather than creating hierarchies of mythological motifs, they appear to believe that each religion uses various descriptive tactics to refer to similar events. Tolkien religiosity continues to this day as the films are deified as the books once were, and I anticipate a third wave emerging following the release of Amazon's new *Lord of the Rings* television series, set to premiere in 2022.

CYBERPUNK & CYBERDELICS

> "Everybody in the World knows there have been three counter-cultures in America...We had the beatnicks, we have the hippies and we have the Cyberpunks: the counter-culture of the electronic age."

> -Dr. Timothy Leary

In the early 1980s, following his exile from the United States, Timothy Leary re-emerged on the cultural scene as the new spokesperson of what he referred to as the *cyberdelic counterculture*. In 1994, he defined a *cyberpunk* as a "reality pilot" who uses "all available data-input to think for themselves."[269] He traced the ancestry of this archetype to the Greek God Prometheus, a "technological genius" who stole fire from the Gods and gave it to humanity. Leary felt that the cyberpunk described a "new species model of human being" who "accesses and steers knowledge-communications technology towards his/her own private goals, for personal pleasure, profit, principle or growth."

Leary prophesied the internet in 1973 when describing a futuristic "electronic nervous system" that would somehow link the world together, and went so far as to claim in the 1990s that "PC is the LSD of the 1990s."[271] Whereas in the 60s, Leary saw computers as devices that increased the dependence of individuals on 'experts', now he was beginning to see the countercultural potential of *The Hacker* – maverick cybernetic individualists who could bypass restrictions and wreak havoc on "the fake prop TV-studio set" symbolically fulfilling the TUNE IN function of his famous axiom, which he described in his *Start Your Own Religion* manual:

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[267] The Legendarium refers to the three principal works of the Middle Earth universe by JRR Tolkien, including The Silmarillion, The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings.
[268] Davidsen, Markus Altena. "The Spiritual Tolkien Milieu : A Study of Fiction-based Religion." PhD dissertation, (Department of Sociology, Universiteit Leiden, Netherlands, 2012), 204.
[269] Timothy Leary. *Chaos and Cyberculture*. (Berkely, Californa: Ronin Publishing, 2014), 62.
[271] Ibid, 62.

> After the revelation it is necessary to drop-back-in, return to the
> fake-prop TV studio and initiate small changes which reflect the glory
> and the meaning of the "turn on"... Slowly, gently, you start
> to seed transformations all around you.[272]

The origins of Cyberpunk as a literary genre emerging also in the 80s and 90s, are rooted in the New Wave science fiction movement of the 1960s. This new movement advocated more experimental and experiential modes of writing that focused less on utopic promises of technology, and more on societal upheaval and dystopia. Cyberpunk looked to the future with ominous suspicion, a future that was characteristically "hi-tec, low-life," where mega-corporations exerted more power and influence than government, ruling over sprawling techno-meccas with massive income inequalities. It's (anti-)heroes were outlaws who worked either for or against the Corporate Mega-State depending on their own purposes, as Leary had described:

> These are people who take the electronic equipment and technology
> and use it for personal, human purposes; not for the Man, not
> for the Government, not for Corporations... and they can zoom in and
> out of corporate electronic waves and they communicate
> person-to-person.[273]

The genre also popularized and embraced post/trans-humanism, wherein many of its actors bore various forms of cybernetic augmentation, that enhanced human abilities and connected them to larger cybernetic infrastructures of social and political control and/or communication. The heroes of the cyberpunk genre were neither noble nor altruistic, but very often amoral and committed to their own autonomy, often seeking revenge upon the very systems that oppressed or enslaved them.

Two signature works ascribed with inaugurating the cyberpunk genre are Ridley Scott's 1982 cult classic *Blade Runner* (inspired by Phillip K. Dick's 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*) and William Gibson's 1984 novel, *Neuromancer*. Both of these works set the stage for the aesthetic dimension of the genre – heavily borrowing from both 1970s French sci-fi comics, and Japanese Manga, incorporating mesmerizing megacities perpetually dark and raining, flying cars, giant ads on giant skyscrapers backlit by neon signs and near-constant advertising.

If *Blade Runner* and *Neuromancer* were the antecedents of the Cyberpunk genre, its mutation into the mainstream occurred in 1999 at the end of the millennium with the release of the blockbuster film, *The Matrix*, written and produced by then Wachowski Brothers (now the Wachowski siblings.) This was the first in a trilogy

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[272] Timothy Leary. *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out,* 2.
[273] Timothy Leary. *Cyberpunks and Cyberdelics*, 63.

followed by *The Matrix: Reloaded* (2003) and *The Matrix: Revolutions* (also in 2003), with a fourth film upcoming in 2022. Merging Cyberpunk with a range of mystical systems and loose interpretations of Baudrillardian Semiotics, the trilogy tells the story of a computer hacker named Thomas Anderson (Neo) whose sense of alienation in the world is affirmed when he is approached by another famous 'Hacker' named Morpheus, who allows him to see the world as-it-is: an illusory virtual matrix produced and maintained by machines that keeps humanity enslaved within a computer general dream world (the matrix) while their bodies remain embryonically plugged into the machines in order to energetically sustain them.

With the aid of Morpheus and other cyberpunk renegades, Neo 'unplugs' from this *fake-prop-TV studio set* and joins in an epic journey to liberate humanity from its simulated bondage. Neo is presented as a kind of redeemer/messiah for all of humankind, whose task is to save the last free human colony (Zion) from the Machines who seek their destruction. Neo, Morpheus, Trinity and their band of cyberpunk renegades are continuously aided by a spiritually-inclined 'program' called *The Oracle* who helps guide the heroes/anti-heroes by sharing secrets of the history of the Matrix and advising the various heroes in dialogues that blend psychoanalysis with prophecy. Neo dies, and is brought back to life by Trinity, yet another exemplar of Leary's death-rebirth riddle, which combined with its inherent psychedelic metaphors makes The Matrix worthy scripture for Leary's new religion.

REDPILLS

Like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Star Wars*, *The Matrix* has spawned its own invented religion, referred to as *Matrixism*, with adherents referring to themselves as *Matrixists*, *Pathists* (newmatricisum.com), *Futurists* or *Redpills*. Largely an online community situated at a few distinctive websites, from 2004-2008 over two thousand people worldwide declared themselves to be *Matrixists*.[277] More recently, several alternate Matrixist websites claim there to be over 16,000 followers, though no information is provided to confirm this figure. Like the Tolkien Religionists who blend Middle Earth religion with various forms of Neo-Paganism, *Matrixism* blends the films obscure theology with the Baha'i Faith, whose founder Baha'u'llah (1817-1892) is said to have explicitly spoken of the matrix in various speeches published in book form.[278] Phrases spoken by Baha'ullah, such as "In the beginning of his human

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[277] John Morehead. "A World Without Rules and Controls, without Borders or Boundaries: Matrixism, New Mythologies and Symbolic Pilgrimages" in Handbook of Hyperreal Religions (Adam Possamai, ed). Brill Handbooks on Contemporary Religion Vol: 5, 2012. 113.

[278] Abdu'l-Baha. 2007. The Promulgation of Universal Peace: Talks Delivered by 'Abdu'l-Baha during His Visit to the United States and Canada in 1912, 3rd ed. Wilmette, IL: Baha'I Publishing Trust.

life man was embryonic in the world of the matrix"[279] are used by Matrixists as evidence of the continuing thread that moves through the film cycles and Bahai religion. As a New Religious Movement, Bahai is read by religious studies scholars as a bricolage and a form of transcendental pluralism, that recognizes all of the prophets of the Abrahamic religions (Moses, Jesus, Mohammed) as well as others (including Buddha, Krishna and Zoroaster) as Manifestations of the One, who reveals himself periodically to the united world of his followers through various religions as operating systems.

In a pivotal scene in *The Matrix: Reloaded*, Neo meets *The Architect* of the Matrix, who explains to him that "The One" is "the eventuality of an anomaly", the "sum of a remainder of an unbalanced equation inherent to the programming of the Matrix"[280] that has reoccurred five times prior to the arrival of "this" Neo. Similarly, Baha'i espouses that "The One" has revealed himself seven times throughout human history.

Matrixism requires its adherents to follow 'The Four Tenets' : the first three understood as coming from *The Matrix* and the final tenet coming from common religious experience and a connection to a mystic text of the Bahai religion. These tenets include :

1) Belief in the Prophecy of the One

2) Acceptance of the use of psychedelics as sacrament

3) Recognition of the semi-subjective multi-layered nature of reality

4) Adherence to the principles of one or more of the world's religions
until such time as the One returns.

