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Between Darwin and the Devil

Modern Satanism as Discourse, Milieu, and Self



Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor

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Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Archaeology and Religious Studies



NTNU – Trondheim
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Acknowledgements

The modest beginnings of this dissertation took place in a small graduate student writing room I shared with 3 other students at the University of Copenhagen. In late 2000, my supervisor sent me some light entertainment which turned out to be quite the distraction from work on my master's thesis. It was a letter from a Danish Satanist describing her experiences with the counter-cult organization Dialogue Centre International, both alone and with a friend. Apparently a Christian employee expected Satanists to be everything the myths and stereotypes said they would be, hinting at bloodletting, handcuffs and other erotic pursuits in a meeting convened to *dispel* myths and mistakes in the Centre's information material. Surely exasperating for the Satanists and disappointing for the staff. Ten years have passed since this event, and I now have contact with Satanists in Scandinavia and abroad, have participated in satanic summer parties and winter celebrations in Denmark, and have a much broader grasp of modern Satanism both online and offline. A dozen books, articles and papers (and two kids) stand between me now and me arriving in Trondheim in the darkest winter, sleeping on the floor of an empty house – next to the heater, mind you, but still cold. So it is time for conclusions.

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“The Seeds of Satan: Conceptions of Magic in Contemporary Satanism”. *Aries* 12, no. 1 (forthcoming).

“‘Smite Him Hip and Thigh’: Satanism, Violence, and Transgression”. In *Violence and New Religious Movements*, edited by James R. Lewis, 351-76. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

“From Book to Bit: Enacting Satanism Online”. In *Contemporary Esotericism*, edited by Kennet Granholm and Egil Asprem. London: Equinox, forthcoming.

* In the final stages of proof-reading the introduction, I became aware of problems with the (accursed) EndNote reference program. Apparently, it did not approve of my editing and deleted about a third of the references in the bibliography, but not in the text. As a result, I have painstakingly recreated the entire reference list. I might have missed some titles, but the text looks complete. I apologize for any difficulties it might cause. Although I would like to blame software, all remaining errors and shortcomings are my responsibility.

Heart of Darkness: A Topography of Modern Satanism

The danger of having [‘wannabees’] being presented as if they were real Satanists happens when lazy journalists, television producers, and ‘hackademics’ doing shoddy research use these losers as exemplars, as if they represented some major faction amongst Satanists. We know that they are not, and these ‘researchers’ would do too if they got off their backsides and separated fact from the fictions spewed on various web sites. (Peter H. Gilmore in *Nocturnum*, 2005: 139)

If we view modern Satanism as ‘a religion’ or ‘religion’, how do we account for its specific and general nature? Peter Gilmore, the High Priest of the Church of Satan quoted above, clearly regards modern Satanism as a single entity or bounded ideology that is the property of the Church. Everything else is “Devil worship” or adolescent posturing. Contrary to such a confident assessment, this dissertation argues that contemporary religious Satanism is in fact a number of antinomian ‘self-religious’ discourses and practices utilized by a bewildering number of groups and individuals acting in a heterogeneous ‘satanic milieu’. The subject of modern Satanism and flesh-and-blood Satanists is thus intimately connected to the demythologizing and resacralizing trends of modernity. As with other mythical figures, Satan has become ambivalent, genre-dependent and articulated according to need, rather than a reference point with a specific set of characteristics or essence. Similarly, Satanism has moved from something evil associated with others to something positive associated with the self. No longer exclusively identified with devils, witches and warlocks, it has now moved into the identity market of the Internet age, in no small part *because* of the Church of Satan.

Consequently, ‘Satanism’ has to be understood as a concept marking out a contested space in which actors present themselves as true or genuine and others as false or ‘pseudo’-Satanic. To understand *what* Satanism is, we have to ascertain *how* it is constructed and *why* it is so; in other words, once and for all discard the attention to belief in stable worldviews for a consideration of discursive practice that is both created by and creating the field of possibilities in which it exists. To do so, the articles that follow deal with a wide spectrum of incendiary tracts, magical rituals, formal organizations and enigmatic individuals all utilizing Satan as a positive self-identifier. By studying the satanic milieu within which contemporary religious Satanism-s are formed rather than any one text, group or community, I present an analysis of satanic discourse focused on the strategies involved in building and defending a meaningful place for the self and the array of resources recruited to authenticate interpretations and legitimate discursive roles.

Part One. A Doorway to the Satanic: Introducing the Study

The failure to treat religion “as religion” – that is, the refusal to ratify its claim of transcendent nature and sacrosanct status – may be regarded as heresy and sacrilege by those who construct themselves as religious, but it is the starting point for those who construct themselves as historians. (Lincoln, 1996: thesis 12)

The dissertation consists of this introductory essay and five articles written over a four-year span, dealing with developments within modern Satanism from Anton LaVey’s seminal acts in the late 1960s to the interpretations of successors, opponents or rivals in the following decades. The principal aim of the essay is to magnify significant concepts and themes emerging from the articles themselves and elaborate on both developed trains of thought and the loose ends that abound in a work of this nature. Regarding *magnification*, I have endeavored to provide a fresh theoretical angle and a distinct empirical focus in all studies. Nevertheless, the specific content and sometimes even the form of the articles were dictated as much by my research questions and overall project plan as by the offers I received to participate in book projects on particular themes. Accordingly, one aim of the essay is to clarify and synthesize analytically developed tools with relevance to modern religious Satanism and beyond, such as strategies of ‘sanitization’ or ‘esoterization’ in the construction of satanic discourse.

On the issue of *elaboration* and refinement, broader issues of definition, theory and methodology have only been cursorily treated in the individual articles. There is thus a need to revisit and contextualize the common points as well as fill in the blanks. For example, from the outset I have combined Colin Campbell’s sociological double of ‘cultic milieu’ and ‘seekership’ (Campbell, 1972, 1978), with the concept of ‘self-religion’ proposed by Paul Heelas (Heelas, 1982, 1996c) to situate and define modern Satanism. Nevertheless, the specific arguments rest on a much wider foundation centered on the concepts of discourse, milieu and self that slowly became more explicit and sophisticated. Such issues need to be elaborated and connected to contemporary theory outside the study of religion. Consequently, the essay will discuss some relevant theoretical and methodological trajectories developed over the past four years of work, which are mostly implicit in the articles because of the project-based approach.

Part one introduces the context of study and the aims, purpose and scope of the dissertation, while part two attends to previous research and the overarching methodological, terminological and material concerns. This is followed by a third part that opens by revisiting the arguments of the articles in more depth. This sets the tone for offering a specific theoretical syn-

thesis dealing with the major concepts of satanic ‘discourse’, ‘milieu’ and ‘self’, sparked by a discussion of my previous definition and classification of modern Satanism. Finally, part four concludes by way of reflection on further research.

I. 1. Setting the Stage: Context and Purpose

The occult is not the same thing as the satanic. So people who are involved in Satan worship are not the same thing as those are involved in Wicca, but we would say Satanists are Satanists. I don’t even consider pagans in the same ways as I would consider those involved in the new age, but I think it’s fair to say the occult can be a doorway to the satanic. (Father Gary Thomas in Aloï, 2011. Comment deleted)

It is customary to begin any study with a critical assessment of the status of research within the chosen field. While it is prudent to point out academic lacunae to demonstrate the relevance of a new undertaking and legitimize the job done, I have to begin by saying that more academic work has been done on modern religious Satanism in the past ten to fifteen years than in any previous period. We have historical studies (e.g. Faxneld, 2006; Medway, 2001), quantitative sociological examinations (e.g. Lewis, 2001b, 2010), local ethnographic studies (e.g. Fügmann, 2009; G. Harvey, 1995), studies of specific groups and trends (eg. Granholm, 2009; Smoczynski, forthcoming), as well as good surveys within wider studies (eg. La Fontaine, 1999; Partridge, 2004b: 78-84; 2005: 207-55). Many of these examples have their origin as conference papers, a fact which in itself indicates a growing interest in academic research. In contrast to earlier gatherings, for example the 1992 CESNUR/CREA conference *The Challenge of Magic: Spiritualism, Satanism and Occultism in Contemporary Society* in Lyon, the first international conference focused *solely* on religious Satanism was *Satanism in the Modern World*, held in Trondheim in November 2009. Apart from such dedicated venues, the number of panels and papers dealing with Satanism and the Left-Hand Path has increased steadily at open conferences as well, multiplying exponentially when moving to graduate and undergraduate work.¹

¹ On Lyon 1992, see Martin & Introvigne, 1994; Martin & LaPlantine, 1994. On Trondheim 2009, see <http://www.ntnu.no/iar/konferanser/satanisminthemodernworld> and the forthcoming anthology *The Devil’s Party: Satanism in Modernity* (Petersen & Faxneld, forthcoming). The Trondheim conference will be followed up by another, *Satanism in Western Culture*, in Stockholm in September 2011; see <http://www.erg.su.se/pub/jsp/polopoly.jsp?d=16068>. On individual papers, see for example the cyber-proceedings of the annual CESNUR conferences in London 2001, Salt Lake City/Provo 2002, Vilnius 2003, Waco 2004 and Palermo 2005 at the website <http://www.cesnur.org/conferenze.htm#past>. For more information on research, dissertations and student work, see the section on previous research below.

This proliferation is not difficult to explain. First, it is concurrent with the last decade's rise of studies in 'occulture' and reenchantment (e.g. Hume & McPhillips, 2006; Partridge, 2004a) as well as the darker aspects of Western esotericism, often lumped together as the Left-Hand Path or 'dark spiritualities' (e.g. Drury, 2008; Evans, 2007; Granholm, 2005; Urban, 2006). Further, these new subject areas coincide somewhat belatedly with the general upsurge during the 1990s in the academic study of Neopaganism (Blain, Ezzy, & Harvey, 2004), Western esotericism (Asprem, 2009; Hanegraaff, 2001, 2004), and the New Age (Kemp, 2004). In fact, these subdisciplines have already been recognized as legitimate academic pursuits, with institutions and chairs, dedicated conferences and journals, scholarly networks, a steady production of degrees and so on. Such professionalization provides both a conceptual 'space' and physical 'place' within the disciplinary assembly of religious studies, comparative religion and the history, sociology and anthropology of religion (McCutcheon, 2001, 2003). In this sense, Neopaganism, Western esotericism and the New Age follow in the footsteps of the study of new religious movements that emerged in the 1970s, grew to maturity in the 1980s and 1990s, and is established today across a variety of disciplines (Mayer, 2004).

The study of Satanism and the Left-Hand Path, along with 'dark' occulture and resacralization, shares this emergent nature and follows this general trajectory, although I doubt 'Satanism Studies' will ever become an established subdiscipline. Nevertheless, there is a new area of study emerging, and the five articles presented here are part of that collective endeavor to bring new academic knowledge on related Satanic and Left-Hand Path religions to public awareness. And that is a cue for the other side of the medal: What is done is still woefully little; it is highly fragmented and it seems to have little penetration into the wider academic world, not to mention the public. Compared to popular scholarly histories on witchcraft (e.g. Russell, 1980), 'biographies' of Satan (e.g. Stanford, 1996), or folkloristic assessments of modern demonologies and moral panics (eg. Ellis, 2000), ethnographic and historical work on self-declared Satanists is largely unknown outside a small group of academics. Not even fellow 'Satanism scholars' feel themselves to be part of a disciplinary matrix with a common pool of examples, solutions and theoretical foundations (cf. Kuhn, 1996 [1962], esp. 174-187). Such academic marginality and 'pre-paradigmatic' confusion might sting, but it also shows that academic misconceptions differ little from popular fallacies about Satanism.²

² As I recently discovered when posting the invitation to an upcoming Satanism conference to the *Academic Study of Magic* e-list. The first reply was: "Satanism is very reactionary; why lock yourself into a dualism with the thing you most dislike, when a simple 'fuck'em all' will suffice to set off on a holistic path" (John Power,

What is more, balanced academic treatments are outnumbered ten-to-one when compared to ‘faith-based’ theological and ‘critical’ journalistic treatments of Satanism as a subversive or dangerous social ‘other’. This multiplies to a hundred-to-one if we include works of popular culture using this collective demonology as inspiration. The recent boom in possession movies is a case in point: *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* (S. Derrickson, 2005), *REC* (J. Balagueró & P. Plaza, 2007), *Paranormal Activity* (O. Peli, 2007), *The Haunting in Connecticut* (P. Cornwell, 2009), *The Last Exorcism* (D. Stamm, 2010), and *The Rite* (M. Håfström, 2011), to name a few of the more popular titles.³ The strength of this mélange of occult and supernatural evil lies exactly in its amorphousness. In the words of Father Gary Thomas, the inspiration for Håfström’s *The Rite* quoted above, witches, ghosts, Ouija Boards, demons, all act as a “doorway to the satanic” (Aloi, 2011). His assessment subtly cancels out the distinctions made between “Satan worship” and “the occult”, “Wicca/pagans”, and “the new age”, by conflating them all into high-risk pursuits ultimately associated with the Prince of Darkness. Although this orthodox Catholic ‘lumping together’ might upset many secularized westerners (especially regarding New Age ‘spirituality’), it is a dominant mode of cinematic evil, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction.

To paraphrase anthropologist Barbara Babcock, Satanism is “socially peripheral” but “symbolically central” (quoted in Stallybrass & White, 1986: 20), providing society with a potent ‘imaginary’ with which to think itself by contemplating the horror of the other. As with the carnival, the Gypsy, the Jew, the witch and a host of other marginal entities, they “play a symbolic role (...) out of all proportion with their actual social importance”, straddling the fence between reality and social imaginary (Stallybrass & White, 1986: 20). This potency makes it doubly interesting to focus on people actually *appropriating* this role by taking the name for themselves. Self-declared Satanists might be few in numbers and socially peripheral, but they too partake in being “symbolically central”, inasmuch as they appropriate a discursive ‘other’ – the imaginary Satanist, with its connotations of perversion, inversion, and taboo – and *turn it on its head* (cf. Stallybrass & White, 1986: 5, 23). Such acts of subversion install a third layer of enactment to the cultural scripts the historian of religion David Frankfurter has described as “direct” and “indirect mimetic performance” to distinguish the direct enactment of

ASM elist, posted February 2, 2011). The subsequent discussion served as a good illustration that confluences of Satanism and evil, puerile inversion, and Nazism and Fascism span both academic, popular, and esoteric discourse (Evans, 2007: 116-22, 175-76; 2009; Lowney, 2009), a collusion I wish to challenge here.

³ See eg. Peg Aloi’s *The Witching Hour* (<http://themediawitches.blogspot.com>) and *The Celluloid Bough* (<http://celluloidbough.blogspot.com>) and John Morehead’s *TheoFantastique* (<http://www.theofantastique.com>) for excellent blogs dealing with the representation of the occult, witchcraft and Satanism in contemporary culture, especially science fiction and fantastic cinema.

‘embodiment’, such as possession narratives, from the indirect acting ‘as if’ on presumed others we find in witch-hunting, for example (Frankfurter, 2006: 177-78). How can we characterize this third layer?

The emergence of Satanism as an autonomous religious alternative with a wider popular appeal is commonly traced via the ‘occult explosion’ of the 1960s to the figure of Anton S. LaVey, a colorful Californian character whose claim to fame lies in the founding of the Church of Satan in 1966 and the subsequent publication of *The Satanic Bible* three years later. Both creations are intimately tied to the biography of LaVey, who gradually came to define a ‘carnal’ religion independent of the Christian context and the wider esoteric milieu of occultism and witchcraft during the 1970s. In the developing activities of the informal Magic Circle out of which the Church grew, and later a number of books and essays, LaVey appeals to the scientific and the magical, the anti-Christian and the ‘counter-cultural’ in a complex of ideas and practices fraught with apparent paradox (Alfred, 1976; Lewis, 2002a). Hence his highly eclectic worldview combines a number of truths, half-truths and fictions, guided as much by the emotional response and subjective impact on the Satanist as by claims to objective truth.