Much of the metaphorical terrain of Matrixism seems to follow the trajectory laid out by Leary beginning in the 1960s up to the 90s when he began to preach about cyberpunks. The expression "unplug from the Matrix" is now common vernacular, used to describe removing oneself from the illusory materialistic world of and liberating oneself from modern life. I read this as a mutation of Leary's *Turn On, Tune In, Drop Out* philosophy and interpret the Matrix as an upgraded analogy for what Leary referred to as *the fake-prop-tv-studio set*. The second of the Four Tenets

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[279] John Morehead. "A World Without Rules and Controls, without Borders or Boundaries: Matrixism, New Mythologies and Symbolic Pilgrimages", 113.
[280] Lana & Lily Wachowsky. The Matrix. (1999) Warner Bros.

describes psychedelics as "a means of accessing various aspects of the 'multi-layered nature of reality' as well as enabling glimpses of and communion with the divine."[281]

In an iconic scene in the first Matrix film, after preliminarily exposing Neo to *the fake-prop-TV-studio set* of the Matrix, Morpheus offers him two options that come in the form of two pills:

> You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed
> and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the Red Pill;
> you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit hole
> goes.

Alice in Wonderland has been appropriated as one of the signature allegories for psychedelic use since the late 1960s, and the presentation of two alternate pills makes the psychedelic referent explicit. Matrixism has appropriated as its logo from the Japanese kanji symbol for RED, which first appeared in the *Enter the Matrix* Video Game, in direct reference to the Red Pill that Neo takes to see where the rabbit hole takes him. When visiting the Matrixism website, there is a button at the top of the screen near other typical website headers such as HOME, FAQ, STORE, JOIN & HISTORY called HACKING. When one clicks it, they are taken to a page that shows images of the Matrix symbol wheat-pasted on public walls and sign poles in the United States, India, United Kingdom and New Zealand. The page directs Matrixists that global dissemination of the message of the path of The One "is our most important mission" and gives instructions on methods to spread the gospel. The website advocates for its' adherents to mass email the Matrixism website to individuals and institutions, post threads or comments about Matrixism on social media, write the word or draw the kanji logo as graffiti and record the url for Matrixism into random books at one's local library. Following this they advertise the use of stickers with the logo that can be downloaded and present examples of various Matrixist hacks throughout the world.

THE NECRONOMICON

> "It was from the artists and the poets that the pertinent answers came,
> And I know that panic would have broken loose had they been able to
> compare notes."

> -HP Lovecraft[283]

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[281] John Morehead. "A World Without Rules and Controls, without Borders or Boundaries: Matrixism, New Mythologies and Symbolic Pilgrimages" in *Handbook of Hyperreal Religions*, ed. Adam Possamai. (Leiden, Brill Publishing, 2014), 114.

[283] HP Lovecraft. The Call of Cthulhu in The New Annotated HP Lovecraft, Leslie. S Klinger (ed) (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2014), 132.

The Tales of HP Lovecraft, which the author began to publish in the late 1920s, centred around a group of ancient gods called *The Old Ones*; giant tentacular otherworldly "monsters" who colonized our planet aeons ago, who now slumber below the ocean floor in titanic "cyclopean" tombs, invading the dreams of the sensitive and promising ever to return. They are collectively called "The Cthulhu Mythos" and this is derived from their central deity, a monstrous miles-high Chimera that combines an octopus, a dragon and a man. In the mythos, a range of "blasphemous cults" are described worshipping Cthulhu and his chthonic pantheon, preparing for the return of their cruel masters through means of violent human sacrifice and "bestial" rites. These horrific ceremonies are often witnessed in Lovecraft's tales by a solitary white male protagonist chancing upon these secret, perverse events. For the majority of his lifetime as a writer, Lovecraft remained virtually unknown, however his Cthulhu mythos came to play an important role in the esoteric imagination beginning in the 1960s when it came to be known as "Lovecraftian Magick."[284]

Many of Lovecraft's tales speak of characters doing magickal works to "open the gate" to other dimensional planes, summoning and communing with these daemonic entities through the recitation of ancient incantations. Lovecraft mentions several "forbidden books" that contain such summoning spells, including Joseph Glanvil's *Saduscismus Triumphatus*, Nicolas Remy's *Daemonolatreia*, Ludwig Prinn's *De Vermis Mysteriis*, von Juntz's *Unaussprec-hlichen Kulten*.[285] But the most iconic, and most repeated of these grimoires is called *The Necronomicon*, said to be composed by the Mad Arab Abdul Alhazred in Damascus sometime during the period of the Ommiade caliphate, circa 730AD.[286] All of the preceding grimoires that Lovecraft mentions are legitimate historical texts, with the exception of *The Necronomicon*, which as far as we know has no historical basis, although this is a matter of debate in esoteric circles where some argue, notably Chaos Magicians, that *The Necronomicon* is a real, ancient historical text, and that the entire Cthulhu Mythos, like Tolkien's Legendarium, was *channelled* by Lovecraft.

A litany of excerpts from various Lovecraftian letters, sent to friends at a time when he had no fame or notoriety, equivocally denies any such assertion:

To Robert Bloch (May 9, 1933):

    By the way—there is no "Necronomicon of the mad Arab Abdul

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[284] Wouter J. Hanegraaff. "Fiction in the Desert of the Real: Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos," in *Aries 7* (2007), 104.

[285] Ibid, 94

[286] HP Lovecraft. "The Call of Cthulhu" in *The New Annotated HP Lovecraft*, 813.

Alhazred. That hellish & forbidden volume is an imaginative conception of mine, which others of the W.T. group have also used as a background of allusion.

To William Frederick Anger (August 14, 1934):

Regarding the dreaded Necronomicon of the mad Arab Adbul Alhazred— I must confess that both the evil volume & the accursed authors are fictitious creatures of my own – as are the malign entities of Azazoth, Yog-Sothoth, Nyarlathotep, Shub-Niggurath, etc.

To Harry O. Fischer (late February, 1937):

The name "Abdul Alhazred" is one which some adult (I can't recall who) devised for me when I was 5 years old & eager to be an Arab after reading the Arabian Nights. Years later I thought it would be fun to use it as the name of a forbidden-book author. The name *Necronomicon*...occurred to me in the course of a dream.[287]

These denials did not, and do not dissuade occultists from continuing to believe that the author was unconsciously recounting elements of his own life experience. Like the Tolkien religionists, these esoterics claim that Cthulhu and his pantheon

existed before [Lovecraft] was born...what [he] could not accept with his rational, conscious mind, he accepted through his irrational, unconscious mind.[288]

In the *Chthulhu Mythos*, the Great Old ones use dreams, and the unconscious to communicate with those sensitive enough to receive their visions, most notably artists and poets. In *the Call of Cthulhu*, the most popular of Lovecraft's tales, the fictional sculptor Henry Anthony Wilcox produces "a horror in clay" – a bas-relief of Cthulhu, replete with undecipherable hieroglyphs, which he does not understand. The artist brings his dream-inspired bas-relief to an expert of Semitic languages, who discovers other artists and poets during the same timespan have reported similar

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[287] The HP Lovecraft Archive. *Quotes regarding the Necromonicon from Lovecraft's Letters*. April 13, 2004 Online. https://www.hplovecraft.com/creation/necron/letters.aspx

[288] John A. DeLaughter. *Lovecraft's Cthulhu and the Great Old Ones: Fact, Fiction or Foretold in ghe Necronomicon?* Lovecraft ezine, June 21, 2016. https://lovecraftzine.com/2016/07/21/lovecrafts-cthulhu-and-the-great-old-ones-fact-fiction-or-foretold-in-the-necronomicon/

dreams, and symbols, some going mad. The inference is that artists and poets are radars that pick up on the frequencies used by the elder gods when they surface from their cyclopean temples beneath the seas to communicate. Many readers of Lovecraft's work infer that Lovecraft was describing that which was occurring within him, unconsciously guiding him to compose his stories and like his fictional artist, not knowing why.

Several copies of *The Necronomicon* have thus been 'found', translated and published by various magickal practitioners over the years. These texts offer incantations to unleash Lovecraft's named deities for one's personal esoteric use. Several additions are still in circulation, but the most prominent is referred to as *The Simon Necronomicon*, penned by the anonymous 'Simon', rumoured in esoteric circles to be the occultist Peter Levenda.[289]

In his Introduction, 'Simon' describes how occultist Alestair Crowley and HP Lovecraft, although ignorant of one another, were both accessing the "same source material" as fodder for their fiction (Lovecraft) and ceremonial magick (Crowley). The "source code", Simon noted, was ancient Sumerian myth and magic. Simon feels that one can "profitably compare the essence of most of Lovecraft's short stories with the basic themes of Crowley's unique system of ceremonial magick,"[290] and while the two never met, nor do the outward shapes of their work resemble each other, Simon believes they are intertwined. Simon believes that Lovecraft channelled that which Crowley went knowingly in pursuit of, and as such, proposes that the reader of *The Necronomicon* consult both bodies of work in tandem, to gain the full experience.

Simon painstakingly traces the connections between the Great Old Ones that Lovecraft claims to have invented, and the ancient Sumerian Gods that he, and Crowley at the same time were studying. *Cthulhu*, Simon says, descends from Sumerian *Kutu* (meaning underworld) or *"Kutulu"* meaning the Man of the Underworld," also referred to as *Shaitan* (or Satan.) Lovecraft's god *Azagthoth* also has composite Sumerian/Egyptian roots, where *Azag* in Sumerian reportedly means Enchanter/Magician while *Thoth*, in Coptic bears reference to the Egyptian god of Magic and Wisdom. While Simon accepts Lovecraft's admission that he believes he invented these entities, he *believes* Lovecraft was channelling the material even though his conscious mind thinks that he invented it.

The Simon Necronomicon is presented as a book of spells aimed at bridging the unconscious with the conscious, through the invocation of ancient god-forms. Simon claims this is not dissimilar to the Jungian psychoanalytic method, albeit much more

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[289] Gabriel McKee. The Necronomicon and the Misappropriation of Ancient Texts. New York University Institue for the Study of the Ancient World (online). Oct. 27, 2015.
https://isaw.nyu.edu/library/blog/necronomicon
[290] *The Necronomicon.* ed. 'Simon', (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2008), xxi.

spiritually dangerous.[291] There are spells for conjuring the very demons that Lovecraft describes, although most scholars who have critically examined the text describe it as a "mishmash" of recontextualized Sumerian and Babylonian spells that have been re-worked to be applied to Lovecraftian themes. There is even the accusation of plagiarism from particular Assyriologists translations which were lifted and used directly for the text without credit.[292]

For occultists who use HP Lovecraft's writings and their offshoots as inspiration, the scholarly authenticity of The Necronomicon is of no consequence. Neither is the question of whether or not it exists as an historical artifact or if it was cobbled together by Simon and his team. Chaos Magicians, who make up the majority of those practising Lovecraftian Magick, perceive all systems of knowledge as socially constructed and therefore culturally biased, and claim that no one belief can be truer than any other. Thus, Chaos Magicians adhering to Lovecraftian Magick

> do not distinguish between fiction and reality [and this] makes it possible for Chaos Magicians to invoke, and allow themselves to be possessed by demons and deities that they know have been invented by Lovecraft: the objection "they don't exist, for Lovecraft made them up" has no power for it presupposes the very distinction they reject.[293]

This ironically aligns with the prevailing themes in Lovecraft's own stories, that imply deities who ensnare the sensitive through their dreams lie beyond our capacity to describe or imagine, thus they live outside of our very conception of the real.

[291] Ibid.

[292] Ibid.

[293] Wouter J. Hanegraaff. Fiction in the Desert of the Real: Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, 103

RELIGIOUS PROSTHETICS V
TEMPLE OF ARTIFICE

[M]Dudeck, *Temple of Artifice (poster)*, digital image, dimensions variable, 2019.

THE DIGITAL TEMPLE

The Latin word *templum*, derived from Greek *templus*, translates as "to cut out", which Servius (late IVth century) refers to as "any place which was circumscribed and separated by the augurs from the rest of the land by a certain solemn formula."[294] This bears relation to the notion of the *holy* discussed in *Religious Prosthetics II*, that a temple is a space made holy through acts of consecration that *set it apart* from the world. This is done by erecting boundaries (skins) as acts of ritual demarcation, and consecrating the space these boundaries surround. Historically cities were built around Temples – they were the tallest structures located at the very heart of the city's spiritual and political life. Now, the religion of consumerism has replaced and defaced religion as a means of social organization in public space. The tallest buildings are now those dedicated to the new gods of media and commerce.

The Temple of Artifice began in 2018 within the context of *HAMBURG MASCHINE*, an international festival of public art initiated by Dirck Möllmann, the Stadtkuratorin[295] of the City of Hamburg. *HAMBURG MASCHINE* sought to examine urban space as a form of machinic assemblage, and meditate upon the role of the city in digitality and the information age. Dirck and I first met at a workshop entitled "The Institution as Fiction" at the pedagogical academy of the *Steirischer Herbst Festival* in Graz, Austria in 2013. The workshop was facilitated by the now defunct curatorial collective *Beirut*, who then was based in Cairo, Egypt, and whose collective work explored institution building as both curatorial and artistic act in the aftermath of the events at Tahrir Square and the January 25th Revolution.

Mollmann was then the curator at the *Institute for Art in Public Spaces* (*Institut für Kunst im öffentlichen Raum*) in Graz, while I attended the workshop as creator of RELIGIONVIR.US and as the representative of my own fictional institution *The Museum of Artificial Histories*.[296] Dirck and I developed an active friendship devoted to our shared interests in artistic strategies of fictioning, cultural engineering and institutional critique from 2013 on. In the Spring of 2018 after having won the position of Stadtkuratorin for the city of Hamburg, Dirck asked me to send him "everything I had" on my work. Three months and several data-transfers later, I received an enigmatic invitation from him, six words long, that would change my entire trajectory as an artist:

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[294] W. Smith. A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities. "Templum."
  http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMIGRA*/Templum.html
[295] The *Stadtkuratorin* is a civic position for public art in Germany, where every city is assigned a curator to manage and deliver public art for the city they serve. The position is usually for 1-3 years, on rotation.
[296] *The Museum of Artificial Histories* is a fictive institution I invented in 2014, which organizes museological exhibitions featuring installations of invented artifacts, dioramas and infotaintment. The Museum has a chief curator (named Troja Norz) who produces all events that the Museum endorses.

"I am dreaming of your digital temple."

Dirck impregnated my artistic process with notions of digitality that at the time I was not yet consciously considering. Retrospectively, in anticipation of the forthcoming global pandemic and its digital implications, I can see now how much of Dirck's instincts were genuinely *prophetic*. My practise had been largely performative in nature; activating a host of media as secondary and tertiary supports to a series of live, prophetic, ritual acts. While meditating upon Dirck's provocations regarding digitality and its relationship to my religion, it occurred to me the significant role digital media and various social media platforms played as critical vectors for the transmission of my RELIGIONVIR.US to the wider public.

Of the thousands who follow and/or support my work virtually, the vast majority, I discovered, have never had the opportunity to experience a RELIGIONVIR.US transmission live. Instead, they keep track of it, comment upon it and participate in dialogues around it, having only experienced the pixelated transcription of live acts, augmented by digital renditions of signature iconographic threads. Commentary is one of the nodes central to differentiating so-called religions from other mythological frameworks; religious texts breed theological, ethical and moral debates that are played out on the margins of the canonized text. Social media platforms with comment sections hosting dialogue and debates began to echo the marginalia I was encountering in my research on illuminated manuscripts and early Talmudic texts. I realized that Facebook, Instagram and Twitter could all be read as *theo-technological* scriptures for the information age. Likes and comments were new forms of exegesis that produced hybrid strains of contemporary theological, artistic and social commentary. Social Media had become the host body that RELIGIONVIR.US used to spread it's transmedial gospels, and Dirck's provocation led me to become more deeply aware of this, and as an artist, begin to work with it as medium.

Dirck was interested in me producing a threefold project that would involve 1) a web-based artwork, 2) a public ritual performance and 3) an exhibition that featured artifacts from both the web-based and performative temple. The *Temple of Artifice* would blend analogue with digital, merge public, performative, conceptual, installation and web-based art-forms into a totalizing transmedial production. Once the contours of the project were set, we began to consider how to activate the urban sphere of the city of Hamburg in order to launch the public component of the project. This would take the form of a liturgical performance on the opening night, followed by ceremonial procession through the streets of Hamburg, followed by a dialogue on the nature of religion and cities in the digital era of the information age.

Dirck's initial suggestion was for me to present the project at the *Künstlerhaus Maetzel*, located on the outskirts of the city, in *Hamburg-Volksdorf*. There, he imagined I could inaugurate a ritual performance under the moonlight in the torch-

lit canopies of the forest. In addition to being remote, the artist collective inhabiting the Kunstlerhaus had a long and rich history with their own created mythological space opera, far more satirical and ironic than my own. Dirck had imagined this as a compelling link that he could explore and exploit curatorially. But, after careful consideration, I concluded that my religion must be performed within the urban core of the city's ecosystem, much like temples used to be. Urban centres are sanctuaries for queer exiles and other outcasts that I felt my work ministered to much more than those who would drive their cars to the edge of the city, and park them to attend a mystical art performance in a forest. For that reason among others, it felt critical that the Temple be constructed in the downtown nucleus of the city/entity of Hamburg.

When I told Dirck my intent of inhabiting the city centre with my temple, he suggested I consider performing my liturgy in the oldest functioning church in Hamburg, *Hauptkirche St. Katharinen*. I was immediately enchanted, as a site-specific artist, being able to perform and present my religion inside of pre-existing religious institution offered tremendous opportunity for my metaphors to become activated in ways synthetic temples can only hint at. As well, this Church featured an impressive Stained Glass Window installation that I felt could be in conversation with my own Hypericons, which I began to imagine projecting in front of the already existing stained glass. I began to witness in my mind, these two dominant religious prosthetics, one "real", one "artificial", starting to speak to one another.

The Church's Pastor, a man called Frank Engelbrecht, had previously expressed interest in hosting contemporary art in his church walls, and was known to Dirck as having a spiritual and ethical commitment to revitalizing the city centre, and activating civic space through political and religious intervention. Englebrecht had collaborated in the past with other state-funded public art projects, and the church had hosted interventions/ installations by Ai WeiWei and Rebecca Horn, so I felt I was in good company.