Both cultural and subcultural discourse *on* the satanic certainly existed before San Francisco became the satanic capitol of the world; and as I will discuss fully in due time, ‘Satanists’ did exist before LaVey. Yet his galvanizing influence cannot be overstated. What LaVey did was to codify an extremely influential *satanic* discourse within the cultic milieu and beyond into mainstream culture, opening a space for a different type of mimetic performance that was organized as a satanic *religion*. Similar to other diffuse alternative religious ‘movements’ appropriating a discursive other, such as modern Witchcraft and Vampirism, the terms Satan and Satanist were ‘de-otherized’ into a positive identity of alterity (cf. G. Harvey, 2009; Laycock, 2009: 28-31). But this is only possible when the term itself has been removed from the original context, here the Christian framework. Further, such appropriations are never mere inversions of the negative; they often *retain* select aspects of sinister power and associations of darker pursuits. Other materials are also incorporated into this assemblage to further strengthen the new register of meaning through expansion, which often contribute to more rather than less ambiguity. The new space was thus quickly filled with a variety of heterodox interpretations of the satanic, challenging the dominance of LaVey’s creation that formalized an autonomous satanic milieu and a satanic ‘tradition’ in the first place.

These processes reveal a host of interesting interrelations between the symbolic hierarchies of high and low, relations that are both interdependent and locked in conflict. By stepping outside the role ascribed to them through demonization, these Satanists work as “hybrids”, potentially challenging both the naive inversion of adolescents and popular culture that “celebrates excluded elements”, and the very binary logic of the ‘system’ itself “by erasing and interrogating the relationships which constitute it” (Stallybrass & White, 1986: 56-59). Of course, this seldom negates the cultural connotations that were there in the first place, which brings us back to the critical treatments of ‘deviant’ subculture that are not overly convinced by the reclamatory rhetoric of self-declared Satanists, witches and vampires today, a position reflected in the tenuous state of academic research.

So, coming full circle, I am motivated by the lack of a larger sketch or model, focused on the present, which provides a broad exploration of the subject and a conceptual framework with which to bring together scholars in the field. In a general sense this work is marking some preliminary academic boundaries by investigating the borders, frontiers, and inclusions and exclusions at work inside one specific segment of the heterogeneous field of contemporary ‘alternative’ religiosity in the West. By attending to Satanism in particular, we can equip ourselves to say something about specific nooks and crannies in the religious ecology, but also about neighboring currents and the wider contexts and conditions affecting contemporary religion.

I. 2. The Shape of Things to Come: Aims and Scope of the Study

If culture as a noun seems to carry associations with some sort of substance in ways that appear to conceal more than they reveal, *cultural* the adjective moves one into the realm of differences, contrasts, and comparisons that is more helpful. This adjectival sense of culture, which builds on the context-sensitive, contrast-centered heart of Saussurean linguistics, seems to me one of the virtues of structuralism that we have tended to forget in our haste to attack it for its ahistorical, formal, binary, mentalist, and textualist associations. (Appadurai, 1996: 12)

Understood as a satanic milieu, contemporary Satanism is in itself a hodge-podge of ideas, practices, groups and discourses. Specific articulations of ‘Satanism’ are located on the one hand in the relative safety of books, journals and peer networks, and on the other in the public arena of instant publishing and websites, both of which stand in a productive tension with alternative subcultural interpretations and the wider cultural discourse on the satanic. Despite

this fragmented and virtual nature, organized groups, significant spokespersons and solitaries in informal networks share a coherent ‘world’ in contrast to historical Satanism and the Satanism of youth culture, popular culture and moral panic. Hence any study of modern religious Satanism should acknowledge the break from what I have called ‘structurally conservative’ discourse on the satanic, semantically connected to Christianity, to the ‘structurally radical’ satanic discourse instigated by LaVey and subsequently developed in many directions in the following decades (cf. Hammer, 2001a: 33; Petersen, 2009b: 10-14). That said, as the satanic milieu today is a heterogeneous network containing many different takes on the satanic, from atheism and materialism to full-blown goetic magic and neo-Gnosticism, Satanism is specifically *not only* Devil worship or the ‘I-theism’ of the Church of Satan, but both and more. Accordingly, the over-arching intention of the dissertation is to provide an explorative study of contemporary Satanism as polyvocal satanic discourse in a deterritorialized satanic milieu.

In order to undertake this general venture, smaller stones have to be placed. In this regard the analysis rests on two interrelated strands: one strategic and the other material. The strategic thread centers on *how* modern *religious* Satanism has been articulated and legitimized from its emergence in the late 1960s to the present, spurring the important question of the *conditions* under which this articulation has taken place. The material strand attends to the complementary question of *which* actors, resources, themes, and arenas have emerged from and contributed to these conflicts and negotiations of authority and tradition. By focusing on the ‘meso’-level of discourse and strategies connecting the collective and individual, inside and outside, past and present (and future), I offer a systematic account of the elusive articulation of satanic identities and worldviews over time. Such meaning-making stimulates conflict as well as consensus, and it has been my goal to analyze well-known major players as well as shine a light into more marginal nooks in the milieu.

Article I investigates two schisms: One leading to the formation of the satanic milieu and the other to the plurality found today. Here the focus is on the interrelated dynamics of individual authority and collective tension framed through various uses of positive and negative renegotiation. Article II expands on the legitimation of tradition and authority within the milieu by examining the strategic use of ‘science’ and ‘esotericism’ as an ambiguous ‘esoterization’ of the secular and ‘secularization’ of the esoteric. This is subsequently related to syncretism and eclecticism as ‘business-as-usual’ in the ‘trading zones’ of the cultic milieu. Article III further develops the hermeneutics of the satanic subject by taking a closer look at the articulation and use of magic. Working both as a utilitarian tool and an expression of self, magic is illuminat-

ing the creative dynamic between authenticity and artificiality. Article IV tackles mythological, ostensive and symbolic violence associated with Satanism in order to propose transgression and antinomianism as exemplary satanic technologies of the self, especially when ‘sanitized’ within the arts and through selective non-conformity. Article V brings the dissertation to a close by analyzing the satanic milieu online, performing two varieties of ‘virtual fieldwork’: A network-oriented approach and a look at the hybrid texts of a satanic discussion group. Both gauge the extent to which ‘community’ exists in the singular or the plural.

Taken together, the strategic and material aspects highlight on the one hand the resources appropriated by individual agency and on the other hand the discursive locality within which significant context resides. As strategic agency, individual hermeneutics are always incorporating something outside the self, namely the resources and amorphous relations in the milieu or habitat in which it is situated. As material location, the milieu is ‘in itself’ a virtual ‘thing’ that is both producing, but also produced by the networks, social spaces, resources and so on articulating an imagined ‘togetherness’. Accordingly, part three of this essay will offer a theoretical redescription of contemporary Satanism through the terms ‘satanic discourse’, ‘satanic milieu’, and ‘satanic self’ based on the analysis developed in the five articles. This will hopefully be of use in future studies of modern Satanism, in neighboring subfields, and in studies of the heterodoxies of modernity.

Part Two. Getting There: Means and Methods

You must be creative. Take inspiration from the most sordid sources if necessary, but never imitate. Rip-off artists cannot proclaim themselves divinities because they lack the originality or creativity to come up with fresh ideas, let alone new worlds. (Anton S. LaVey, "How to be God (or the Devil)", in LaVey, 1992: 66)

After getting introduced to the central themes, issues and circumstances in part one, this second part attends to elements of research design and execution. The aim is to place the present study within ongoing disciplinary and methodological discussions, providing a background for and reflection on the work done in the articles. It consists of two sections. The first section, 'Previous research', is a critical survey of relevant literature focused on modern Satanism and neighboring fields. Here, I aspire to be inclusive in terms of material covered, as no previous study, nor the articles to come, have surveyed the breadth of studies on religious Satanism and its context. In addition to works dealing with Satanism in any shape or form, the nature of the thesis has led me to read literature in many related fields of so-called 'alternative' religiosity outside the increasingly fuzzy 'mainstream': Western esotericism, the 'occult', Neopaganism, 'New Age', new religious movements, 'invented religions' and so on. Relevant empirical and/or theoretical perspectives from these studies are reviewed and developed in the following sections and in the articles. The second section, 'Methods, terms, and sources', elaborates on the mixed execution of the five articles by describing the collection and systematization of texts and the analysis of discourse and practice. In both sections, individual treatments are necessarily brief and general in scope; for more extended discussion, see part three and the article studies.

II. 1. Previous Research

So if you meet me/ - Have some courtesy/ - Have some sympathy, and some taste/ - Use all your well-learned politesse/ - Or I'll lay your soul to waste, um yeah/ - Pleased to meet you, hope you guessed my name (Rolling Stones, *Sympathy for the Devil*, 1968)

I have divided this treatment of previous research into three thematic parts: Modern religious Satanism and the satanic milieu; popular, aesthetic and esoteric discourse on the satanic; and Satanism as demonology.

A. Modern religious Satanism and the satanic milieu

The earliest accounts of modern religious Satanism as a new satanic discourse are reportages on the resurgence of witchcraft and black magic in newspapers and magazines of the late 1960s and early 1970s (cf. McCloud, 2004). In the vast majority of American cases, they dwell extensively on Anton LaVey and the Church of Satan, often contrasting Satanism with ‘white witches’ such as Sybil Leek (e.g. Alexander, 1967; Klein, 1970; Time, 1972). Internationally, they usually connect Satanism to local individuals involved in satanic witchcraft and occultism, such as Martin Lamers *Kerk van Satan* in the Netherlands (Baddeley, 2000b: 103-105) and Gittan Jäderberg in Denmark (Berg, 1973; Gade, 1974; Snitkjær, 1973), who both have connections to LaVey. I have also consulted many book-length exposés or ‘travel reports’ to the underground published in the early 1970s, and as with media reports, they frequently associate Satanism with the wider ‘occult explosion’ (Freedland, 1972; Godwin, 1972; Roberts, 1971) and/or the upsurge in ‘alternative’ lifestyle (Cabot, 1970; Fritscher, 2004 [1973]). Although often sensationalist, these sources nevertheless do give us an early glimpse into the important formative years of the nascent milieu, especially when they hand over the microphone to the practitioners, thus providing ethnographic data.⁴

A frequent feature of popular articles and books is their attention to the history of witchcraft and black magic, framing modern Satanism within a moral framework of Christian heresy (e.g. Godwin, 1972: 229-41; Rachleff, 1971: 69-122; Roberts, 1971: 161-65).⁵ A good example is Arthur Lyon’s *The Second Coming: Satanism in America* (Lyons, 1970), later rewritten as *Satan Wants You* (Lyons, 1988) to cover the ‘Satanic Panic’ of the 1980s. This is a fast-paced history containing a decent, if somewhat fault-prone, ethnographic account of contemporary Satanism (Lyons, 1988: 84-138), lumping together spurious pre-modern accounts, organized “neo-Satanic churches”, and a host of criminals and deviants. In contrast, Jack

⁴ As such, they straddle the divide between research and source material. For an impressive collection of examples, see the appendices of Aquino, 2009a. See also Barton, 1990: 24-25; 1992: 115-119 for the Church of Satan’s own somewhat hyperbolic account.

⁵ For example, Susan Roberts’ *Witches U.S.A.* adopts her informants’ view on black magic and Satanism as real threats (Roberts, 1971: 161-229), although she dismisses the Church of Satan as a money-making scheme (ibid.: 217-223) and Herbert Sloane’s Toledo-based Our Lady of Endor Coven, Ophite Cultus Sathanas as an idiosyncratic blend of Gnosticism and personal fetishes (ibid.: 200-217). In the same vein, both Nat Freedland and John Godwin cover LaVey as a quite sane component on the ‘satanic scene’ (Freedland, 1972: 148-54; Godwin, 1972: 241-49) that is nevertheless stretched to cover kinky ‘sex cults’ and acid-crazed ‘Satan cultists’ like Charles Manson (Freedland, 1972: 169-78) or the Asmodeus Society (Godwin, 1972: 249-51). The same all-inclusive, yet dismissive strategy is pursued in explicitly faith-based accounts such as clairvoyant Daniel Logan’s *America Bewitched*, which refrains from quoting the Enochian keys in *The Satanic Bible* for fear of summoning “evil forces” (Logan, 1974: 56-59), Father Richard Woods eclectic “Satanism Today” (Woods, 1972), and Owen Rachleff’s skeptical *The Occult Conceit* (Rachleff, 1971). All are a far cry from ‘first-hand’ research and are purely entertainment or material for research.

Fritscher's *Popular Witchcraft* provides a wide-ranging exploration of popular witchcraft based on largely sympathetic engagement with a range of participants on the 'scene'. Accordingly, it is a snap-shot of the early cultic milieu connecting popular culture, gay and BDSM-scenes, and the occult revival as independent, yet interrelated subcultures deeply immersed in American history, gender politics and the ambiguity of the mainstream. Conformism and Christianity become common enemies, which facilitates movement across these self-contained circles. A similar survey is provided by Gavin Baddeley's more recent *Lucifer Rising* (2000b), which is both inclusive, as the book examines Satanism as a historical, sub-cultural and popular phenomenon, and more carefully crafted, as Baddeley separates the different manifestations and let individuals speak for themselves in interviews. Even after 10 years, this book ranges as one of the best non-scholarly works on the satanic milieu and popular culture, his membership of the Church of Satan notwithstanding.⁶

The first academic studies on modern religious Satanism are sociological and ethnographical (Alfred, 1976; Moody, 1974, 1974 [1971]; Truzzi, 1972, 1974). The work of sociologist Marcello Truzzi is a particularly salient example (Truzzi, 1972, 1974), as his articles take popular and journalistic treatments as the central starting point, and thus connect Satanism to popular witchcraft, the occult revival and the possibility of an emergent new religiosity. His studies are mainly exploratory and classificatory in scope, and propose a plethora of categories of "white" and "black" witchcraft to understand the empirical forms of this particular "foci of occult interest dominating the youth culture" (Truzzi, 1972: 18; for a schematic illustration, see Truzzi, 1974: 639). These are inscribed in some insightful comments on the legitimation of authority (Truzzi, 1974: 636-37), the dynamics of secularization and 'massification' of the occult (Truzzi, 1972: 16-19, 28-30), and the multidimensionality of the field (Truzzi, 1972: 18; 1974: 628-38). The latter two anticipate the notions of 'milieu' and 'occulture' that is used in this study, although Truzzi seemed confident in downplaying their significance as "pop religion", a contestable position today.

In contrast to Truzzi's 'categorical' sociology, Randall H. Alfred and Edward J. Moody approach Satanism through ethnographic methods, in both cases participant observation of the

⁶ See Baddeley, 2000b: 9. Michael Aquino states that Arthur Lyons was a member as well (from 1968 to 1975, if not further), although Lyons himself describes it as an "affiliation for research purposes" (Aquino, 2009a: 99, 435). In the same vein, Jack Fritscher was apparently initiated in some capacity and mentions his deep admiration for LaVey (Fritscher, 2004 [1973]: xv, 5).

early Church of Satan.⁷ Although the theoretical reflections may seem dated, the empirical data is notable (especially on early membership figures and demographics) and they both introduce valid theses. Of the two, sociologist Randall Alfred's study of the Church of Satan has had more influence on this dissertation (Alfred, 1976), as the Weberian dimension of Alfred's work is prescient and at the root of my discourse-strategic analysis. Although I have many reservations with seeing Satanism as "another Protestant sect" (ibid.: 199), his condensed analysis opens up for incorporating Satanism in the wider cultural dynamics of late modernity. Taking his cue from the work of Truzzi, he initially connects Satanism to the 'counter-cultural' youth movement and the witchcraft revival. But through the study the major differences between these factors and the Church of Satan becomes apparent, such as the stark contrasts in the view on drugs, justice, and occultism, which places the Church at odds with youth culture (Alfred, 1976: 185-87, 194-96). Alfred implies three undeveloped fronts connected to milieu and self: the individualization, secularization and resacralization of religious means and goals; the "polymorphous galaxy" of "symbol systems" (ibid.: 200); and the wider history of hedonism and capitalism, all of which I will revisit in part three.