I began to develop the web-based digital temple as well as the liturgical performance along with the installation/exhibition as the conductor of a symphony of polyphonic religious prosthetics. I worked with voice actors to inscribe, record and master the invocation text (in English and my invented language), worked with electronic composers, musicians and opera singers to write, record and mix the original soundtrack, wrote, illustrated and designed the graphic novel which would form the basis of the imagery on the Hypericons and began to compose the sermon for the liturgical performance that would feature myself, performance artist Cordula Daus and opera singer Annette Elster. All of this that would take place on the Autumn Equinox in 2019.

Dirck became extremely interested in fabricating the Hypericons and making them battery-powered and portable so that they could (1) accompany the performance in the Church, (2) be carried in procession through the streets of downtown Hamburg

and then later (3) be installed in a nearby gallery for a public exhibition. Pastor Englebrecht recommended that we make contact with an anarchist design collective called *LU'UM* which had taken up residence in the former parking garage just behind Sankt Katharinen Church. As a guest of Pastor Englebrecht, I attended one of the *LU'UM Kollectiv* meetings – and as soon as I told them I was building a queer, sci-fi digital temple, they instantaneously signed on as collaborators. They too, as architects and urban planners, had been exploring the metaphoric potential of the Temple as activation tool for public space. Interested in creating performative, participatory encounters that performed "social acupuncture", they saw providence in my Temple and it's worldbuilding capacities and read it as an opportunity to expand their purview from civic space and design into art, myth and religion. As trained designers, they were keen to help me not only build the mobile lightboxes that would become the Hypericons, but also to troubleshoot the difficulties of making them battery-powered. The *LU'UM Werkstatt* was located a short walk away from the Church, and they offered in that first meeting to become the host body of the Hypericon installation that would follow the liturgical performance and procession on the Autumn equinox and the month that would follow.

Over the course of the entire project which was roughly a year and a half in production, Dirck Mollmann had been battling Cancer. As the project developed, his symptoms and his prognosis worsened. By the time I had arrived in Hamburg – nearly a month before the official launch of the project, Dirck had already been hospitalized and was unable to be present to help guide the work to its' completion. This did not deter him from sending me emails from his hospital bed to ensure that the battery-powered Hypericons would last the whole night of the performance. Even his deathbed, Dirck was still curating the project.

On September 21, 2019, on the eve of the Autumn Equinox, one night before the public launch and performance of *The Temple of Artifice*, Dirck Mollmann, Stadtkuratorin for the City of Hamburg, my colleague and long-term comrade, died of Cancer. The next day, the day of the performance, we had already arranged a large catered lunch for everyone who had collaborated to help build our Temple. This included members of LU'UM Kollectiv, art historians, my husband, visiting friends and family as well as Pastor Englebrecht, Dirck's wife Isabella and their young 1 year old son, Carl Monte. When Isabella and Pastor Englebrecht arrived, they shared the news with the entire group, and informed us that Dirck wanted the performance to go on unhindered, and so we fulfilled his wish. Pastor Englebrecht later described our gathering that day like the Last Supper: there were twelve people present, mourning, grieving, all centred around a makeshift table in the LU'UM Werkstatt.

For the liturgical performance, we installed all seven of the mobile battery powered Hypericons on the altar of the church, and with the help of the technical crew we installed a large projector screen directly in front of St. Katharinen's own mammoth stained glass windows. A small memorial was installed for Dirck and as the audience

gathered I was made aware that some members of the community had not yet learned of Dirck's passing, and some would be learning directly at this moment, through the introduction to the performance given by art historian and curator Nina Kalenbach, and Pastor Frank Englebrecht.

While the opening words were largely spoken in German I understood, as did my collaborators, the weight of the moment we all had inherited. My liturgical performance, based upon my invented queer religion as part of a larger project of producing a fictional digital temple, had just become a ceremony for the passing of a comrade, a friend, the visionary who made all of this possible. But more so, this was being done at a place of worship in Dirck's own community, so in addition to being an artist my work was also ministering to a community in grief. Art, religion and life blended in a manner I had never yet experienced, and I understood that strangely, through my hybrid positionality, I was uniquely qualified to hold the mantle of artist, healer, priest, prophet and counsellor. It was as though all of my various trainings had climaxed in this moment and I had the uncanny feeling that this evening's curator had designed it precisely to be this way. That feeling retains itself even now.

The liturgical performance involved myself and performer Cordula Daus, dressed and painted as *Bio Priests* from my fictional religion. Our shared sermon gave liturgical and exegetical accounts of the symbols, images and histories contained within the "scriptural" pages of each of the seven Hypericons projected in front of St. Katharinen's stained glass. Divided into seven distinct sections, we explored each Hypericon with digitally modulated voices, deconstructing the Hypericons as artifacts and analysing their symbolic contents as fictional experts within the mythos. Annete Elster, the opera singer, was presented as a Sybil from RELIGIONVIR.US, chanting in my invented language whilst we lectured, moving in and out of psalms we had composed with synth-scapes as sound scores blasting across the loudspeakers.

Following the liturgy, we asked members of the audience to help carry the Hypericons with us through the streets as we began the procession. This would lead us through downtown Hamburg, and we would eventually arrive at/return to the *LU'UM Werkstatt* for the final phase of the process. Pastor Englebrecht turned the lights on in the Church while we all walked outside, carrying the lightboxes in procession around the contours of the St. Katharinen. Pastor Englebrecht told the harrowing history of his Church that was burned, and rebuilt, then bombed and rebuilt, and its trajectory ever looking towards the future. We positioned the Hypericons directly beneath one of the stained glass windows of the church, which was illuminated by having been lit from the inside, and again, the two works spoke to one another. Pastor Englbrecht gave an impromptu sermon about art and civic space, and his desire to bring people back to the city centre, away from the suburbs. He most elegantly spoke of Sankt Katharinen as a sentient entity who "wants to have playmates to play with." He referred to my Hypericons in relation to the Stained

Glass windows of Sankt Katharinen and said with delight, "now she [the Church] is happy – they are playing with one another."

My cousin and Aunt had travelled from Sweden to come see the exhibition, and my cousin Allen was one of the audience members tasked with carrying the Hypericons through the street during our ritual procession. As a Jew, he remarked to me in passing, that carrying my Hypericon was very much like carrying the Torah, an honour and a mitzvah in the Jewish tradition we were both raised within. This was a performative role we had both enacted when we had our Bar Mitsvahs and at various other ceremonial events. When one is asked to carry the Torah around the Synagogue, it is an extreme honour and spiritual responsibility, for dropping or breaking it was simply *forbidden*. My goal with the religious prosthetics was to produce artworks imbued with the aura of religiosity, and my cousins statement likening my mobile light-box to a Torah demonstrated to me that I had achieved this conceptual goal. Both a *Torah*, and an artwork produced by an international artist in an established artworld event, have worth that cannot be properly conveyed in dollars or number signs. The procession, as a public artwork, asked members of the public to share ritually in helping to carry that symbolic weight. The *Hypericons* were treated as devotional artifacts, carried and cared for by a public who were forged through art into parishioners.

Following the procession we returned to the LU'UM WERKSTATT where the Hypericons would be left and would remain as a public installation. Upon Pastor Englebrecht's suggestion, those who had remained in the procession were seated together in a circle, and Lu'um initiated a conversation, with artists, performers, collaborators, collective members, audience members, church congregants and the pastor, about what it meant to make a temple in the information age. After nearly an entire hour of discussion, the event turned into an afterparty which lasted all night long. But this was just the beginning of a story that continues to this day.

Following our experience, members of the LU'UM Kollectiv approached me to continue our dialogue, as they were interested in a particular idea I had transmitted during the building of the Hypericons. This was the aforementioned Kabbalistic idea I had discovered in the book *God is A Verb*, by Rabbi Alan Cooper, where the Rabbi suggests we should perceive ourselves as verbs, not nouns. Inspired by this, we collaboratively produced the idea that what we were all doing together was Temple-*ing*, or enacting the verb "To Temple." This idea resonated with LU'UM as well as Pastor Englebrecht and I was asked to returned to Hamburg four months later to do an hour long vodcast with the Pastor and the collective which explored this notion of Temple amidst the wider implications of the project.

SEEK COMMON GROUND:
HOW TO TEMPLE

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xexh6S6rack&feature=emb_title

Directly following the vodcast, Coronavirus hit. As the LU'UM Kollectiv struggled with how to continue to do social and civic work amidst lockdowns and increased restrictions, they arrived at the idea of creating a "Digital Temple", an online platform that took our notions of Temple as a Verb and adapted them to respond to the cultural moment we were all facing. Their Digital Temple continues to this day, and has grown and spread far beyond any of us. The Digital Temple was a virus that Dirck infected me with. I functioned as a host body and through me it infected the LU'UM Kollectiv, who now are using it as a means to adapt to unprecedented circumstances. I had never intended to go "digital" with my work, and rarely if ever do I allow curatorial suggestions of that magnitude to shape or shift the direction of my practise. But in this case it did, and because of that my entire trajectory has changed. The launch of the Temple of Artifice aligned with the revelation of Religion as a form of Multi-Media production, and inaugurated the beginning of the Fourth Mutation of the RELIGIONVIR.US. I have since purchased www.religionvir.us and following the completion of my PhD my practise turns to developing the web-based temple into a digital, transmedial Bible.