Anthropologist Edward Moody takes a different road by combining ethnography with social psychology (Moody, 1974, 1974 [1971]). In the book chapter "Magical Therapy: An Anthropological Investigation of Contemporary Satanism", this colors all observation data, as Moody is more interested in the psychological 'why' than the more basic, but also less fashion-prone 'how' and 'what' (Moody, 1974). As with previous studies, he connects Satanism to witchcraft of the past and present; where he diverges is in the explicit focus on instrumental beliefs and magical practice as emotional management tools. As such, all Satanists become "deviant or abnormal in some aspect" (Moody, 1974: 359), marginalized and unable to cope with their desires, frustration, envy, and need for "power" (ibid.: 358). While this approach is actually very interesting, not least given the wealth of private ritual activities described from two years of participant observation (1967-69), Moody's focus on personal inadequacies and emotional insecurity quickly becomes one-dimensional and over-generalized.⁸ Particularly, the *specificities* of Satanism as a developed discourse and practice disappear in the haze of

⁷ As with Baddeley, Lyons, Wolfe and Fritscher, both Randall Alfred and Edward Moody were high-ranking and enthusiastic members of the Church of Satan, allegedly for ethnographic reasons (Alfred, 1976: 183-85; Moody, 1974: 356, 358n3; 1974 [1971]: 223n-224; cf. Aquino, 2009a: 38). In addition, Marcello Truzzi was on very friendly terms with LaVey (Aquino, 2009a: 38).

⁸ Actually the earlier write-up of his research, the article "Urban Witches", reads as more contextually aware because of length and a more empirical focus (Moody, 1974 [1971]). Perhaps the excessive use of psychological theory is a distancing technique because of his membership involvement?

human potential psychology. As such, his thesis remains tied to the early Church and to questionable theory.

The work of Truzzi, Alfred and Moody are seminal works providing three paradigmatic approaches to modern Satanism emulated in the research of the following decades: A descriptive and typological approach, relying mainly on historical and sociological data; a thematic and hermeneutic perspective centered on ethnography and/or texts, often incorporating sociological perspectives; and a fused psychological and anthropological angle, focusing on the interplay of actors and worldview. These categories are purely heuristic, of course, but they can serve as a guiding principle as we move along to the present.

The *first* approach, the descriptive and typological, is popular with general overviews of Satanism, in large part because of the natural need in such panoptic works to distinguish the modern and historical, the real and mythological, and formal and diffuse within ‘Satanism’ as a topic of inquiry. As noted above, this heresiological frame often distorts the coverage of modern satanic groups in the sense covered here, as spurious historical cases, satanic panics and teenage Satanism are all covered under the same heading. Even so, these studies frequently contribute sensible information on contemporary trends. Two examples of recent research indebted to Truzzi in both method and angle are German scholar Joachim Schmidt’s thoughtful and readable overview *Satanismus: Mythos und Wirklichkeit* (Schmidt, 2003 [1992]) and the work of Italian sociologist of religion Massimo Introvigne (e.g. Introvigne, 1995; Introvigne, 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 2002 [1997], 2006, 2009). Where Schmidt’s book splits time evenly between historical and contemporary cases (Schmidt, 2003 [1992], esp. 126-232 on contemporary trends), Introvigne’s *Enquête sur le Satanisme* devotes considerable time on topics outside self-declared religious Satanism (Introvigne, 1997a, esp. 255-396 on contemporary trends).⁹

As an intermediate category between the broadly descriptive and the more thematically informed we find something quite novel, namely ethnographic and/or sociological area studies, many localized *outside* the United States. Recurrently, local ethnographies are written in dialogue with analysis of anti-Satanic discourses and activities in the media, justice and political

⁹ Other examples used here are Jean S. La Fontaine’s chapter in Ankerloo and Clark’s *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, volume 6 (La Fontaine, 1999, esp. 94-110); Christopher Partridge’s survey of Satanism as religion, popular culture and demonology in *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (Partridge, 2004b: 78-84; 2005: 207-55); Asbjørn Dyrendal’s succinct introductory articles (Dyrendal, 2004b, 2005, 2007); and James R. Lewis’ encyclopedic *Satanism Today* (Lewis, 2001a).

systems of the country. Good examples include conference papers on Eastern Europe by Milda Alisauskiene (Lithuania), Ringo Ringvee (Estonia), and Rafal Smoczynski (Poland) (Alisauskiene, 2009; Ringvee, 2009; Smoczynski, 2009, forthcoming), and for Scandinavia, Asbjørn Dyrendal's collaborative studies on media representations and 'glocalization' dynamics (Dyrendal & Lap, 2008; Søderlind & Dyrendal, 2009) as well as the collaboration by Hjelm, Dyrendal, Henrik Bogdan and myself (Hjelm, Bogdan, Dyrendal, & Petersen, 2009). Also noteworthy here is Dagmar Fügmann's huge doctoral dissertation *Zeitgenössischer Satanismus in Deutschland* (Fügmann, 2009), which is almost a shadow image of this dissertation in its dedication to ethnographic data rather than theory.¹⁰

Related to these local ethnographies is the important sociological work done by James R. Lewis, especially on the basic demographics of Satanism today (Lewis, 2001b, 2009, 2010). As his 'Satanism Surveys' are distributed and answered online, they both illustrate the importance of the Internet on fragmented subcultures and the utility when researching them, although data from (relatively) small samples (140 to 300 individuals) should be used with caution (Lewis, 2001b: 2, 5). In general, studies focusing on 'cyber-Satanism' have been few, arguably beginning with Roald E. Kristiansen's now dated "Satan in Cyberspace" (R. Kristiansen, 2001 [1995]). Although the article is based on a quite thorough search of the web, it shines little light outside the well-known groups; in addition, it proves the futility of explaining anything based solely on Internet material, as Kristiansen concludes quite dogmatically from few online texts, without checking the validity of these conclusions on actual Satanists or even offline material. Hence one aspect of online Satanism in a particular point in

¹⁰ Let me provide a brief rundown. In general, Gavin Baddeley's travelogue *Lucifer Rising* covers groups and individuals from many regions (Baddeley, 2000b). For the United Kingdom, Dave Evans (2007, 2009) and Graham Harvey (1995, 2009) provide useful discussions. For Germany, see also Melanie Möller's *Satanismus als Religion der Überschreitung* (Möller, 2007), and of course Joachim Schmidt (2003 [1992]: 187-203, 214-223). Both Fügmann and Möller confirm that German Satanism acts like Satanism in other regions. For France, I have only a cursory impression from articles by Olivier Bobineau and Alexis Mombelet, but they too corroborate the dynamics we see elsewhere (Bobineau, 2009; Mombelet, 2009). The work of Introvigne (especially 1997b, 2009) and Andrea Menegotto (2009) covers Italian groups and trends. On Sweden, see Fredrik Gregorius' book *Satanismen i Sverige* (Gregorius, 2006); for Finland, see work by Titus Hjelm and Merja Hermonen (Hermonen, 2002; Hjelm, 2002, 2005a). See also studies on the black metal and 'goth' scenes, which largely belongs *outside* modern religious Satanism proper as aesthetic youth movements, yet have some membership overlap and ideological congruence (Boman, 2010; Forsberg, 2010; Fridh, 2010; Moynihan & Søderlind, 1998; Mørk, 2009; Rem, 2010). Going back to the United States, a host of descriptive (and often derivative) work is available in reference books and encyclopedias (e.g. Bromley & Ainsley, 1995; Melton, 2009: 864-66). Finally, two problematic studies that nevertheless deserve mention are Danish Lars Munk Sørensen's *Satanism*, an 'ethnography' of "counter-theologies" (L. M. Sørensen, 2006), and "Satanism in Contemporary America" by Diane Taub and Lawrence Nelson (Taub & Nelson, 1993). Sørensen's book can barely be seen as a scholarly study, yet he does provide some interesting interview snippets with unaffiliated Danish Satanists (L. M. Sørensen, 2006: 102-119). In contrast, Taub and Nelson discuss a "satanic continuum" from "establishment" groups to an "underground" of criminal deviants. Despite their qualifications, this directly associates Satanism with crime, making Devil-worship more of a cause than a symptom (Taub & Nelson, 1993: 525, 532).

time is blown out of proportion.¹¹ Besides the surveys of Lewis and Kristiansen, I have found a handful of case studies (some of which are already mentioned) using Internet material, usually based on a period of ‘surfing’ and snowball-sampling sites, texts and images (see Alisauskiene, 2009; Dyrendal, 2008; Petersen, 2002; Smoczynski, 2009, forthcoming).

The *second* approach covers topical studies centered on ethnographic and/or hermeneutical research, in other words interpretive work on various facets of Satanism or individual satanic groups and discourses. Developing in dialogue with the descriptive efforts of the previous category (especially Introvigne and La Fontaine), these studies provide core elements in a more refined picture of Satanism today. Empirically, the field of modern Satanism has broadened significantly. However, LaVey’s Church of Satan and Aquino’s Temple of Set are still the primary examples, and all of the descriptive volumes covered in the first approach discuss either one or both. In addition, several overviews of the Left-Hand path of Western esotericism include extended discussions, such as Stephen E. Flower’s emic history of ideas *Lords of the Left-Hand Path* (Flowers, 1997)¹² and religion scholar Nevill Drury’s *Stealing Fire from Heaven* (Drury, 2011).¹³

On the contemporary satanic milieu in the widest sense, I have consulted a variety of works on clearly satanic as well as conceptually related groups.¹⁴ Among them are Fredrik Gregorius’ study of ‘Luciferian’ witchcraft (Gregorius, forthcoming), as well as his cartography of ‘sinister’ groups in Sweden mentioned above (Gregorius, 2006). This also includes Bjørn Boman’s graduate assignment on the Temple of Black Light (Boman, 2010), studies by Henrik Bogdan and Egil Aspren on contemporary magic groups (Aspren, forthcoming; Bogdan, 2008), and the work of Kennet Granholm, mainly on the Swedish group Dragon Rouge (Granholm, 2005, 2009), but also on the Temple of Set and the Rune-Gild (Granholm, 2010, forthcoming-a). Granholm has also done interesting research on satanic iconography

¹¹ Kristiansen’s preliminary work was actually done to familiarize himself with the Internet and was compiled into two compendiums – as such, it has historical value (Kristiansen, personal communication, Oct. 6, 2010).

¹² Stephen E. Flowers has a doctorate in Germanic philology and is an ex-member of the Church of Satan, a member of the Temple of Set, and founder of several magical orders, most importantly the Rune-Gild (Granholm, 2010). *Lords of the Left-Hand Path* is set up as an essentialist “history of spiritual dissent” stretching from pre-history to the present, making it problematic as a scholarly source for older and more exotic currents, individuals and groups. Nevertheless, it is heavily referenced and definitely usable with caution for the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set (Flowers, 1997: 171-242).

¹³ Although a certain ‘Setian’ sympathy is prevalent in his understanding of modern religious Satanism, Drury has written usable presentations in several publications, such as interviews (Drury, 1985: 104-120), popular history (Drury, 2004: 188-198), thesis work (Drury, 2008: 127-132, 173-185), and scholarly surveys (Drury, 2009: 76-79; 2011: 78-81, 205-23).

¹⁴ I will discuss pertinent demarcating issues in greater detail in part three, section two, including the role of the scholar as arbiter for in- or exclusion.

(Granholt, forthcoming-b, forthcoming-c, forthcoming-d, forthcoming-e). In addition, historian Dave Evans' *The History of British Magick After Crowley* has some interesting reflections on 'black' magicians and on LaVey as an early Chaos Magician (Evans, 2007: 83-222, 374-76), while Nevill Drury has analyzed Australian witch Rosaleen Norton extensively (Drury, 1988, 2008, 2009).¹⁵ Finally, the non-scholarly works of Gavin Baddeley, Michael Moynihan and Didrik Søderlind, *Corvis Nocturnum*, and George Petros all provide extensive inside coverage of the wider implementation of the satanic across various subcultures, including actors within the satanic milieu (Moynihan & Søderlind, 1998; *Nocturnum*, 2005; Petros, 2007), as does Joseph Laycock's scholarly study of modern vampirism (Laycock, 2009) and Introvigne's "The Gothic Milieu: Black Metal, Satanism, and Vampires" (Introvigne, 2002 [1997]).

A particular category of empirical source material is the LaVey-biography. These biographies have played an important part in preliminary research and as (generally unreliable) secondary sources. Burton H. Wolfe's chapter on the Church of Satan in Tracy Cabot's lurid *Inside the Cults* (Wolfe, 1970) includes some amusing ethnographic tidbits as well as a repetition of much of the 'LaVey myth', the legendary biography of Anton LaVey that forms the backbone of both Wolfe's *The Devil's Avenger* (Wolfe, 1974) and Blanche Barton's biographies on the Church and LaVey, *The Church of Satan* and *The Secret Life of a Satanist* respectively (Barton, 1990, 1992). The unraveling of this myth, an activity that in itself often transcends the academic, probably begins with writer Lawrence Wright's 1991 *Rolling Stone* article "Sympathy For the Devil" (Wright, 1991, reproduced in Wright, 1993). It also dominates Burton Wolfe's revised and updated *The Black Pope* (Wolfe, 2008) as well as Michael Aquino's colossal Church biography *The Church of Satan* (Aquino, 2009a), the last of which I have consulted frequently in this thesis.

¹⁵ More peripheral to the present study are studies of the Order of Nine Angles and related 'Nazi satanic groups'. These groups, which I would definitely call 'fringe' even in the satanic milieu, are generally researched critically as extremist outgrowths of more benign Satanism-s, as in Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's *Black Sun* (Goodrick-Clarke, 2002: 213-32) and Mattias Gardell's *Gods of the Blood* (Gardell, 2003: 284-323). But interpretive ethnographies do exist, most notably the MA thesis of Jacob C. Senholt and a good survey of contemporary trends by George Sieg (Senholt, 2008; Sieg, forthcoming). In addition, Roel van Leeuwen's MA thesis on Kerry Bolton's Order of the Left Hand Path, based in New Zealand, analyze this particular Nazi-satanic synthesis (Leeuwen, 2008). A final borderline example, unrelated to Nazism, is William S. Bainbridge's influential study of the Process Church of the Final Judgment (Bainbridge, 1978, 1991). Based on a five-year ethnographic fieldwork, I have found Bainbridge's work to be insightful but ultimately marginal in the study of modern religious Satanism, as the development of the group and its psycho-cosmological discourse distances it from both satanic discourse and the Left-Hand path.