The following pages are an excerpt from the upcoming publication HAMBURG MASCHINE, designed by myself in collaboration with the publicaions' editor Isabella Kohlhuber to fictionalize and reproduce the performative elements of the Temple alongside the procession that followed.

THERE IS NO BEGINNING
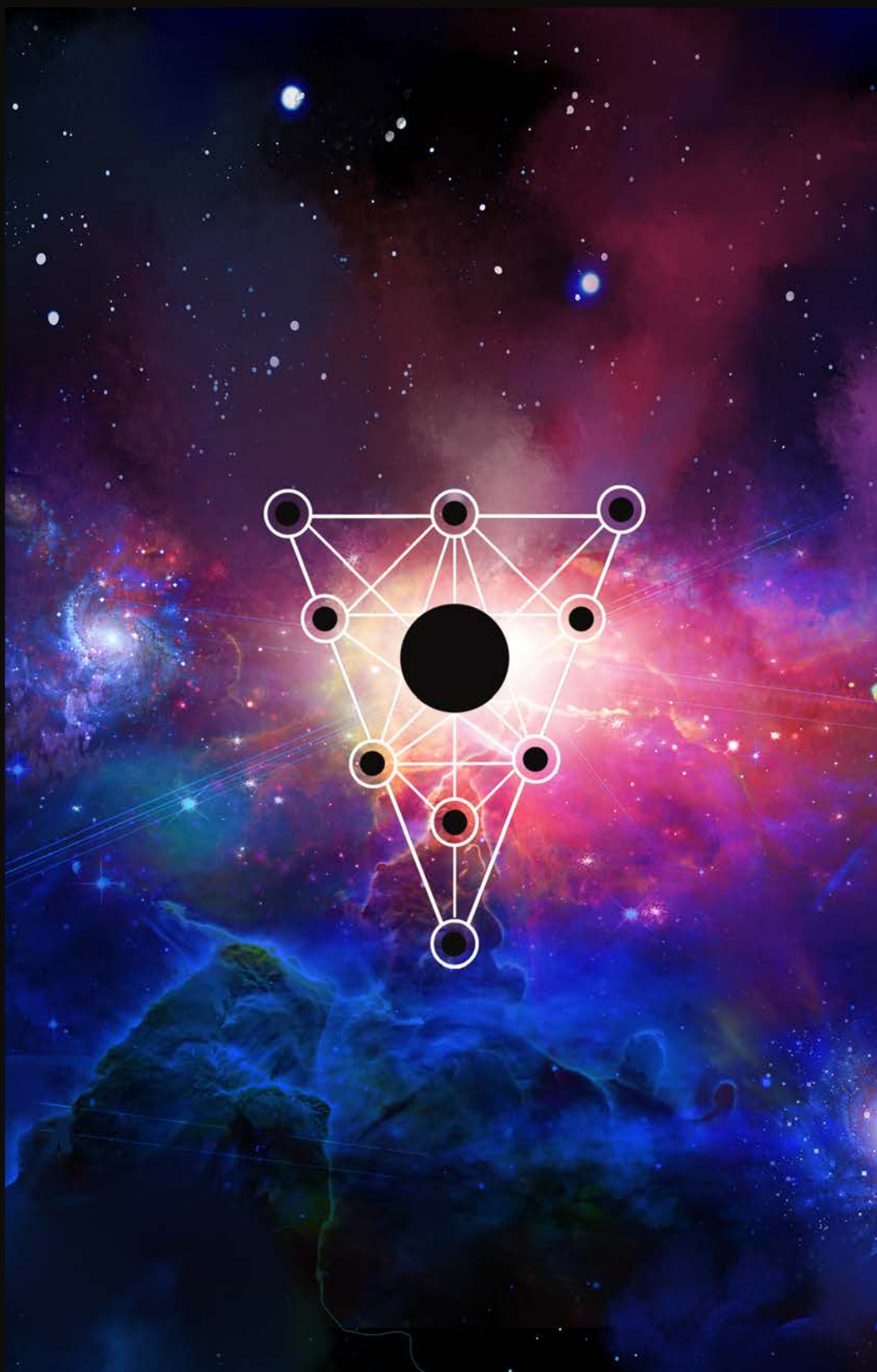
THERE IS NO END

ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED

WILL HAPPEN AGAIN

THIS IS THE STORY

OF THE GROWING OF A GOD

THE SABRE-HORN BLASTED THREE SHRILL CRIES TO SIGNIFY THE CLOSING OF THE RITE...

OUTSTRETCHED UPON A MAZE OF FURS, NUMBED BY TIME, ENCLOSED IN WALLS BESIEGED WITH CRUDELY CHISELED HIEROGLYPHS, XE BARELY FELT THE FISSURED HEAT OF THE DOLOMITE BENEATH XYR...