Moving from empirical to theoretical studies, where discussions are generally more thematic in scope, I have sought out a range of approaches to central topics which frequently use the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set as their only or primary cases. On Satanism as (a) ‘self-religion’, paganism scholar Graham Harvey is the first to apply the concept to the discourse of the Church and Temple and thus bring attention to the ‘detraditionalization’ of Satan (G. Harvey, 1995, 2009). His basic thesis has had a wide influence, not least on Norwegian historian of religion Asbjørn Dyrendal, who offers a refinement and empirical substantiation of Satanism as a self-religion in several articles (Dyrendal, 2004b, 2009a; Petersen & Dyrendal, forthcoming).¹⁶ On Satanism as ‘antinomian’, I have learned much from Hugh Urban’s entertaining book *Magia Sexualis*, although not from the fault-ridden chapter on historical Satanism and the Church of Satan (Urban, 2006: 191-221); Kim Knott’s *The Location of Religion*, which has a very interesting section on the antinomianism of the sinister left through a reading of Satanists Vexen Crabtree, Tyagi Nagasiva and LaVey (Knott, 2005: 163-68, 210-11); and Melanie Möller, who contrasts satanic and born-again narratives of transgression (Möller, 2007).¹⁷

On issues of authority and legitimacy in Satanism, especially between esotericism and science, an early contributor to the field is James R. Lewis. I have already covered his quantitative work, but he is also important in providing interpretive studies (Lewis, 2002a, 2002b; 2003, esp. 103-122; 2009). His research on the role of science in relation to the construction of authority of Anton LaVey, *The Satanic Bible* and the Church form the basis for both Urban and Knott above, as well as Maxwell Davies’ study of post-charismatic developments (M. Davies, 2009). Several of Asbjørn Dyrendal’s articles also deal with the ambiguous use of esoteric discourse as a significant negative and positive ‘other’ in LaVey and Aquino’s writings (Dyrendal, 2004a, 2009a, forthcoming-a, forthcoming-b). Finally, late in the research process I discovered Joshua Gunn’s massive thesis *Rhetorics of Darkness*, an erudite and wide-ranging study of the rhetorical underpinnings of occult discourse (Gunn, 2002; see also

¹⁶ See for example Drury, 2004: 200; Lap, forthcoming; Petersen, 2005, 2009b. Related to this topic are Cimmine Holt’s performative study of rituals in the Church of Satan (Holt, 2010) and the totally forgotten doctoral dissertation of sociologist John L. Henricks, *Satanism in the Post-Industrial Society*, which dedicates some 50 pages to the beliefs, practices and social structure of the Church of Satan (Henricks, 1977: 256-309). In Henricks’ analysis, Satanism becomes a prototypical instance of a desacralized negation of the Christian worldview that is simultaneously a sacralization of the values of contemporary secular society (ibid.: 2, 267-69, 274, 304-5), a central dynamics in this dissertation as well.

¹⁷ This topic also includes the general discussions on related groups by Henrik Bogdan, Dave Evans and Kennet Granholm mentioned above.

Gunn, 2005a; 2005b). Here, LaVey's work is covered as commodified and transposable pure surface with little use-value, a conclusion I wish to challenge here (ibid.: 439-90).

Recently, James R. Lewis has attempted an integration of the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of his work through a thought-provoking analysis of the 'conversion' of satanic 'seekers'. In the article "Fit for the Devil" (Lewis, 2010), he argues that satanic self-religion is highly dependent upon a conscious "ideological 'fit'" to satanic discourse, making satanic identity subject to both an active process and a reflection of a shared cultural orientation (ibid.: 123, 126-28). LaVey's *Satanic Bible* and the Internet play a paramount role here (ibid.: 130-31). Concerning the specific theme of *The Satanic Bible* and other satanic texts as literature and "quasi-scripture", notable expansions and critiques of Lewis' arguments can be found in the recent work of Bernt Schipper and Eugene Gallagher (Gallagher, forthcoming; Schipper, 2010).¹⁸ On the mediatization of Satanism, Dyrendal has analyzed the use of media and popular culture as a common resource and thus a venue for socialization in lieu of more traditional arenas (Dyrendal, 2005, 2008, 2009b; Søderlind & Dyrendal, 2009), which is contributing an important dimension to my thesis on the satanic milieu as an 'actor' in its own right (see also Partridge, 2005: 207-255; Partridge & Christianson, 2009; Possamai, 2005: 57-79).

The *third* and final approach examined here is the 'psycho-anthropological', focusing on the psychological gains behind the adoption of a satanic worldview. This can apply to the identity work of adolescents on the margins of the satanic milieu, as with Kathleen Lowney's sympathetic essays on teenage subculture (Lowney, 1995, 2009), or to the focus of power within established groups such as the Temple of Set, as in the extremely negative ethnographic study of Gini Graham Scott, *The Magicians* (Scott, 2007 [1983]). As with Edward Moody above, studies of this type tend to be deeply anchored in their chosen site and thus susceptible to over-generalization. What is worse is another tendency, namely the frequent downplaying of the 'satanic' for the psychological and hence the marginalization of the *substance* of satanic discourse. Accordingly, psychological studies exhibit a problematic bias, as Satanism is constructed within a 'problems discourse' that is primarily normative and not analytical. A good example is Chris Mathews' *Modern Satanism: Anatomy of a Radical Subculture* (Mathews, 2009), mainly a study of LaVey and the Church of Satan. As the argument unfolds, most of

¹⁸ For alternative views, analyzing *The Satanic Bible* in the tradition of magic books, see Bill Ellis' folkloristic discussion in *Lucifer Ascending* (Ellis, 2004: 69-90, esp. 86-90) as well as Owen Davies' wide-ranging study *Grimoires* (O. Davies, 2009: 272-77).

the virtues of historical, sociological and anthropological scholarship are substituted for a normative philosophical assessment based on a simple yet defective premise: Satanism is neo-fascism, built on faulty reasoning and emotional underdevelopment (ibid.: 204-5; see especially p. 159-175 on psychology). I have used his book with great caution, as Mathews nevertheless incorporates a lot of interesting material in his analysis and sometimes provides fresh insights despite his indignation.¹⁹

Other, less ideologically laden studies are also prone to unnecessary judgments based on psychological assessments. For example, David Frankfurter's otherwise brilliant *Evil Incarnate* (Frankfurter, 2006) does little to distinguish superficial satanic 'tourism' from a more dedicated adolescent subculture or, which is much worse, from the established satanic groups. The book, which mainly deals with moral panics and discourse on evil from a constructivist perspective, includes contemporary Satanists under the label of "direct mimetic parody", a subspecies of "direct mimetic performance" of evil (Frankfurter, 2006: 177-78). What becomes clear in the course of the argument is that Frankfurter views all Satanists as reactive and parodic, lumping together Ozzy Osbourne, young mallrats and committed Satanists as "usually quite inarticulate" social criticism (ibid.: 201), derived from "deviance and impotence" (ibid.: 199). As I noted earlier, we should be careful with extending such monolithic explanations to the milieu as a whole.

B. Neighbors: Popular, aesthetic and esoteric discourse on the satanic

In contrast to the research on modern religious Satanism presented so far, this section will briefly discuss some pertinent studies of neighbors either in time or space. Regarding *time*, both the satanic milieu and specific satanic discourses have been influenced deeply by historical instances of satanic self-ascription. Yet I would submit that when the satanic is invoked, it is still largely dependent upon hegemonic cultural discourses on Satan, whether inverted or

¹⁹ Scott's interesting, if flawed work is another case in point. The study is rather tied to a specific time and place, namely the dysfunctional San Francisco 'pylon' (i.e. local group) and the authoritarian reign of then-High Priest Ronald Barrett (Aquino, 2009b: 68-88). In consequence, specific instances of interpretation and power struggle color her general conclusions on personal development and black magic as a ritual tool, forcing her in the same direction as Edward Moody, into socio-pathology and power fixation (Scott, 2007 [1983]: part III, 143-200). She also builds her case on the same ambiguous 'survival'-model of magical ritual, where one is kept wondering whether magic is "primitive science" based on false premises or a more substantial resource for the groups based on esotericism and psychology (ibid.: 7-37). Finally, although the study is based on covert participant observation in the Temple of Set (as the "Church of Hu") and a witchcraft group in the early 1980s, she was caught and kicked out of the Temple (Scott, 2007 [1983]: 45-46, 129-134; cf. Aquino, 2009a: 888), putting new light on the negative angle she has chosen.

realigned. Although there might be a connection in the ‘what’ of Satanism, the ‘how’ changed critically in the 1960s. In other words, these occurrences of Satanism are tied to crossbreeds of Christian and popular conceptions of Satan, or, in a few cases, coupled to wider esoteric ideas that make Satan somewhat secondary. Such examples can be conceptualized in three distinct ways: As individual pact-making and popular ‘sympathies’ for the Devil; as an aesthetic or ideological association, like the literary and political use of Satan in the 19th century; and as early esoteric discourses on the satanic in the cultic milieu before LaVey.

Most instances of popular discourse on the satanic belong in folklore, literature and the mythological reality of Christian demonology, the subject of section C. Nevertheless, as argued by Swedish historian Mikael Häll, “individual Satanists” probably did exist, whether they were in allegiance with Satan, cavorting with demonized nature spirits, or practicing diabolical “hunting magic” (Häll, forthcoming). On these early instances of ‘direct mimesis’, often of an opportunistic and informal kind, I have conferred with various historical accounts, but have found little of importance for the present study.²⁰ There is more significance and substance to the ‘high’ cultural aesthetic and political discourse on Satan as rebel hero and adversary. Its many forms have been analyzed and documented extensively. On the Milton-reception and literary Satanism of British romanticism in the early 19th century, definitive studies are Hannes Vatter’s *The Devil in English Literature* and Peter Schock’s *Romantic Satanism* (Schock, 2003; Vatter, 1978); on Gothic novels and the political use of Satan in British, French, Swedish and Italian literature, I have consulted particular studies by Ruben van Luijk and Per Faxneld, as well as wider overviews.²¹ These instances of satanic metaphor shade into the bohemian Satanism of decadent Berlin and Paris, where we find many examples of aesthetic ‘Satanism’ that belong in the next section on demonologies, but also several serious occultists appropriating Satan.²² In general, the aesthetic and political alliance with Satan dwindled after the First World War, pushing Satan fully into the domain of popular culture and self-declared ‘Satanists’ below the societal radar.

Esoteric discourse on the satanic is another ‘high’ cultural mirror image of the ‘low’ folk models of Satanism we discussed above, and I have sought out information on explicitly dia-

²⁰ See e.g. Ellis, 2004: 1-15; Faxneld, 2006: 29-61; Introvigne, 1997a: 17-62; Medway, 2001: 9-33, 50-69; Russell, 1972; 1980: 8-139; 1984: 62-91, 274-302; 1986: 25-76.

²¹ For examples, see Dyrendal, 2006: 118-44; Faxneld, 2006: 85-100; Faxneld, 2009, 2010a, forthcoming-a; Luijk, forthcoming; Murchembled, 2003 [2000]: 148-226; Russell, 1986: 168-204.

²² See e.g. Dyrendal, 2006: 145-67; Faxneld, 2006: 125-49; Faxneld, 2010b, forthcoming-b; Medway, 2001: 88-96; Russell, 1986: 205-26.

bolical elements of Western magic in both older and more recent research.²³ What is obvious is that the majority of occult writers and practitioners stay clear of self-declared Satanism in any sense; and most forms of ‘black’ magic are in fact rooted solidly in a Christian theological context of summoning and binding demons, making it irrelevant here (at least until these practices are openly associated with esoteric satanic discourses in the 20th century). In any case, I have endeavored to substantiate my exclusion by reading up on usual suspects, some of which definitely serve as models for contemporary Satanists although they did not engage in Satanism as such. On Satan and Lucifer in the interesting cases of Danish occultist Ben Kadosh and Polish decadent Stanislaw Przybyszewski, the pioneering work of Swedish historian of religion Per Faxneld is particularly noteworthy (Faxneld, 2006: 101-25, 140-49, 160-77; see also Faxneld, 2010b, 2011, forthcoming-b).²⁴

Regarding *space*, I have deliberately kept the exact boundaries of the satanic milieu somewhat vague. Thus I have included contemporary groups that can be considered both central and marginal in the satanic milieu in their reworking of Satan and the Left Hand path, as is evident from the inclusion of e.g. Henrik Bogdan and Kennet Granholm’s work on the Dragon Rouge in the previous section. Nevertheless, esoteric currents and groups stretch outside modern religious Satanism in a strict sense, and although it can be very damaging to draw too clear a line, there is a clear sense of moving too far from a self-described satanic identity. What is essential is that it is done on a case-by-case basis, using knowledge of genre and context and a good dose of common sense as guiding principles. In the same way, on the boundary between satanic discourse and playful ostension of cultural narratives lies a shady realm of ‘reactive’ satanic discourse which, when we move far enough, takes us into mythology and

²³ For older examples, see Cavendish, 1967; Arthur E. Waite, 1912; Arthur E. Waite, 2005 [1898]. More recent studies include Asprem, forthcoming; O. Davies, 2009; Drury, 2008, 2011; Ellis, 2004; Evans, 2007; Faxneld, 2006, 2010c; Gregorius, forthcoming; Introvigne, 1997a; R. Sutcliffe, 1996. This category also includes emic historiographies such as Flowers’ *Lords of the Left-Hand Path* and Zeena and Nikolas Schreck’s *Demons of the Flesh* (Flowers, 1997; Schreck & Schreck, 2002). As noted by both Bill Ellis and Owen Davies, there was a market for grimoires as ‘fetishes’ and an increasingly important popular demand for occult books (O. Davies, 2009: 189-261; Ellis, 2004: 46-90), paving the way for the modern erosion of ‘high’ and ‘low’ (cf. Verter, 1997: esp. 96-180).

²⁴ On alleged Gnostic antinomianism, see e.g. Filoramo, 1990: 173-89; Jonas, 1992 [1958]: 266-90; Williams, 1996: 163-88; I side fully with Michael Williams in taking a skeptical approach. Along with Aleister Crowley and the Ordo Templi Orientis, works covering sexual magic often incorporate Maria de Naglowska’s *La Fleche d’Or* and Gregor Gregorius’ *Fraternitas Saturni*, the latter two of which certainly did use Satan and satanic in their esoteric discourse on ritual practices. Nevertheless, both *La Fleche d’Or* and *Fraternitas Saturni* seem like sexualized esoteric versions of the later Process Church rather than the Church of Satan; and Crowley, the “Great Beast 666”, has a marginal, although important role (see e.g. Drury, 2008; 2011: 77-126; Dyrendal, forthcoming-b; Faxneld, 2006: 150-160, 177-194; Flowers, 1997: 133-170; Hakl, 2008; Schreck & Schreck, 2002: 173-277; Urban, 2006: 109-162). In addition, I have consulted the *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism* (Hanegraaff, Faivre, Broek, & Brach, 2005) for most figures and groups in 19th and 20th century.

cultural fears that cannot be considered Satanism as a coherent ideological or sociological entity. A frequent dividing line is the understanding of the satanic as transgression and opposition. There is nevertheless significant overlap in aesthetics, nonconformity, and constituency, and the boundary between modern religious Satanism and these modern-day aesthetic Satanists, adolescent dabblers, and black magicians should be kept fluid. As with their historical and contemporary esoteric counterparts, we must engage with such self-declared diabolists on a case-by-case basis, as instances of modern-day aesthetic discourse on the satanic; a discourse which *can* take them closer to a religious engagement, but seldom does.²⁵ On teenage Satanism, I have primarily used studies on identity work.²⁶ I have read these sociological accounts in tandem with studies on satanic imagery in black metal and gothic subculture, although neither subculture has a direct and established link to religious Satanism.²⁷ This universe of subversion and inversion also takes us into the next category of social demonologies.

C. Demonology and moral panics: History, theology and sociology on the 'other'

Mythical narratives on historical Satanism also play a part as resources for Satanists in their construction of a genuine satanic 'tradition'. Yet in contrast to the self-declared neighbors, we should be extremely careful to analyze them as anything else. Thus, the work of historians and theologians on historical cases are more akin to sociologies of modern-day satanic panics and should be reviewed in this light. Consequently, historical cases are a specific genre of *demonological* discourse on the satanic 'other', related to moral panics and not the seed-bed for Satanism as a religious practice, and I have included little historical or sociological work on demonology in this dissertation. This basic view on historical Satanism is fully congruent with Gareth Medway's *Lure of the Sinister* (Medway, 2001), which dismisses all the well-known cases of 'true' Satanism in earlier 'research': Satanic heresies, witchcraft, Gilles de Rais, The Chambre Ardente affair, Hyusman's claims in *Là-Bas* and so on. Further, he relates

²⁵ An interesting parallel to these cases are the British gentleman's clubs, the members of which were neither Satanists nor satanic beyond the original club's name, Lord Wharton's Hell-Fire Club. Nevertheless, the heady blend of symbolic violence, skeptical blasphemy, subversion, and later sexually titillating paganism seems an appropriate historical precursor to contemporary transgressive aesthetics (Ashe, 2003 [1974]; Lord, 2008; Medway, 2001: 79-86).

²⁶ In particular, Dyrendal, 2008; Ellis, 1991; Fine & Victor, 1994; Kahn-Harris & Bennett, 2004; Lowney, 1995; Swatos, 1992.

²⁷ For example, Baddeley, 2000a, 2000b; Baddeley & Woods, 2002; Bossius, 2003; Dyrendal, 2009b; Forsberg, 2010; Fridh, 2010; Introvigne, 2002 [1997]; Kahn-Harris, 2007; Moynihan & Søderlind, 1998; Mørk, 2009; Rem, 2010.

the entire complex to modern occurrences of satanic panic.²⁸ On the history of Satan and the Devil, I have frequently consulted Jeffrey B. Russell's useful four-volume study from antiquity to modern times, which seems perfectly laudable until we reach the 19th century and one-sided when we arrive at the 20th century (Russell, 1977, 1981, 1984, 1986).²⁹ Although it is an artifact of the research focus, this total dismissal of modern religious Satanism seems theologically biased. The same view on recent trends is found in Robert Murchembled's *A History of the Devil* (Murchembled, 2003 [2000]), although he at least has a sympathy for popular culture, as has Asbjørn Dyrendal's popular overview *Demoner* (Dyrendal, 2006).³⁰

For a more considerate view of popular appropriations, I have conferred with Christopher Partridge's *The Re-Enchantment of the West* (Partridge, 2005: 207-55) and W. Scott Poole's insightful *Satan in America* (Poole, 2009). The latter is a book-length study charting the transformation of a theological and literary concept into a popular 'culture icon'. Combined with the work of Gavin Baddeley, Carrol Fry, Nikolas Schreck and others, I have been able to chart the demonological discourse on the satanic in popular culture.³¹ Finally, for basic studies of demonologies and moral panics, I have relied upon the work of Norman Cohn and Stanley Cohen (Cohen, 2002 [1972]; Cohn, 2000 [1975]). As such, moral panics must be associated with social anxieties and the strategic framing of social problems, a hypothesis similar to but outside the focus of this study. When associated with Satanism as absolute evil in historical and contemporary times, specifically as 'Satanic Ritual Abuse' and the wider 'Satanic Panic', I have referred to standard reference works such as James Richardson, Joel Best, and David Bromley's *The Satanism Scare* and the *Encyclopedic Sourcebook on Satanism* (Lewis & Petersen, 2008; Richardson, Best, & Bromley, 1991).³²

To conclude, the various discourses on the satanic, whether self-ascribed or societal 'others', should be kept apart from satanic discourse, the subject of this study. The popular, aesthetic,

²⁸ The same position is taken by Per Faxneld, Massimo Introvigne and Philips Stevens, Jr., although they differ in their assessment of particular cases (e.g. Faxneld, 2006; Introvigne, 1997a; Stevens, 1996). For comprehensiveness, I have also perused older, more gullible studies such as Rhodes, 1954; Seabrook, 1970 [1942]; Summers, 1974 [1946].

²⁹ See also his summary (Russell, 1991) and his work on European witchcraft (Russell, 1972, 1974, 1980).

³⁰ Peripheral to the research focus, yet worthy of brief mention are 'biographies' of the Devil (Carus, 2008 [1900]; Graves, 1999 [1924]; Kelly, 2006; Pagels, 1995; Stanford, 1996), and Neil Forsyth's *The Old Enemy*, a superior study of narratives of the "combat myth" across mythologies (Forsyth, 1987).

³¹ E.g. Baddeley, 2000b; Cowan, 2008: 167-200; Fry, 2008: 92-158; Jenkins, 2004; Partridge & Christianson, 2009; Schreck, 2001.

³² These also include monographs (Dyrendal, 2003; Ellis, 2000; Frankfurter, 2006; La Fontaine, 1998; Victor, 1993) and essays elaborating on various dimensions of this perceived social problem (Dyrendal, 2000; Frankfurter, 2001, 2003; Hjelm, 2002, 2005a; Jenkins, 2004; Mombelet, 2009; Richardson, Reichert, & Lykes, 2009; Smoczynski, 2009, forthcoming; Woodman, 1997).

and esoteric discourses on the satanic are different in terms of chronology (it is after all a study of *contemporary* Satanism) and in terms of a conceptual space, where the concrete self-designation and active application of Satan in discourse and practice play a defining role. Conversely, historical and contemporary mythologies have their roots in theological and popular imagination on absolute evil and serve as funhouse mirrors at best. As such, analytically the discourses described here exist in the satanic milieu as resources for the selective construction of satanic ‘tradition’ and identity, the subject of part three.

II. 2. Methods, Terms, and Sources

Practitioners of everyday life conduct their business making use of what is available – what their immediate and broader circumstances provide them – to construct the meanings that inform and guide their actions. (...) These worlds, in turn, are variably linked to cultural and institutional formations. While practice is ineluctably local, it is selectively fed by and selectively draws from what is immediately and more broadly available. As Marx (...) would have it, people actively construct their worlds, but not completely on, or in, their own terms. (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997: 121-22. Notes deleted)

To elaborate on the methodological and meta-theoretical decisions I have made during the research project, but never thoroughly explained, this section reflects on two interrelated dimensions of the analytical process: The methodological issue of cataloguing satanic texts in a satanic milieu, and the interpretive issue of discourse and practice arising from the methodological thicket of a constructivist position. I only dwell on general vectors here; for supplementary themes and concepts of a methodological nature see the individual articles.

A. Collecting satanic ‘texts’: Issues of method and data

As outlined in the introduction, the basic aim of this dissertation is an exploration of the various articulations of Satanism in a heterogeneous satanic milieu, which is translated into a strategic and a material strand. Consequently, the fundamental unit of analysis is not a specific group, individual, or text, but the trajectories of meaning-making and -management in a milieu that operates on three theoretical levels simultaneously. First, it can be conceptualized as a *sociological* entity “with consistent features at a level beyond that of constitutive groups and actors” (Redden 2005: 233). Second, it is a *fluid discursive space* of cultural materials from

which to appropriate and to which rejected knowledge flows. Third, it can be understood as a collective *imagination* of the seeker ‘ethos’ – that of self-religion. I will return to these scholarly concepts and dimensions of analysis below; what is of immediate importance is a brief summary of how I have operationalized the study in more manageable research objects.

As a first move, I have chosen to focus on the larger picture and a few arenas of articulation by choosing material that offers breadth of vision and depth of interpretation. Accordingly, the five articles primarily deal with two processes and three major themes, all centered on authority, legitimacy and tension. This is constructed as a progressive argument; the basic framework provided by article I sets the stage for the three thematic studies and is capped off by the final foray into contemporary virtual communities. Regarding the processes, I have focused on two connected strategic developments: On the one hand the formation of the Church of Satan, the Temple of Set and various splinter groups from the late sixties onwards, a process motivating the articulation of independent ‘rationalist’ and ‘esoteric’ satanic discourse in a satanic milieu. Apart from the internal struggles, they are also defined over and above the dependent ‘reactive’ discourse of individuals involved in direct mimesis of cultural stereotypes, as well as the wellspring of witchcraft and occultism of the cultic milieu.³³ On the other hand, I examine the powerful change of pace introduced with the Internet in the mid-nineties, especially as seen through the ambiguous concept of an online ‘satanic community’.

This project is traced through all five articles as an interplay between my classifications and the moves and countermoves of satanic authors; nevertheless, it is especially prominent in articles I, III and V. To study these dynamics in more detail, I have selected three major thematic fields: the interplay of science and esotericism, the utility of magic, and the sanitization of violence, each with an article of its own (article II-IV). These themes constitute important building blocks in the formation of positions within the satanic milieu, while simultaneously providing arenas of struggle connected to wider socio-cultural conditions. As such, the themes work as gateways into the strategic ‘architecture’ of religious worlds erected in speech, text, imagery and action. Of course, others could have been included, not least body, gender, and popular culture. However, the chosen topics of science and authority, magic and artifice, and symbolic violence and transgression are recurrent core source domains for authenticating *satanic* discourse.

³³ I return to the rationalist, esoteric and reactive types and the complexities of modeling *actual* satanic discourse in part three, section two.

To delimit my sources I have taken advantage of Olav Hammer's stipulative concepts of 'movement text' and 'spokesperson' (Hammer, 2001a: 36-40). In methodological terms this indicates a study focused on authoritative "doctrinal and ritual texts" of a material kind, purposefully created by religious "innovators" who perform novel exegeses. This is especially dominant in article I, where the discussion of satanic schism is facilitated mainly by the reading of Anton LaVey's *The Satanic Bible* (1969) and Michael Aquino's *The Book of Coming Forth By Night* (1975), denoting two basic authoritative texts and innovators in the satanic milieu. The reliance upon a small gallery of spokespersons and defining movement texts continues to be a core undertaking in the subsequent articles, even though the content of both categories are extended as I incorporate larger parts of the satanic milieu in my analysis. In the language of Bent Flyvbjerg, I use both as 'paradigmatic cases' in an "information-oriented selection" in order to focus on the exemplary characteristics of various satanic articulations. As discussed in his thought-provoking book *Making Social Science Matter*, the paradigmatic case is suitable for developing "metaphors" or "schools" for a given domain (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 66-87, esp. 77-81; cf. Hammer, 2001a: 15). In addition, such cases can be augmented by or even transformed into both 'critical' and 'extreme' cases in order to test hypotheses or examine the boundaries of the field studied, a strategy I have resorted to when building my case for locating central typological categories and strategic themes.

Nevertheless, from a methodological perspective, empirical examples of movement texts and spokespersons cannot be understood apart from the milieu which situates the producer and product in the broader field of the "religious economy" of producing, distributing, and consuming worldviews in a social context (Hammer, 2001a: 27-34). Consequently, from article II to V I gradually move away from Hammer's explicit focus on *elite* practitioners and *doctrinal* statements implied in the previous terminological double (ibid.: 14-15) and into a closer engagement with *networks* of participants performing their own 'unorthodox' innovations, above all as these processes have become visible online, in the far less bounded 'texts' found there. A key dimension in Colin Campbell's original concept of a cultic milieu is the fluidity of worldview and ethos and the underscoring of the "ideology of seekership" in "overlapping communication structures", now including virtual networks of communication (Campbell, 1972: 121-123). Although movement texts and spokespersons play an important role in the milieu as exemplars (thus working as *emic paradigms* as well), the seekers and communication structures facilitate a closer engagement with the practices of and resources available to participants outside authoritative centers of power (cf. Hammer, 2001a: 28-29).

That said, the articles work with texts first and people second. Although I aim to say something meaningful about both, there are methodological reasons for choosing one or the other, as a study of a large corpus of textual material *and* a representative body of interviews, not to mention stacks of fieldnotes from participant observation, is simply too large. On the other hand, the way I use the texts is inspired by studies of people and their practice, and my interpretations have been applied to and commented upon by participants and contacts, both online and offline. It is my contention that a first choice on people or text is a motivation to find the presence of the other; in this case, to discover the fluidity and hybridity of meaning-making in the apparent stability of writing. Following this, this text-based study of the satanic milieu and satanic discourse is expanded by opening up the sources themselves, emphasizing the hybrid nature of texts and text production, rather than opening up the historical study to ethnographic methods such as fieldwork, participant observation, and interviews. In the language of the social sciences, I have generally eschewed *methodological* triangulation for *theory* and *data* triangulation (e.g. Denzin, 2006 [1970]: 472).

I have summarized the various sources in the following table (table 1). *Formal sources* delimit the material engaged with explicitly in the five articles, selected from a pool of printed and Internet sources. *Printed data* include movement texts by spokespersons³⁴ as well as significant texts that are either not authoritative or not doctrinal and ritual in nature, such as commentaries or correspondence.³⁵ It also includes interviews, reportages and travelogues as

³⁴ For bibliographic details of sources found in this and the following footnotes, see the individual articles. As true movement texts for the Church of Satan, I use Anton LaVey's five published collections *The Satanic Bible* (1969), *The Satanic Witch* (1989/1970), *The Satanic Rituals* (1972), *The Devil's Notebook* (1992), and *Satan Speaks!* (1998); Peter H. Gilmore's *The Satanic Scriptures* (2007); and Blanche Barton's *The Church of Satan* (1990) and *The Secret Life of a Satanist* (1992). On the Temple of Set, I use Michael Aquino's *The Book of Coming Forth By Night* (1975), and *Black Magic* (1985); and Don Webb's *Uncle Setmakt's Essential Guide to the Left-Hand Path* (1999) and *Mysteries of the Temple of Set* (2004). Outside these major groups, I have used Stephen E. Flowers *Lords of the Left-Hand Path* (1997), Nikolas and Zeena Schreck's *Demons of the Flesh* (2002), Michael Ford's *Luciferian Witchcraft* (2005), the many pamphlets published by Tani Jantsang and Phil Marsh, and the anonymous *Liber Azerate* (2002) and *Liber Falxifer* (2008), to name a few. Many of the smaller groups covered in article II, III, IV, and V either use established movement texts from larger groups as a foundation or use electronic material.

³⁵ Significant texts for the Church of Satan include Anton LaVey's newspaper column *Letters to the Devil* (recently published in their entirety); self-published anthologies like James P. Sass' *Essays in Satanism* (2007), Matt Paradise's *Bearing the Devil's Mark* (2007), Nemo's *The Fire from Within* (2007), and Joel Gausten's *Words from the Third Side* (2009); and material from printed journals such as *The Black Flame*, *Not Like Most*, *S magazine*, *Lust magazine*, *Old Nick*, and *The Devil's Diary*. For the Temple of Set, Michael Aquino's *The Church of Satan* (6th ed. 2009), and *The Temple of Set* (8th ed. 2009) are highly significant. Outside the major groups, I have utilized e.g. the Danish journal *Satanisk Bulletin*, Adam Parfrey's *Apocalypse Culture* (1990) and *Apocalypse Culture II* (2000), and George Petros' *Art that Kills* (2007). As with movement texts, the virtual nature of the satanic milieu means that much exist as documents on websites, and in both cases, I have left many stones unturned.

mentioned above on previous research.³⁶ *Internet data* consists of various documents of official and unofficial nature, such as texts provided on websites, posts on message boards and weblogs. It also includes the quantitative data used in article V.³⁷

SOURCE	TYPE	DESCRIPTION
Formal	Printed data	Movement texts Other significant texts Interviews, reportages and travelogues
	Qualitative Internet data	Documents on official websites Hybrid posts and threads on message boards Weblog posts Transcripts of interviews
	Quantitative Internet data	Whois Alexa Issue Crawler
Informal	Interactive online data	Websites Email correspondence Virtual participant observation Message boards and e-lists
	Audio-Visual data	Documentaries Youtube clips Podcasts
	Offline interaction	Informal participant observation Informal conversations

Table 1. Data summary: Formal and informal sources

Concerning specific choices on formal sources, they have been dictated by the two processes and three themes, branching out from the more visible movement texts and spokespersons of established groups (mainly the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set) to more marginal or

³⁶ These include Arthur Lyons' *Satan Wants You* (1988/1970), Jack Fritscher's *Popular Witchcraft* (2004/1973), Gavin Baddeley's *Lucifer Rising* (2000), V. Vale's *Modern Primitives* (1989) and *Modern Pagans* (2001), and Corvin Nocturnum's *Embracing the Dark* (2005), as well as articles/interviews by Kim Kline and Mick Farren.