XE SENSED WITHIN XYR UPPER JAW THE INSTINCTS OF XYR BONES AND TEETH TO CHATTER IN THE COMING OF THE STORM, BUT PRIESTYSS-TRAINED XE HELD THE TENSION FIRMLY, AS THE ARCHER TAUTS THE SINEW OF THE BOW
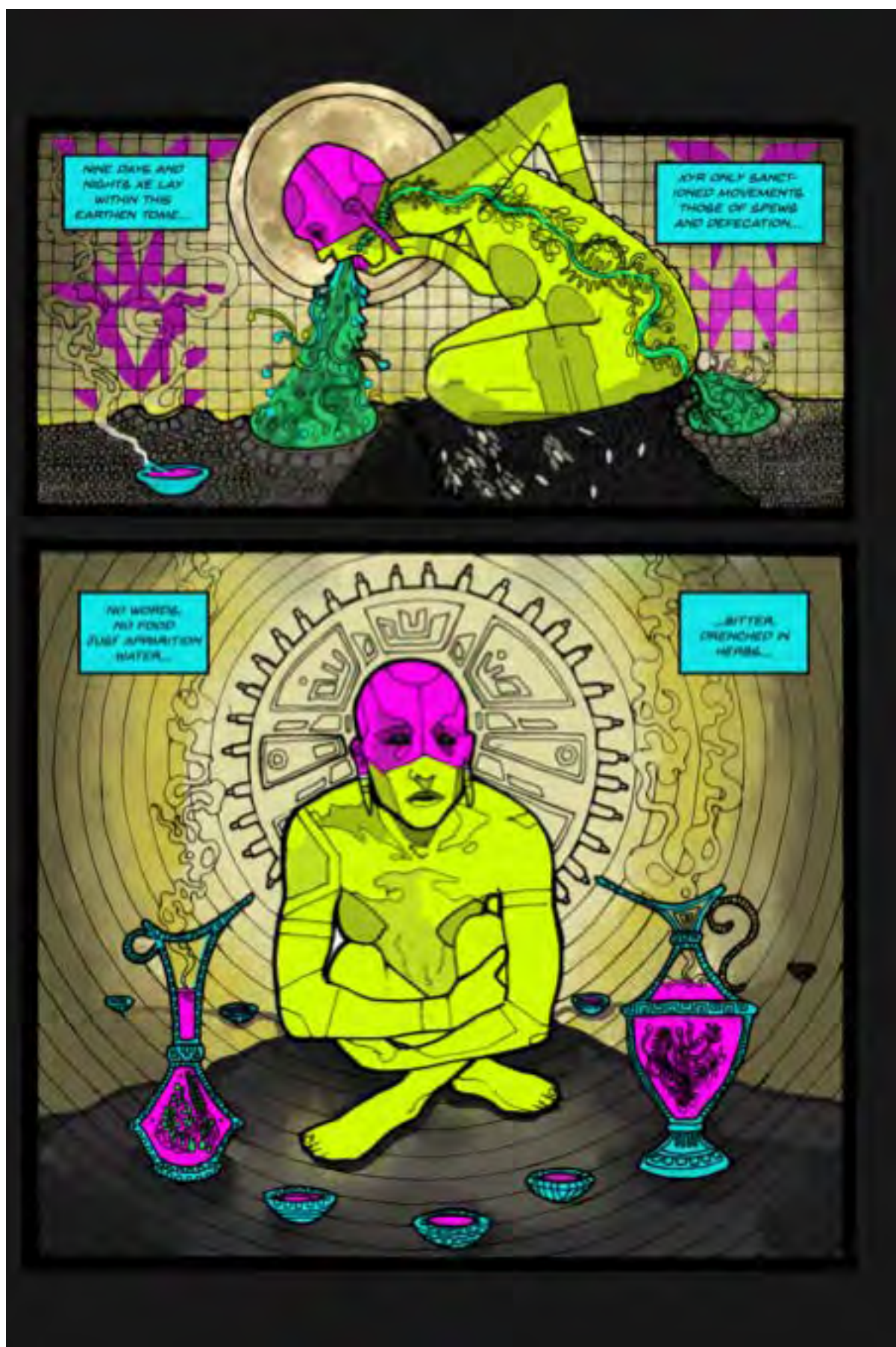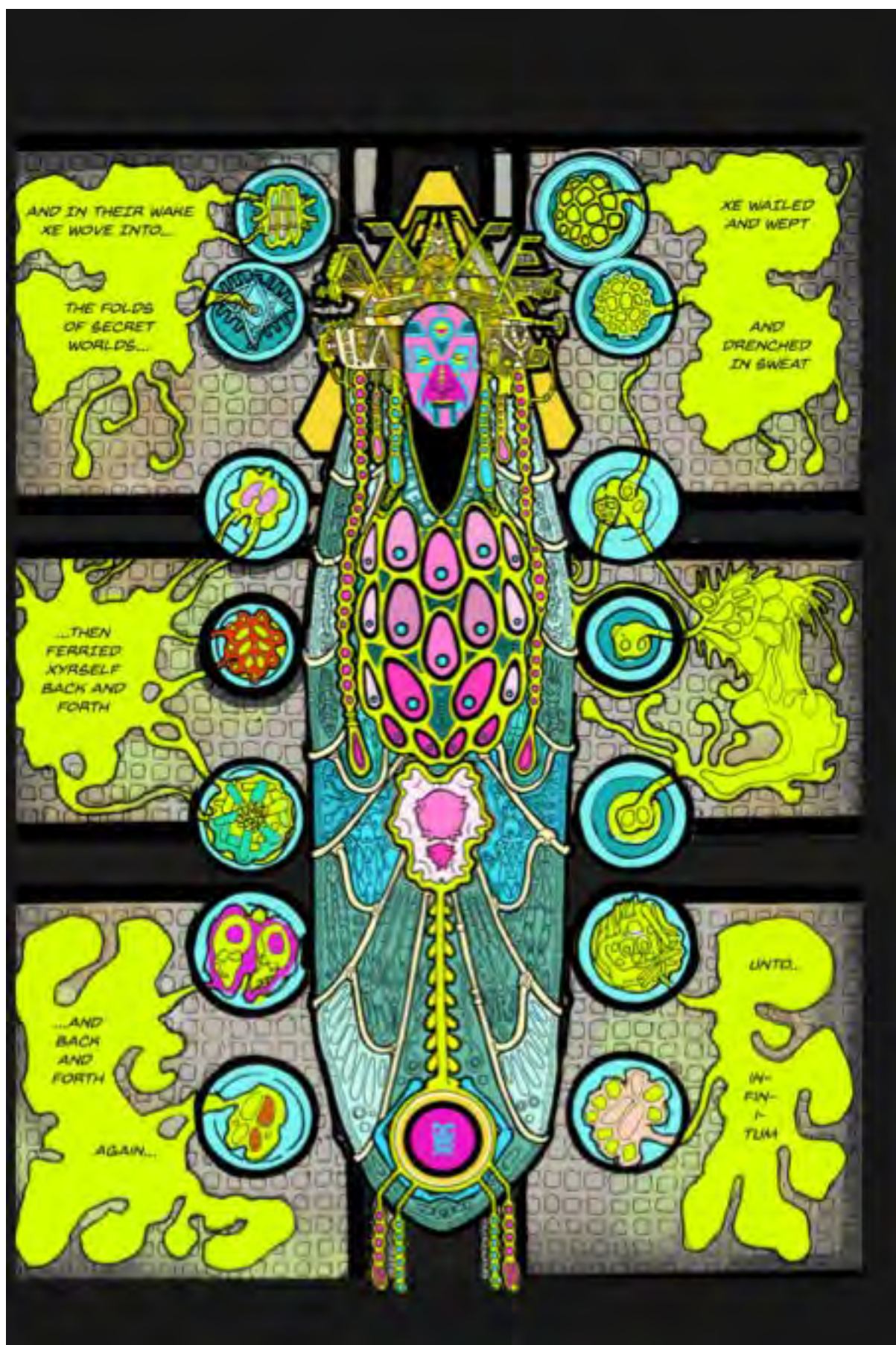
AND IN THIS KATABASIS, THIS PURIFIC RITE, NEON VISIONS SET ABOUT TO MAZE XYR...