³⁷ During the research, I have consulted the websites of groups such as the Church of Satan, Temple of Set, Satanic Reds, Joy of Satan, Temple of the Black Light, Dragon Rouge, and Satanisk Forum; the message board of *Satanisk Forum*; and individual sites including John Allee's *First Church of Satan*, Vexen Crabtree's *Description, Philosophies, and Justification of Satanism*, Dominic's *Satanic Spells*, Matt Paradise's *Diabologue*, Boyd Rice's blog, James P. Sass' *Cosmodromium*, Venus Satan's *Spiritual Satanist*, Kevin Slaughter's *The Unwanted Advocate*, Diane Vera's *Theistic Satanism*, and Ole Wolf's *Aminas og Oles sæbekasse*. In addition, I have made use of a range of internet interviews, David Shankbone's in particular.

invisible networks via reference lists, suggested reading and critical comments. Thus, more privileged material stands alongside sources of a more *ad hoc* nature, which guarantees a certain level of breadth regarding the satanic milieu as a whole as well as depth along the three main thematic fields. Nevertheless, there is an emphasis on Anton LaVey, the Church of Satan and the rationalist discourse on Satanism, to the detriment of a fuller coverage of esoteric and reactive Satanism. To an extent, this is a consequence of the specific development of the satanic milieu. But it is also directly related to the availability of sources, the size and visibility of groups and networks of this orientation, and the curious magnifying effect of the Internet, where marginal, numerically insignificant groups are amplified. Although this assists us in charting and cataloguing the variability of satanic discourse today, it also occludes the asymmetric accessibility and importance of alternatives off-line. In the articles, I have covered a reasonable spread of esoteric and reactive groups and individuals, thus providing a first fill of a significant white spot in the cartography of religious Satanism; nevertheless, the worldview of the largest single group and most prevailing discourse is the dominant one, both conceptually and as a ‘territory’ within the milieu, and it also governs the direction and scope of this study.

Informal sources signify data that is collected through informal means and/or used impressionistically or implicitly in the analysis of text and discourse. Most notably, this includes a variety of *online data* collected from websites and computer-mediated communication such as email and discussion boards.³⁸ Second, I have made use of assorted media sources such as documentaries, podcasts, and ‘home movies’ on YouTube, often of an informative nature, both to locate formal data and to substantiate impressions gathered from printed sources and web surfing.³⁹ Finally, I have collected a fair amount of ethnographic data through unstructured interviews, conversations and participant observation with Satanists in Denmark.⁴⁰ All

³⁸ For example, in addition to the sites mentioned above I have spent some time with Mychailo Chorniysin’s *Ad Astra Perversum*, Modern Church of Satan and its *Grotto Forum*, as well as the message boards *Letters to the Devil*, Edred.net’s *community forum*, and the *600 club*. During the research process, I have corresponded with Caroline Tully, NocTifer, Venus Satanus, Vexen Crabtree, Amina Lap, Ole Wolf, and Michael Moynihan, both on dedicated e-lists such as *Academic Study of Magic* and through private channels. Finally, Facebook has provided an additional conduit, especially the interest groups found there.

³⁹ A list of movies, podcasts, YouTube-clips and so on would be too excessive. Main sources include R. Laurent’s *Satanis: The Devil’s Mass* (2003/1970), N. Bougas and A. Parfrey’s *Speak of the Devil* (1995), J. Warren’s *Inside the Church of Satan* (2008); Point of Inquiry’s hour-long podcast with Peter H. Gilmore *Science and Satanism* (2007); the illustrative recording of the June 6 2006 High Mass found on the Church of Satan website; and the many smaller clips with Peter Gilmore, Venus Satanus, Michael Aquino, Boyd Rice, and Anton LaVey which can be found on YouTube. In addition, the website *Dangerous Minds* provides an embarrassing wealth of material on transgressive culture.

⁴⁰ I have been present at summer and Halloween parties as well as various meetings in public places and in private homes during the past 10 years.

in all, through this informal material I aspire to soften the heavy focus on text with more participant-oriented sources. What in this case amounts to a ‘coloring’ of text analysis infuses the individual articles with a respect for the polyvocality behind the text, the instability of meaning outside the page and the agency of real people surrounding any disembodied information, printed or otherwise.

B. Analyzing satanic ‘discourse’: Issues of locality and strategic practice

My decision to take an interpretive and ‘text-centric’ approach is following a well-trodden hermeneutical and philological path in the history of religion (e.g. J. P. Sørensen, 2006b). Nevertheless, today the wider discipline of religion, straddling the intersection between the humanities and social sciences, challenges this ‘semantic bias’ from several angles. As I have already indicated, actor-centered methodologies point to the practice of ‘lived’ and ‘everyday’ religion as valid areas of research, advocating the introduction of the extra-textual, the contextual, and the participant view via qualitative research methods (e.g. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 1997; Holstein & Gubrium, 2005; King, 2001). In addition, the engagement with poststructuralism and practice theory has invoked a traditional academic division of labor outside the purview of idiographic studies, based on the dialectics of structure and agency, society and individual, ideology and practice, constraints and creativity (e.g. Ortner, 1984, 2006).

To meet these challenges, the articles engage a variety of theories on discourse analysis, discourse theory and social constructivism.⁴¹ Although this is reminiscent of the *bricolage* described by Claude Lévi-Strauss, it is a consequence of the position inherent in all qualitative research focused more on pragmatic *analytics* than totalizing *theory* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 4-6). My orientation towards discourse and constructivism is thus a way of tinkering with useful concepts and approaches, not a theoretical exposition with ambitions of universality. On the other hand, as argued by Bent Flyvbjerg above on case-based studies (and frequently proven by good anthropology and ethnography), recharged concepts and new conclusions can say something of general import without being universal (Flyvbjerg, 2001).

⁴¹ Main references are Bredsdorff, 2002; Carrette, 2000; Fairclough, 1992, 2003; Flyvbjerg, 1991, 2001; Foucault, 1972, 1973, 1999; Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999; Kendall & Wickham, 1999; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Lincoln, 1989, 1994, 2003; Merquior, 1991; Murphy, 2000; Newsom, 2004; Schiffrin, 1994; Stuckrad, 2003, 2005a; Titscher, 2000; Torfing, 1999; Wetherell, Yates, & Taylor, 2001; Åkerstrøm Andersen, 1999.

Concretely, the chosen thematic fields highlight accordant practices, terminologies and negotiations related to the formative processes of the satanic milieu. This has both a ‘hegemonic’ and ‘hermeneutic’ application (Foucault, 1988: 18). As aspects of *domination*, the themes rely on the authorizing domains of science, esotericism, and aesthetics from which Satanists borrow and adapt strategic discourse to set boundaries or challenge fixtures through the articulation of specific positions of hegemony. Apart from this role as ‘technologies of power’ (or ‘power-knowledge’), they also work *hermeneutically* as ‘technologies’ or ‘hermeneutics’ of the self (Foucault, 1980, 1988). The actual practices dubbed ‘syncretism’, ‘magic’, and ‘transgression’ all facilitate “a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 1988: 18). Both the hegemonic and hermeneutic dimensions of discourse will be expanded upon in part three as an analytical framework, connecting discourse and self in the satanic milieu. This section will outline the basic elements of and background to this ‘analytics’.

The theoretical focus of the five studies is the application of the concept of milieu through a constructivist analysis of discourse and its relation to strategies of articulation and legitimacy. Going back to the cultic milieu as a sociological entity, fluid discursive space and collective ‘ethos’, the implication is that a cultural ‘ecology’ can explain the transitoriness of individual groups and the eclecticism of individual belief and practice through a stable element of society (Campbell, 1972: 121-122). Most importantly, it is a virtual concept: “[m]uch broader, deeper and historically based than the contemporary underground known as *the* underground, it includes all deviant belief-systems and their associated practices” – as well as the “collectivities, institutions, individuals and media of communication associated with these beliefs” (ibid.: 122). As is evident from the strategic and material dimensions of this study, I have endeavored to retain this duality of the social and discursive in my development of the satanic milieu as an analytical concept.

Although it is largely undeveloped in the articles, the analytics of materiality and strategy employ Foucault’s combination of ‘archaeological’ and ‘genealogical’ approaches (Fairclough, 1992: 37-61; Flyvbjerg, 1991: 89-103). Briefly put, the archaeological method is an analytics of the discursive “archive”, focused on the stratification of statements and the materiality of discourse as ordering procedures and principles of production and dissemination (Foucault, 1972, 1999). Ideally, the method is *non-interpretive*, targeting rules and regulations that are visible in the statements, and *non-anthropological*, concerned with utterances

and arrangements and not authors, intentions or the deeper meaning of structure. In contrast, the genealogical method introduces power and process to the snapshot of regulated statements provided by archaeology. Genealogy is defined as the “history of the present” and is thus ‘problems-based’ (Flyvbjerg, 1991: 101; Foucault, 1991 [1971]). Nevertheless, it is not normative and presentist in order to evaluate the past, but rather concerned with dismantling the essentiality or natural ‘givenness’ of entities in the present by pointing to the “disparities” of origin and the “interstices” of their formation (Foucault, 1991 [1971]: 79, 83-85). As with the genealogy of an individual which seems so solid and self-evident in the present, any ‘planned beginning’ or teleology disappears when moving back through the generations.⁴²

This is very important as a principle of analysis, as any discursive practice and stable complex of discourses have an origin embroiled in the dynamics of power. As with knowledge and subjectivity, power is something practiced that cannot be analyzed in isolation or from one perspective alone. Discourse is constituted as both productive and constraining (Flyvbjerg, 1991: 103-137). Both the historicity and ‘tacitness’ of discourse can be said to rely on this theme. Following critical discourse analyst Norman Fairclough, I use the satanic milieu as an ‘order of discourse’ to capture this element of power, demarcating a domain wherein a number of discursive articulations compete. An order of discourse can be social, institutional or imagined, and is both an analytical tool established by the scholar and a necessary element in the articulation of a discourse (Fairclough, 1992: 42-43, 68-71, 97-98; 2003: 24; cf. Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 37-38, 67-71, 79-84, 143-48). This situates any textual object within ‘discursive practices’ understood as processes of production, distribution, and consumption of texts, and ‘social practices’ of ideology and hegemony (Fairclough, 1992: 71-98; 2003: 21-39). In turn, a ‘text’ is a concrete product retaining implicit or explicit indications of its provenance and genealogy (e.g. Fairclough, 1992: 73-78, 234-37; Schiffrin, 1994: 362-385; Scollon, 2001; Titscher, 2000: 5-49).

How does this map onto the social element? Previously, the cultic milieu has inspired sociological work on cults (e.g. Jenkins, 2000; Stark & Bainbridge, 1985), ethnographic work on communities (e.g. Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Jørgensen, 1982, 1992), and historical work on currents (e.g. Hanegraaff, 1998 [1996]). There is nothing inherently wrong in any of these

⁴² To stretch the metaphor, what ancestors did in the past ‘produce’ you in the present, but not as a planned product – you are the result of choices rooted in their present rather than anticipating some specific result in the future. Your mother and father might have planned you, but grandmother and grandfather didn’t. Actually, ‘you’ disappear totally when moving back through the generations, just as any stable discourse dissipates as we move back to the machinations and impromptu decisions making up its past.

operationalizations of Campbell's model, but they all seem to miss a crucial aspect of the notion of milieu in their implementation. Basically, I understand the milieu as a 'meso'-level concept lying between the macro-level of the societal field and the micro-level of individual actors (e.g. Dobbelaere, 1981, 2004).⁴³ Sociologically speaking, the meso-level encompasses the internal organization of relatively autonomous subfields and mid-scale organizations, such as communities, neighborhoods and subcultures, and their relations to larger institutional entities such as 'economy', 'politics', and 'religion' (the societal macro-level) and more intimate groups and networks of individual action (the micro-level). Nevertheless, there is an element of scholarly stipulation involved here, and outside sociology the empirical levels are often translated into a convenient shorthand for three analytical or explanatory *dimensions of research*, indicating a span from individual phenomena to universal categories, with the mesolevel as some sort of intermediate unit between idiographic and nomothetic (e.g. Sørensen, 2011). This becomes evident when moving from bounded sociological concepts of individual, group and society into the discursive space and collective ethos, that is the 'economy' and 'architecture' of these communal 'worlds' implicated by the milieu's embeddedness in "magazines, periodicals, books, pamphlets, lectures, demonstrations and informal meetings" (Campbell, 1972: 123; cf. Hammer, 2001a: 27-32).

Consequently, I apply the three levels as flexible analytical tools, targeting the meso-level as the 'location' of the dimensions of modern Satanism I study here. As a result, the exact content of the levels can change in relation to the unit under consideration. For example, when discussing the satanic milieu the three-tiered scheme shifts relative to the specific attention to groups and networks, discourses and strategies, or the milieu itself. Beginning with article II, I posit the major socio-cultural conditions like 'cultic milieu' and 'socio-cultural field' as an analytical macro-level; the generalized strategies, discourses and groups of the satanic milieu as a meso-level; and local practices such as the utterances of individual actors and the textual 'tactics' of spokespersons in movement texts and other textual sources as a micro-level. This is a stable operationalization of the conceptual scheme which combines a sociological attention to satanic groups between society and individual, and a semantic attention to satanic discourse between a reservoir of resources and specific textual utterances. In practice, this is less complicated than it sounds, as it is clear from the context what the levels imply.

⁴³ The inclusion of the individual in micro-level studies is contentious. Some sociologists doggedly contrast the individual and the social, while others see no problem in including the individual as generalized 'actor' or 'participant'. I am here following Karel Dobbelaere, who works with an individual micro-level.

This brings us to a central influence on the articles in this dissertation, namely Bruce Lincoln. In *Holy Terrors*, he proposes a polythetic definition of religion composed of the four dimensions of discourse, practice, community, and institution (Lincoln, 2003: 5-8).⁴⁴ Analytically, they are nested within each other, as the discourse is providing the authority and truth to both the ideological ‘world’ and the set of practices, individual and collective identities formed within a community, and institutional structures regulating it. The central point is that discourse frames a given content by claiming a “transcendent status”, indicating that ‘religion’ is primarily identified by a “metadiscursive” capacity to articulate legitimate content, which is then reinforced and gradually altered through practice, community, and institutions constructing proper worlds and proper subjects. In other words, discourse works as “ideological persuasion” and “sentiment evocation” that is magnifying or erasing “segmentary patterns” in a social whole through “affinity and “estrangement” (Lincoln, 1989: 9, 19). An analysis in this vein thus hones in on the groups and categories produced in myth, ritual, and classification, especially as they are produced and challenged by “fission and fusion” (ibid.: 19). Accordingly, he argues for an attention to fault lines of society and culture that are created and maintained discursively, a point he shares with Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe.

In their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, discourse is defined as a “structured totality” establishing connections between language, objects and practices; specifically, it is a delimited horizon of meaning constructed through “closure” or exclusion of alternatives (Jørgensen & Phillips, 1999: 34-72; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 105-14). Accordingly, it has a linguistic and a material dimension reminiscent of Foucault. Across these discursive horizons (in the polyvocal “field of discursivity” outside the discourse), we can identify “floating signifiers”, unstable and polyvalent concepts around which discursive battles for ownership take place (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985: 112-13). When considered as an order of discourse, concepts such as ‘Satan’, ‘Satanism’, ‘satanic’, and ‘Satanist’ can be considered floating signifiers in the satanic milieu, as can for example ‘magic’, ‘transgression’, and ‘tradition’. Through processes of articulation in a satanic discourse (referring to the recombination of concepts which reconstitutes the horizon of a given domain), such floating signifiers are appropriated and fixed in the network as anchors of meaning, called “nodal points”. These are symbolic ‘condensation’ nodes made meaningful in relation to other concepts, but also providing the discourse with master concepts governing meaning making and articulation (ibid.).

⁴⁴ On polythetic definitions, see Saler, 2000.

Ultimately, the social and the discursive are connected, as differences and similarities are potentials for conflict which are activated by social actors with political goals. This is described through the concepts of ‘antagonism’ and ‘hegemony’ (ibid.: 122-45), denoting specific conflicts between discursive positions and temporary articulation of dominance of one discourse, both of which are played out in and through discursive practice. This is a basic outlook I find very appropriate for the discursive battles inside the satanic milieu and between this milieu and other sub-milieus of the cultic milieu. Strategic satanic practice constitutes social and ideological ‘boundary-work’ both within the satanic milieu and to establish limits outside, as various groups compete for hegemony (see Gieryn, 1983, 1995; Hess, 1993: 17-18, 145-48). The focus here is the construction of ‘tradition’, but in a dynamic sense, defined as the strategic discursive interventions and negotiations undertaken the minute one is *challenged* rather than being anything constant and delimited (cf. Engler, 2005; Grieve & Weiss, 2005; Hjelm, 2005b; Lincoln, 1994; Stuckrad, 2005b). So tradition is anything but stable; in a sense it is pure practice, always (re-)constructed (or at least re-interpreted) in relation to the situation and task at hand (cf. Benavides, 2001, 2004; Hobsbawm, 1983; Lewis, 2003; Post, 2001; Shaw & Stewart, 1994).

Specifically, the articulations of the satanic discussed in the articles relate to the interrelations of “individual seekership” and “cultural orientation” (Ezzy & Berger, 2007) in the relative absence of fixed institutions and reinforced communities as outlined by Bruce Lincoln. Regarding the first, Colin Campbell’s “common ideology of seekership” or “problem-solving perspective” is founded on the belief “that truth (or enlightenment) is an esoteric commodity only to be attained after suitable preparation and a ‘quest’” (Campbell, 1972: 124). Accordingly, it brings into sharp relief the issue of authority. In all articles, I have made use of Paul Heelas’ concept of self-religion to explain Satanism as focused on the self as the locus of authority and paradigmatic truth as well as the space of diagnosis and transformation (Heelas 1996c: 2, 18-36).⁴⁵ As evinced by the tension between utilitarian and expressivist “self-ethics” in contemporary religion (Heelas 1996c: 155-168), an important legitimating device is the outer *versus* inner-defined goals of acting in and with the world, connected to worldly success *versus* inner self-actualization.⁴⁶ Nevertheless it is self-religion whether participants want to get rid of the ego or seek empowerment of it, intimately connected to a master trope

⁴⁵ In his later writings, Heelas uses ‘self-spirituality’, but I find the conceptual change deeply problematic as it rests on emic rather than etic considerations. Briefly put, in the study of religion spirituality *is* religion. It is not a new noun implicating a new ‘thing’ in contrast to religion, but a new ideal type of the theoretical object ‘religion’.

⁴⁶ Adam Possamai dubs them “instrumentalist” and “illuminational” ethics (Possamai 2001: 87).

of modernity, namely individualization or the “subjective turn” (Heelas, 2008; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005).⁴⁷

Regarding the cultural orientation, I have borrowed the concept of ‘occulture’ as a new mediating concept spanning ‘milieu’ and a ‘mainstream’, working towards the erosion of both (Partridge, 1999, 2004a, 2004b, 2005). Through this concept, Christopher Partridge reorients Campbell’s milieu in two dimensions. First, he discards both deviance and mystical religion as defining traits, focusing rather on its character as a reservoir of ambient background knowledge (Partridge, 2004b: 40-42, 62-68, 186-87). This is in line with developments by e.g. Wouter Hanegraaff and Colin Campbell himself (Campbell, 1977, 1978; Hanegraaff, 1998 [1996]: 14-18). Second, Partridge retains the sociological perspective, but more as a mainstreaming dynamic, as the ‘alternative’ is interacting with popular culture, mainstream society and orthodox culture as resacralizing or reenchanting currents. Consequently, occulture is a “broad type of ‘culture’” (Partridge, 2004b: 187). Here, he follows Campbell’s own notion of cultural ‘paths’ (Campbell & McIver, 1987; cf. Partridge, forthcoming).⁴⁸ In contrast to Partridge, I have some doubts about the ‘normality’ and ‘everyday’ character of much occulture of the ‘deeper’ end of the cultic milieu. It is simply too foreign for wider consumption in ‘uncooked’ form, prompting me to retain a certain level of perceived deviance or tension as a defining element (cf. Barkun, 2003; Ben-Yehuda, 1985, 1986). By extension, I do think diffusion frequently instigates dilution, motivating me to incorporate a scale of engagement in occultural material, even though such matters should be analytical and not normative. In effect, I retain the satanic milieu as the socio-discursive ‘location’ of contemporary Satanism, defined in relation to a ‘dark occulture’ containing all cultural discourse on the satanic.

Moving closer to the actual study of satanic discourse as a collective imagination, the exact relations between an interpretive hermeneutics based on texts and a sociological analysis built on practice form an analytical dialectics between a substantive ‘what’ and a constructive ‘how’, both of which are necessary to understand the ‘why’. I have borrowed these terms from sociologists Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein to illustrate the material and strategic domains of analysis (Petersen, 2009b; see also 2009a). In *The New Language of Qualitative Method*, they propose the very useful maxim that a choice of methods is a question of ‘both-and’ rather than ‘either-or’:

⁴⁷ The term is Charles Taylor’s, see Taylor, 2007. See also Cusack, 2010; Tipton, 1982.

⁴⁸ This integration of popular culture, cultic milieu, and subjective ‘mythmaking’ is mirrored by Adam Possamai; see e.g. Possamai, 2003, 2005, 2007.

Rather than bracket the phenomenon as a prelude to analysis, we work with what we call analytic bracketing, which operates along with analysis. This procedure amounts to alternately bracketing the whats, then the hows, in order to assemble a more complete picture of practice. The objective is to move back and forth between constitutive activity and substantive resources, alternately describing each, making informative references to the other in the process. (...) The constant interplay between the analysis of the two components mirrors the interplay between artfulness and substantive resources that characterizes interpretive practices. (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997: 119)

The ‘what’ thus refers to substantive resources and the integration of them into ‘worlds’ for a given actor, while the ‘how’ points to the processual or constructive side of this integration. In order to successfully represent both when providing an answer to the ‘why’ of any interpretive practice, a methodological “bracketing” is necessary. Fully in tune with their sociological background, Gubrium and Holstein refer to conversation analysis and other ‘actor-centric’ methods when describing methods addressing the ‘how’ (ibid.: 123-160), while methods of the ‘what’ is described through a detailed analysis of “conditions of interpretation”, a continuum from situational “circumstance” over “local cultures” to “institutional sites” (ibid.: 161-194).

Following this, all articles in this study focus on the articulation and performance of utterances, activities, texts, images, identities, groups, communities and so on *as satanic*. Historian of religion Jørgen Podemann Sørensen’s ‘minimal definition of religion’ can illustrate this: He states that religion is the production and utilization of religious utterances (J. P. Sørensen, 2006a: 16-22, esp. 20). What we study and theorize about is thus the practices around situated utterances with a specific ‘prefix’ or mode, namely ‘religious’, refocusing ‘religion’ as the act of *declaring* and *practicing* a religious stance, not a possession of certain experiences or beliefs. Religion is in essence a *modality* of speech and action, not an inherent substance or function (Lincoln, 1989: 24-25; Stuckrad, 2003, esp. 263-66). This is a shift from a reified ideology or institution with a given substance, form and function (the ‘whats’ and ‘whys’ of Satanism) to a heterogeneous field of technologies, practices, or strategies (the ‘hows’ of the satanic). Accordingly, it is an analytical reorientation of the research, especially as it places our models squarely in the tradition of seeing cultural meanings and practices as made and managed (Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 116-142). In the words of Russell McCutcheon, the focal questions are “[h]ow, why, and for whom does something come to mean in the first place” and “[w]hat are the practical consequences of meaning” (McCutcheon, 2003: 213. He is paraphrasing Bruce Lincoln).

Being a Satanist is both a public enactment and something deeply personal, and identity and worldview are determined as much by choices made in specific contexts as by recourse to scripted ideological formulations. As such, individual Satanists can move about in daily life appropriating and reworking whatever is needed to construct a meaningful context of living (King, 2001; Possamai, 2005). There is little or no cost involved in saying ‘I am a Satanist’ in a closed circle of peers, but it makes tons of sense. What is said and what is done, or even what one *is*, is never entirely congruent or defined. That is, until someone asks what this means, confronts the incongruities of everyday life practice and ideological purity, or even defies the identity and legitimacy of the author of the statement. This challenge provides an impetus for saying both what one is and what one is not (Smoczynski, forthcoming), invoking negative and positive strategies manifested in interrelated ways. Succinctly stated by Russell McCutcheon (this time in his own words):

(...) the academic study of religion – when religion is conceived as but one more cultural practice – turns out to be an exercise in (i) determining the limits of what social groups understand as credible and (ii) identifying the mechanisms used to police and contest those usually invisible limits. (McCutcheon, 2003: 161)

But we should not go too far. On the one hand the constructivist reorientation is a good recipe for empirical research integrating the actor’s point of view and thus the rationality of the field itself. On the other hand, it is a reorientation and not a wholesale conversion. Specifically, I have significant reservations as to how Gubrium and Holstein exclude text and marginalize discourse from their “new language of qualitative method”, relegating the ‘what’ to the role of contextual resources and conditions in interpretative practice. Regardless of qualifications to the contrary (eg. Gubrium and Holstein, 1997: 120-121), they are partisan towards the ethnomethodological ‘how’ of actor and interaction, privileging for example interviews, fieldwork and conversation analysis. This exhibits an unnecessary fear of discourse (actor, not structure) and text (actor, not product) expressed as a resistance towards “totalization” (cf. Holstein & Gubrium, 2005: 490-92, 497-98). As indicated by both the processes of development in the satanic milieu and the three themes of discursive ‘architecture’, discourse and text remain the core constituents of this dissertation, making it partisan towards substance, ideology and ‘world’.

At this juncture, it is important to note that discourse analysts inspired by Foucault also advocate attending to the constructivist ‘how’ rather than the ‘why’ or ‘what’ of traditional history (e.g. Flyvbjerg, 1991: 106; Kendall & Wickham, 1999: 51), fitting nicely with the method talk

of Gubrium and Holstein on the level of dialectical analytics. As such, I view their language as a meta-method, compatible with my own. Hence discourse is used as another meso-level concept uniting actor, text, and structure by proposing a *middle* ground between individual production and contextual resources, something realized both *within* individual utterances (whatever their nature, written, spoken or performed) and *between* them, without being ‘above’ them (e.g. Jordheim, 2001: esp. 180-208; Murphy, 2000). The nature of discourse as a methodological concept lies exactly in thinking the structurally conditioned ‘what’ and the situational, constructive ‘how’, as any utterance is determined and determining in relation to ‘worlds’ and concrete practice. Analytically, the particulars of ‘how’ and ‘what’ can go both ways. In article II, III, and IV, for example, I introduce the range of themes to analyze strategies emerging from the textual corpus (the ‘how’), which are subsequently related to formative aspects of *satanic* discursive positions in the satanic milieu (the ‘what’). Conversely, article V incorporates sociological methods to chart established groups in the online satanic milieu (the ‘what’), opening up a new avenue for understanding texts as performances of authority, position, and world-building (the ‘how’). In parallel with Gubrium and Holstein, rather than reducing the tension in terms of process *or* product, I keep the dynamics intact by focusing on the strategies of articulation and legitimation inherent in the structure, genre and circumstances surrounding it.

To conclude, what is central is the move from belief to discourse, from experience to claims, and from psychology to communication indicated by the ‘meso-space’. This is in accord with the general Foucault-esque turn from nouns as ‘things’ to verbs and adjectives as ‘relations’, beautifully illustrated by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s argument for “*cultural* the adjective” as the central concept of anthropology (Appadurai, 1996: 12). This removes the study of contemporary Satanism-s from any ‘natural’ association with a prescribed entity called Satanism outside the work done to *make it fit*. Both the angles of ‘what’, ‘how, and ‘why’ and the concepts of discourse and strategy highlight the space between conditioning resources and constitutive activity or structure and agency, opening a new analytical dimension applicable to (movement) texts, spokespersons, and milieus. As such, this study progresses from the opposite side of the pond towards what Gubrium and Holstein calls the “hybridized analytics of reality construction at the crossroads of institutions, culture, and social interaction” (Holstein & Gubrium, 2005: 492). To use the words of Danish historian of religion Jeppe Sinding Jensen, in the *generalized* study of religion, theory has to fit with theory, not fact or correspondence with the ‘reality’ of participants (Jensen, 2003: 149-57, 179-83, 320-24). But this gen-

eralized study is only the most abstract level of a methodology moving from particular to general and back again: Data collection, emic systematization, etic generalization. This is vital, as correspondence is constructed in the first phases in order to “study particular congeries of facts that predate that exercise (...)” (Donald Wiebe, quoted in Jensen, 2003: 143, n31).

That said, what is important is that the emic and etic levels are *both* scholarly projects (particular and general – indeed, all stages are theory-prone), making insider/outsider-distinctions *complementary* to emic and etic phases. We are no longer inside a religious world or discourse, when we are emic and etic; we are already outside *and* inside the scholarly world (Jensen, 1999: 422; 2003: chapter 4, 232-36; see also Kraft, 2006; Petersen, 2009a). In consequence, the discursive level gives us a different angle of analysis and critique that is absolutely irreverent while at the same time truly relative. On the one hand, Satanism indeed *exists* – as narratives, relations, and practices subsequently synthesized into our “‘first order’ emic social facts” (Jensen, 2003: 291). The ontological question is pushed aside (or bracketed) in order to focus on the discursive reality of the phenomenon in question (*ibid.*: chapter 8-9). On the other hand, the existence as narratives, relations, and practices shift the explanatory potential away from the claims of the subject and the veracity of these as truth-claims. They become discourse, and as such they can be subjected to critical investigation formulated in “‘second order’ etic social facts” (*ibid.*: 291, 298-304; see also chapter 12).⁴⁹

The implications of this theoretical stance should now be clear. There is no single ‘thing’ called Satanism ‘out there’. There is no ‘satanic community’ of ‘believers’ with a unified practice. What we have is a multiplicity of discourses vying for hegemony in a field of interpretations. In this sense, every insider claims that Satanism exists and that their community is the right one. On the emic level they are of course right (hence the ethno-methodological talk of ‘Satanism-s’). At the same time, plurality of meaning is the state of things. Hence I cannot simply import concepts from this level, as that would be falling into the “endogeneity trap”. Saskia Sassen explains this concept by invoking a basic explanatory paradox: “We cannot understand the x (...) by confining our study to the characteristics of the x (...). These various features (...) amount to a description but not an explanation (...)” (Sassen, 2006: 4). In conse-

⁴⁹ Oluf Schönbeck has written a clear and spirited argument for the return of the subject and the non-discursive in a re-assessment of Alfred Schütz and Suzanne K. Langer in relation to Jensen’s project. He considers the position of radical intersubjectivity as going too far, missing the centrality of the subject along the way (Schönbeck, 2008: 191). I certainly agree that ‘meaning’ can be experienced outside discursive language (bodily states, emotions, and music spring to mind); however, a defense of a general discursive study of religion is not an elimination, but rather a ‘bracketing’ of the subject, embodiment, and the non-discursive, as the methodological discussion has illustrated.

quence, I have used discourse, milieu and self-(religion) as analytical constructions or etic social facts that are “configured in terms of the non-x” (ibid.); sufficiently broad and abstract so as to facilitate comparison while still having analytical power, especially in light of the dialectics of structure and agency. All are “theoretical universals” (Jensen, 2000: 55) and “impure objects” (Jensen, 2003: 27), that is theoretical tools, abstract nouns and “second order concepts” (Jensen, 2000: 52, 59). It is to these we now turn.

Part Three. Tying the Knot: Redescribing the Field of Religious Satanism

(...) the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. (...) The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (Appadurai, 1996: 31)

This part returns to the primary object of the dissertation, namely contemporary religious Satanism. Here, I will assemble the various strands of the previous parts and the articles to follow, providing a synthetic ‘topography’ of Satanism comprised of three abstract sites of scholarly representation in which the satanic is articulated: satanic discourse, satanic milieu, and satanic self. Satanic discourse has a specific character compared to other discourse on the satanic. When unfolded and reified via discursive practice into *a* satanic discourse, several ideal types can be extrapolated, three of which I will discuss in the following: rationalist, esoteric, and reactive. In addition, as satanic discourses are realized in practice, they produce satanic *religion* in a recognizable form – with organization, sense of community, ethics and so on. In consequence, the first site of satanic discourse takes us from the traits of abstract discourse to specific groups via ideal types, giving us a first glimpse of the strategies and materials that sustain the satanic milieu as a substantive and discursive entity.