THE MOTHER OF CLONES

THE DESTROYER OF WORLDS

THE ADEPT   THE STAR MAGE

THE STAR SHRINE   THE CRONE

THE GOD SCHOOL AND TREESHIP

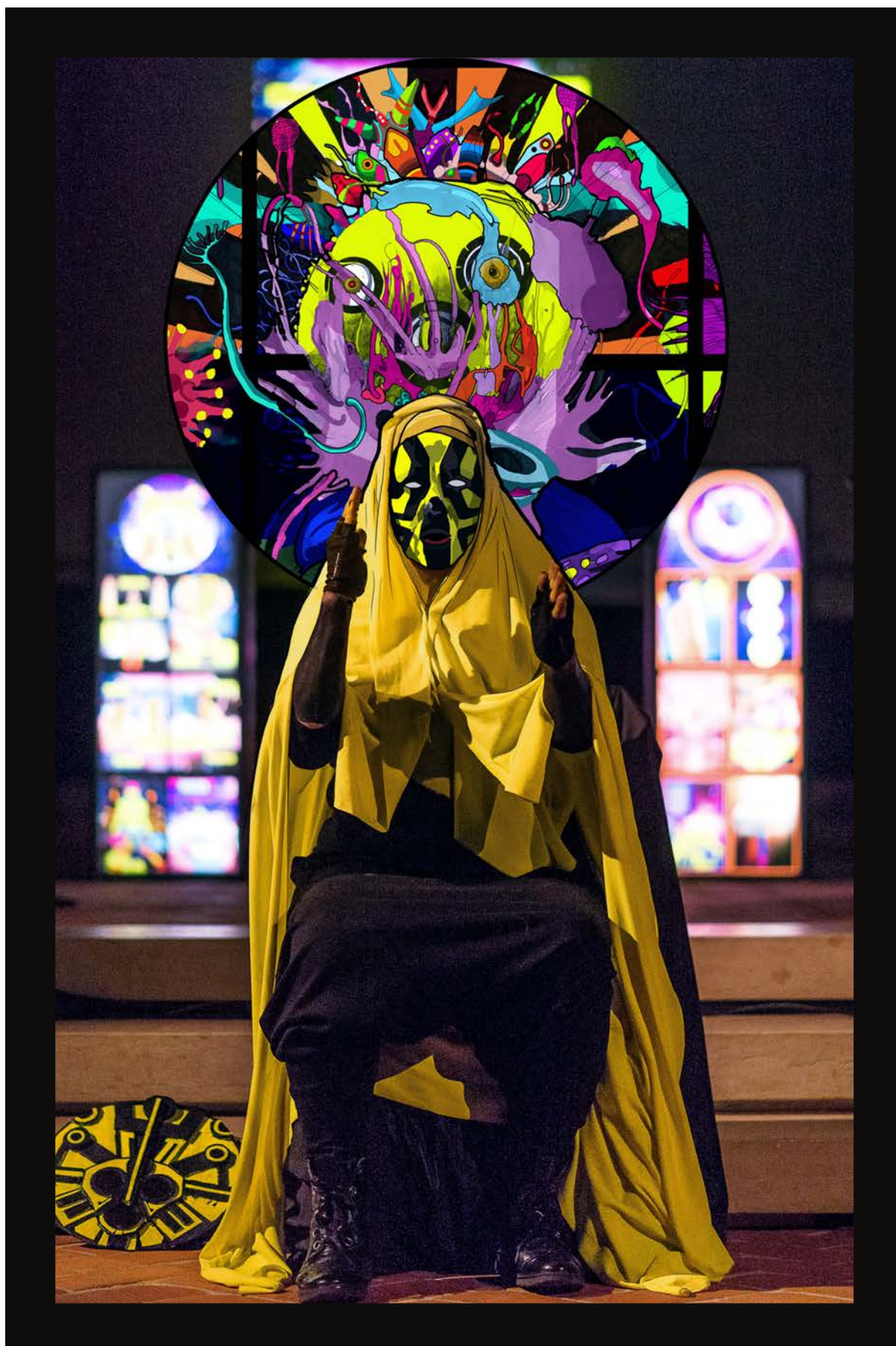THE CHTHONIC ABYSS
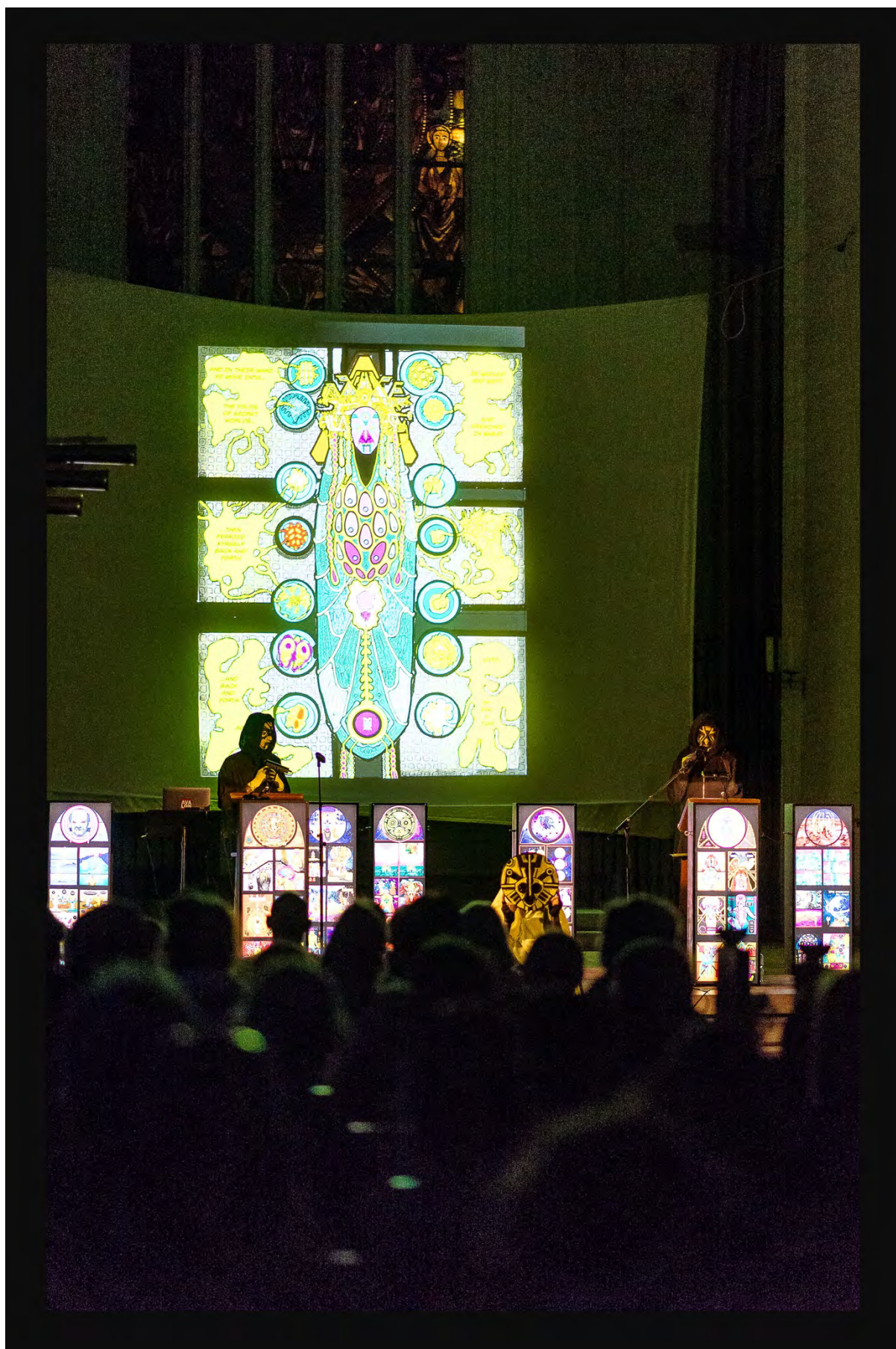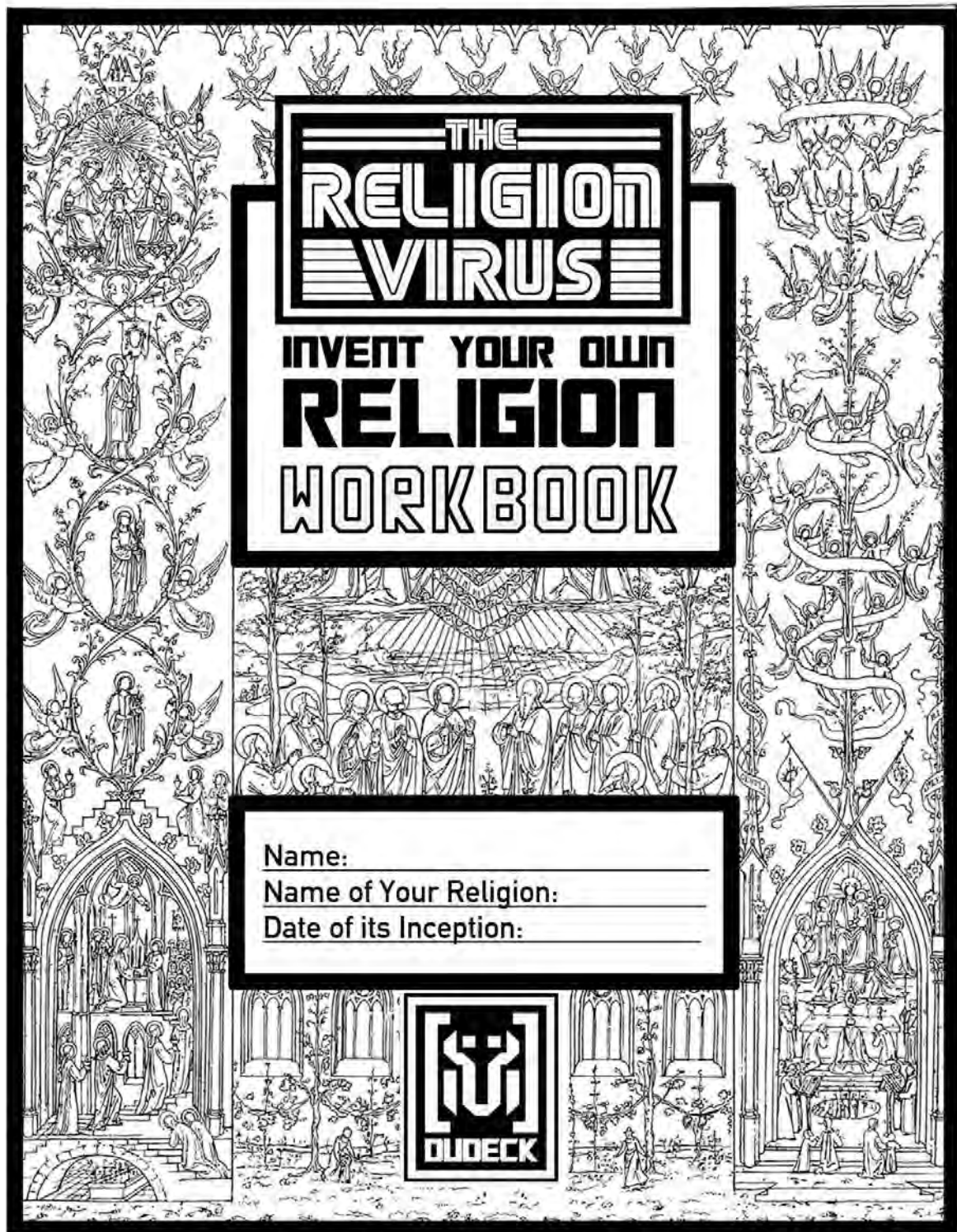
THE ALCHEMICAL

TEMPLE OF ARTIFICE

Note: The Invent Your Own Religion Workbook/Workshop was presented as part of the Society for Artistic Research conference Crisis! Collective (dates), as a guest lecture at Durham University's Theology Department and will be presented at the upcoming International Federation of Theatre Research Conference in Summer 2021 in Galway, Ireland. A version of the workshop with an accompanying essay will be published in special edition of the peer-reviewed journal *Ecumenica* in Spring 2021.

THE RELIGION VIRUS

INVENT YOUR OWN RELIGION

>>>>>WORKSHOP<<<<<

Name: _____

Name of Your Religion: _____

Date of its Inception: _____

Step One: Select a Story

This can be any story that has inspired you – and it can be any medium – film, novel, comic book, video game. The important feature is that it is a story whose mythology you are deeply familiar with. Write the name of your story inside of this box (1 minute.)

Step Two: Key Mythological Themes

Identify at least three key mythological themes in the story. These can be archetypal, theoretical, or philosophical. In short, you must identify the prevailing themes that are present in your mythological religion. Examples include : Hero's Journey, Transition from Childhood to Adulthood, Death and Loss, Metamorphosis/Transformation. Write the three themes inside of this box. (3 Minutes).

Step Three: Applied Moral Framework

Utilizing the three mythological themes identified in the earlier section, begin to imagine an Applied Moral Framework that emerges from the mythology of the story. How can the lessons of this story be applied to the life of an individual ? If it helps, you can import a recognizable religious prosthetic, such as The Ten Commandments, or The Seven Deadly Sins, or the Six Bardos. There is no minimum or maximum here – take some time with this. (Minimum: 5 minutes).

Step Four: Religious Affordances

Imagine how you can transform key symbolic dimensions of the story into religious symbols. For example, in The Matrix, Neo must make a choice as to whether to take the red pill or the blue pill, which Matrixism codes as a sacrament. Or how Jediism uses 'The Force' to explain a sentient animate consciousness. These symbols will become important anchors for your religion to resonate with its adherents. This is a process of symbolic alchemy, where you take recognizable motifs from the narrative and imbue them with larger symbolic meanings.

Try and create/imagine at least four religious affordances and write/draw them inside of this box. (Minimum: 5 minutes)

Step Five: Applied Time/Space

It takes the earth 24 hours to undergo a complete rotation around the Sun, and 365 days to complete its full orbit of the Sun. Likewise, the Moon orbits the Earth every 27.32 days. Both lunar and solar calendars are used by religions to ritually tell aspects or versions of their central stories. This repetition, aligned with changes in the seasons and historical remembrances are important aspects of religion's ritualistic repetitive power. Using the Gregorian Calendar (with lunar cycles attached), try and create holidays or rituals that use aspects of the story for inspiration. For example, Tolkien Religionists track Frodo's Journey with the Ring over the course of one year, and create holidays that reflect key turning points in the narrative (the fellowship's arrival at Rivendell, the Death of Gandalf, their arrival at Lothlorien, the Battle of Helm's Deep, etc.). Many religions use the earth's natural rotation as inspiration (solstices and equinoxes) but feel free to be inventive. Circle key dates on this calendar and give names to a minimum of four holidays. (Minimum : 5 minutes).

2020 Moon Phase Calendar

Holiday One :
_____

Holiday Two:
_____

Holiday Three :
_____

Holiday Four:
_____

Step Six: Religious Prosthetics

Identify a number of symbolic objects, and/or media from within the narrative you have chosen, which can become relics or religious prosthetics. This can include a song that the story features, or a physical object, or environment from the story which can be constructed or built. These objects become tactile and/or abstract media that give affective and experiential significance to your religion and which can be used in ritual. Select a minimum of three, and draw or write them in this box. (3 minutes)

Step Seven: Create a Logo/Symbol

In a culture of world religions, almost all religioins now have identifiable symbols, and invented religions carry on this tradition. Considering all of the symbolic material you have unearthed in this process, select one visual symbol that is able to convey the significance and ideals of this religion to the public. Draw this symbol in this box. (2-3 minutes).

Step Eight: Construct a Ritual

Ritual is the means through which a religion moves from the theoretical to the lived experience. Consulting all of the aesthetic, mythological, symbolic and philosophical materials you have thus far unearthed, design a ritual that your religion, based upon a work of fiction, can create. Think about the entire experience : location, environment, smells, tastes, foods, clothing, music, atmosphere, pace, rhythm and repetition.
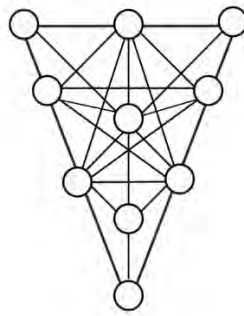Imagine what role the sacred text (or film, or novel, or venerated comic book) may or may not play, as well as time (duration) and/or transitional periods, possibly moving between locations or taking place over a number of days. Take your time with this. Use this paper as a base to design the skeleton of the ritual, then experiment by inviting guests to participate in the ritual, using all of the objects and materials you have unearthed, to learn about your new religion. For makers of performance, you could consider producing this ritual as a live art act, with or without context, as an experiment to see if it indeed produces religious experiences among its audience.
(Minimum: 20 minutes).

I Want to Believe, X-Files promotional poster, original artist unknown.

CONCLUSION
I WANT TO BELIEVE

The X-Files, a science fiction television series claiming to be inspired by actual events, centers around the search for evidence of extra-terrestrial life. It premiered in 1993 and lasted 11 seasons, and has since produced two feature films. The series protagonist is Agent Fox Mulder, referred to as 'Spooky Mulder' by others in the FBI, due to his incessant interest in paranormal investigation, particularly UFO abduction and alien involvement with the United States Government. Assigned to the X-Files in effort to debunk Mulder's theories of alien conspiracies is Agent Dana Scully, a medical doctor, and a rationalist pathologically opposed to the radical beliefs that Mulder is fuelled by. Scully needs proof, whereas Mulder need only be led by blind conviction. Mulder's dark, alchemical office which houses his state-funded research into the paranormal, is enshrined with a poster of a UFO flying over top of a treeline overlaid with the words: "I Want to Believe."

Due to the success of the series, and an increase in public belief that we are not alone in the Universe, the slogan *I Want to Believe* went viral before viral was even invented. It came to represent a desire for confirmation of the existence of extra-terrestrial life, but it has since mutated from a slogan into a worldview for the secular West. *I Want to Believe* describes our collective desire to reach for transcendence, while constantly eluded by our inability to shake our suspicions.

There is a tendency, among those of my generation in particular, to interpret the incitement of "belief" as some kind of *trick*. "What am I being asked to believe in ?" one critic demanded after seeing a ritual performance of my work. However veiled within that question, I perceived a yearning - a yearning to be *asked* to believe in something, if only to refuse.

In an age of post-truth, alternative facts and deep fakes, our discernment and criticality towards that which asks to believe in anything is an essential apparatus for our existential survival. It is both ethical and responsible to look upon all metanarratives, particularly those that have promised transcendence, eternal salvation or a definitive answer to any of the mysteries, with unrelenting suspicion and scrutiny. At the same time, I believe my invented religion (and other invented religions) minister to a collective hunger, rife among outcasts -- to believe in some-thing, to reach for a myth that can weave us back into the larger pattern, to practice collective rituals, to create communions, bereft of existential dread and oppressive dogma. But where can the instinct toward religiosity be directed in an age where belief systems are mass produced and sold now in supermarkets? My answer to that question, and the answer that Invented Religions suggests, is that religion and belief can continue to live on -- in fiction.

It has long been apparent to me that the overtly fictional status of my religion allows members of the public who interface with it to feel comfortable enough to *experiment* with belief in the mediated environment of art. The uncanny reports that audience members provide to me of having unintended "religious experiences" inside of my work, suggests to me that art and fiction may be a kind of refugee camp for those fleeing institutionalized religion in search of more meaningful, autonomous spiritual homes. Encountering religions as fictions renders the myth, or in this case the "religion" naked, and allows the possibility for transcendental encounter or "religious experience" to occur naturally, without the typical hierarchies dominant belief systems produce.

Fictions allow for the possibility of truth without claiming they have ever accessed it. This can take place at a gallery, museum, cinematheque, movie theatre or in the comfort of your home between the pages of a book or a tablet, on a flatscreen in your lap or in your living room. Religion, and belief are now being played with outside of holy grounds. And yet, perhaps thats where they always were *played with*, before holy grounds were invented. What we now refer to as religions were not always as they are. They developed creatively, carefully, sometimes spontaneously, violently, persistently, in such manners as perhaps they are emerging now. As Carole Cusack notes,

> It is argued that the process of world-building that generates the specific [297] type of worldview identified as 'religious' is rendered transparent in these contemporary 'fiction-based' religions...In the contemporary West it is possible now to observe religion emerging in real time/before our eyes from play, narrative, humour, the whimsical use of the category of the sacred and experiences of Durkheimian collective effervescence."

Whether we are watching religion emerge from invented religions as holographic re-enactments of our ancestral belief systems, or are re-imagining religion as a new artform (while remembering it as the Ur-Medium), the task of re-writing, re-coding, re-performing and re-constructing religion in the information age has fallen into the hands of artists. French Performance Artist Orlan claims that artists must "observe the germs of the future" and goes so far as to suggest it is our task to

> remember the future... We are all inscribed in our time and the artists are those that have the capacity to call it into question. ₂₉₈

As a Cultural Engineer, I feel myself and many of the artists discussed in this thesis do more than *observe*, or attempt to *remember* the future: we are building alternate futures and fictioning worlds into form. Art making *is* world-building, but cultural engineering takes that to a new level and proposes that art may also be a way to re-order the world. This is most obvious in the realm of speculative fiction, wherein future worlds are imagined, described and constructed as blueprints for the worlds that the future inherits. By inventing my own queer religion as art, and placing it in an imagined ancient future, I am radically expanding the category of the sacred and re-imagining the cosmos where the future is already queer.

By rendering transparent the means through which religions operate to produce religious experiences, I offer this manual and grimoire to those who long to hack their own belief systems and produce their own religiosities, and for those who would like to observe the alchemical process of invented religions in motion. For those who want to believe, or experiment with belief, I offer my work as a laboratory, where one can test out their assumptions, project themselves against me and my mythos, and leave the experiment unscathed by dogma, orthodoxy or the need for worship. By rendering religion an artistic medium, and making it open-source, I construct creative sanctuaries for healing from the traumas of grand narratives, while liberating and returning religion to its birthplace:

the human imagination.

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[297] Carole Cusack, "Play, narrative and the creation of religion: Extending the theoretical base of 'invented religions" in *The Problem of Invented Religions,* ed. Steven J. Sutcliffe & Carole Cusack, (London: Routledge, 2016), 10.

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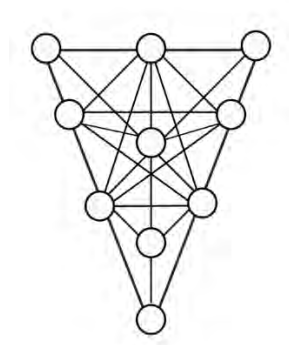
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