Nevertheless, this second site has an autonomous nature apart from the abstract one of discourses and resources – a social one of groups, networks and individual seekers existing within a supportive environment or habitat. The satanic milieu provides some conditions of possibility that ground the discursive in social practice, yet also transcends the individual groups, networks and communication channels that produce it. Further, models of the satanic milieu and the cultic milieu of which it is a subset must be able to encompass the increasingly deterritorialized and fragmented nature of the socio-cultural field, both in a concrete, geographical and virtual, epistemological sense. This is particularly important as internal battles, new elements and external circumstances are stimulating new reterritorializations in semantic and geographic space, prompting a model combining the liquid and amorphous reservoir with the semi-organized social ‘habitat’. As such, the second site of satanic milieu situates the flows of people, resources and discourses in a virtual, yet localized environment.

The third site of satanic self is also stretched out on a scale of abstraction. On the one hand, the self is connected to the widest cultural markers of modernity, such as subjectivization, deterritorialization, and detraditionalization. On the other, selves are deeply personal and tied to feelings of identity and personality, as well as narratives of life trajectory and meaning. Thus the element of agency and direction combines the abstractions of appropriation and authority when building ‘worlds’ to inhabit, with the more specific technologies and adaptive strategies that are ‘performing selves’ in the first place. Satanism might be analyzed as satanic discourse in a satanic milieu, but it also requires Satanists to be fully understood. In other words, the third site takes us from environment to actualization and thus back to discursive practice, tying together specific resources, factions and interpretations with salient characteristics of culture and society in late modernity.

By explicating the specific dynamics of generalization and classification before engaging with the implementation of discourse to build ‘selves’ and ‘worlds’, I hope to substantiate the exploration of “polyvocal satanic discourses in a deterritorialized satanic milieu” that is the fundamental goal of the dissertation. Before visiting these places and actually moving along the pathways I have just traced, we need to prepare; to do so, I will first discuss the five articles in some depth and extract what is useful, guided by the strategic processes and major themes I outlined in part two. Thus, I will foreground elements in the articles that deal with the diachronic articulation of satanic discourse and the changing make-up of the satanic milieu over time as well as the synchronic implementation of science, esotericism, and aesthetics through syncretism, magic, and transgression.

III. 1. Revisiting the Five Articles

Yes, times have changed, but man hasn’t. The basics of Satanism have always existed. The only thing that *is* new is the formal organization of a religion based on the universal traits of man (Anton S. LaVey, in LaVey, 1969: 53)

Article I, “Satanists and Nuts: The Role of Schisms in Modern Satanism”, is a study of one particular process of differentiation: the schismatic. Incidentally, the article also marks the first proposal of a minimum definition of organized Satanism as the four traits of ‘self-religion’, ‘antinomianism’, ‘self-designation’, and ‘subcultural ancestry’, as well as the three ideal types of rationalist, esoteric and reactive Satanism. In many ways, the questions and

answers addressed in this article constitute the seedbed from which the remaining articles take their cue. On the one hand, I see schism as a general dynamic and propose a constructivist framework for understanding it, which in essence puts modern religious Satanism back into the category of ‘religion’. On the other, I translate the conflicts and innovations into something specific: a dynamic between negotiations of individuality and negotiations of the satanic. Both have a positive and negative side; individuality is simultaneously “self-assertion” and “non-conformity”, and the satanic is at once “positive content” and defined against “pseudo-Satanism”. In this way, negotiation and tension become central qualities, pointing us towards the satanic milieu as the fundamental level of analysis. Further, the “crystallization” and “breaking” points that produce new groups and doctrines also set it apart from the wider cultic milieu and neighboring submilieus. Of course, the dynamic itself is exactly what nurtures the production of groups and networks within the cultic milieu as well, once again marking the commonality between them. Individuality and organization is an inherent fault line across the board, as is the fluid sense in which groups remain connected to and apart from the milieu to operate.

This framework is then put to use on two schismatic events, marking the first introduction of Anton LaVey and his rationalist Church against Michael Aquino and the esoteric Temple of Set. The analysis itself is diachronic, first tracking LaVey’s cultic movement, which appropriates the general syncretism and legitimation strategies of the cultic milieu while rejecting both the specific resources and the ideal of tolerance. This in effect produces a new satanic discourse and a satanic milieu somewhat congruent with LaVey’s increasingly decentralized organization. The second event marks the assertion of the milieu against its founding father, as Aquino musters a full spread of material and the entire palette of strategies to make a solid ‘us’ and a wanting ‘them’. This is also a reintegration into the cultic milieu, leaving the satanic milieu less ambiguous, as two positions have been established over a previously latent fault line, but also more divided, as two organized Satanism-s now exist. I conclude by discussing an array of internal articulations: Metaphysical (materialism vs. idealism, atheism vs. theism), epistemological (science vs. religion), technological (empowerment vs. antinomianism), and organizational (legitimation of authority, individual vs. collective). All of these have a direct bearing on both the formulation of ‘rationalist’ and ‘esoteric’ satanic discourse and their organizational ‘translation’.

Article II, “‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’: Modern Satanism between Secularized Esotericism and ‘Esotericized’ Secularism”, develops the thesis of article I by providing an in-

depth analysis of the authority of science in LaVey's writings and three exemplary successors and competitors: Peter Gilmore's Church of Satan, the Satanic Reds and Dark Doctrines, and the Satanic Forum. Two contributions to the general argument stand out. Materially, the given subject is examined by returning to the ambiguity of LaVey's self-religious project. The "bed-rock knowledge" of the Church of Satan is discussed as a synthesis of two distinct currents: A secular philosophy mainly fuelled by materialism, constructed from philosophy, biology, psychology, and so on, and a magical technology built upon a recognizable esoteric foundation. In my reading of LaVey, I attempt to be comprehensive when constructing this catalogue of inspirations; with later movement texts and spokespersons, I restrict the logging to significant new material such as quantum physics, Advaita Vedanta and the routinization of the authority of LaVey. All in all, this provides a wealth of data used in subsequent work. The second contribution is strategic, effectively dismantling any easy classification of 'secular' and 'esoteric' elements. Throughout the article, a recurrent theme is the dialectical nature of the construction of tradition, forcing us to see the undercurrent of 'esoterization' in the use of secular material and the 'secularization' of esoteric matter.

Here, I issue a challenge to scholarly reliance on substantives and end products, representing a compartmentalized history of ideas. When applying dialectical models of boundary work from a range of scholars, the issues of syncretism, construction of tradition and boundary maintenance activates a bundle of strategies of appropriation and legitimation for social actors, transforming the 'secular' and 'esoteric' into modes of discourse in flux rather than fixed categories. In particular, I point to two basic "motivating myths" in LaVey's dual discourse on authority, the secular "man the beast" and the esoteric "satanic self". These appeals to material science and the LaVey myth, respectively, are inversely related to appropriated material in his satanic discourse: Under scientific reasoning we find the LaVeyan master narrative of the "self-made man", while "carnal psychology" undergirds the use of esoteric resources. In consequence, it is not the borrowing that is important, but the shaping. On the other hand, this diachronic attention to change is complemented by a reinstatement of the substantive concepts of "esotericized secularism" and "secularized esotericism", but as a "sedimented rhetoric" that can be analyzed synchronically. In other words, the strategic choices gradually form a coherent ideological world leaning towards one or the other, developed in critical dialogue with resources and interpretations in the satanic and cultic milieus as well as modern culture. Through this framework I redescribe the typology of rationalist and esoteric Satanism offered in article I as "sedimented claimsmaking" on a scale of authentication and syncretism.

Article III, “The Seeds of Satan: Conceptions of Magic in Contemporary Satanism”, continues this reorientation of the secular and esoteric as major sites of satanic discourse by analyzing the other side of magical practice. It also marks the first instance of distinguishing various ‘discourses on the satanic’ from self-ascribed ‘satanic discourses’ to posit a basic constituent of the satanic milieu. Consequently, LaVey’s discursive practice is shown to have both an ideological (or doctrinal) and a sociological effect on the heterogeneous landscape of modern Satanism, refining the point already made in article I and further building the case for seeing rationalist and esoteric religious Satanism as scholarly abstractions of sedimented strategic choices. What is of more immediate importance is three new contributions: A stronger attention to contemporary groups and individuals and to esoteric ‘counter-traditions’; the development of expressive and utilitarian ‘self-ethics’ as poles on a scale of self-development, which when combined with ‘esoterization’ and ‘secularization’, the strategies of legitimation already mentioned, form an interpretive matrix of discursive practice; and an analysis of LaVey’s paradigmatic understanding of magic as artifice between reality and imagination.

Materially, the article discusses the magical theory and practice of LaVey and Aquino as well as their organizations and supporters today. Further, I examine “paradigmatic” black magic of the grimoire tradition, “devotional” Satanism of the Joy of Satan and Diane Vera, and anti-nomian “self-deification” of the Dragon Rouge, Misanthropic Luciferian Order, and Temple of the Black Light to provide new contemporary data. The large amount and high frequency of Internet sources illustrates the new dimensions of the satanic milieu as we move closer to the bewildering present, but also a significant departure from more established movement texts to capture meaning-making closer to individual agency. Throughout this ethnographic cartography of ‘subcultural ancestors’, I place the actors in the interpretive matrix outlined above, highlighting the instrumental or expressive orientation (outer or inner-directed) along with the secularized and esotericized nature of rationalist and esoteric satanic discourse to provisionally fix self-religious Satanism in distinct, explanatory categories. Finally, the very specific reading of LaVey’s magical technology is generalized to say something new about satanic magic as well as magic in modernity. Actually, as with science, LaVey’s take on magic is a quite refined *re-articulation* of esoteric understandings; it is not only asserting a secular foundation, but carefully retaining a third, satanic alternative beyond simple dichotomies. Magic is “authentic artificiality”, a “conscious life design” underscoring the formative power of aesthetics infused with will. This is traced as a creative or expressive dimension

found in all the materials surveyed, transforming for example literature, music and art into ritualized channels for self-development and world-making.

Article IV, “‘Smite Him Hip and Thigh’: Satanism, Violence, and Transgression”, strengthens this incorporation of the aesthetic dimension by further addressing the boundaries between on the one hand cultural stereotypes and demonological discourse and on the other the satanic discourse of the satanic milieu. The given subject is violence, providing a welcome opportunity to reflect on the attribution of and playing with cultural linkages of Satanism and violent acts. By seeing violence as a mythological, ostensive and symbolic space for discursive practice, I try to discern actual or imaginary physical violence framed as satanic from various transgressive acts performing antinomianism and nonconformity in a symbolic sense, thus providing an alternate identity without breaking the law. Further, I investigate the ways in which cultural demonologies are appropriated and rethought as “aesthetic terrorism”, a “play with gray” mirroring straight mimetic performances of evil in what on the surface looks like either an ironic mode or a solemn embrace. However, there is a scale of *sanitization* of violence and diabolism. Consequently, the discursive articulation of satanic transgression marks a continuum of symbolic violence from the vulgar to the refined, from ostension to a “third side” beyond norm and counter-norm. This distinction marks a clear yet permeable boundary between reactive and religious Satanism, supplying the final component for the typology *via* a refinement of ‘antinomianism’ as transgression *from* and transgression *to*.

A large part of the article discusses various transgressions. The specific acts might look alike, yet the ideology of transgression can be non-existent or elaborate. Apart from merely existing, such ideologies are also very different in their understanding of Satanism as an end in itself or means to a new end, reflecting the degree to which Satanism is distanced from demonological stereotypes. Thus, when confirming norms by performing antinomianism, it is a transgression *from* by opposition. In contrast, when marking new premises and a “new affirmative space”, transgression is a ‘deconditioning device’ with a goal outside the normative system, transgression *to*. To substantiate this distinction, I return to the type of reactive Satanism and the associated ideological positions, discursive practices and social categories this entails. As with the two established religious satanic discourses, the reactive is a unique articulation of the satanic, based on ostension of mainly Christian stereotypes and popular fantasies. Nevertheless, its social manifestation is tied to small networks of peers and individual performance in opposition to the established groups and networks already discussed. In addition, few true movement texts and spokespersons exist, affecting the coherence of reactive satanic discourse and the

cohesion of the associated submilieu. As such, it is even more fragmented and tied to solitarities with few common denominators. Its significance rather lies in the huge symbolic importance it plays as a negative category of exclusion for religious Satanists, even though they frequently use reactive discourse in their transgressions, further complicating the emic distinctions at work.

Article V, “From Book to Bit: Enacting Satanism Online”, is the final article in this anthology and the last article written before compiling the dissertation, making it more related to article I than the three thematic studies in between. As with the other articles, the subject is given, here Satanism as a test case for contemporary esotericism on the Internet. This ‘environmental’ angle incites me to return to the ‘schismatic’ approach, expanding the limited time frame of article I into the present, while also providing a theoretization of the new sources we find online as “hybrid texts”. As a result, the article provides significant new input on both material and strategic issues, which are interlinked through the examination of new contexts for and new types of source material. The new contexts are studied by examining the inclusive/tolerant and exclusive/dismissive articulations of ‘community’ and testing them on concrete data culled from online data searches. Here, an expected discrepancy emerges between *imagined* community and the actual *practice* of linking sites or collaborating online. What is evident is a large deterritorialized milieu and smaller networks of reterritorialization, whether this is understood as geographical locations or discursive spaces. Consequently, heterogeneous ‘communities’ exist in organized settings, but little ‘community’ is found.

Whatever exists of “togetherness” is a result of interpretive practice, something enacted in discursive practice on a wide field of ‘cthonian’ oriented currents that have some elements in common, but also exist in distinct milieus. To understand this, I move to new types of material found in the online context, specifically those of interest to a historian: texts and written discourse more broadly. What we find is a new genre of hybrid text where the conditions and processes of meaning-making are intrinsic in the make-up of the text. This is not qualitatively different from the texts we know, but it is much more visible and integral to the production and consumption of written discourse, as online communication has a deeper connection to the speech situation. As an example, I focus on individual “posts” and longer “threads” on a satanic message board, which in essence is an electronic community site. Through this analysis, we move very close to the individual agency already alluded to in article III, as posts and threads actively construct community while also being conditioned by it. We also witness how the battles over Satanism carried out by LaVey and Aquino in the formative years, ana-

lyzed in article I, are continuously replayed in new contexts, but also transformed according to new constituents of power and authority in the specific groups. Instead of viewing the end product of these discussions, we can follow them ‘live’ in process, resulting in a better understanding of the construction of hegemonic discourse within communities.

III. 2. Satanic Discourse

Them that has gets. Until one has he’ll never get. And you don’t get it by taking someone else’s either. You create your own. If you can’t figure that one out, you’re not much of a magician. (Anton S. LaVey, “Ravings from Tartarus”, in LaVey, 1992: 40)

The first site emerging from this study is that of satanic discourse as a singular, plural, and ‘unfolded’ phenomenon. As we have seen, one recurrent project is a basic delimitation of the subject, a ‘Satanism 101’ so to speak. On the one hand, this is an artifact of the individual contexts, as I have had to present Satanism as a legitimate field of study in each new setting. On the other hand, it has been a central factor in the project from the beginning. To even begin discussing the vicissitudes of modern Satanism over time, we have to establish a boundary and content. In other words, the traits and interpretations discussed here as boundary markers arise from discussions of ‘Satanism’ undertaken by both academics and Satanists, but they are synthesized into analytical terminology as a meso-level of satanic discourse. This marks a preliminary demarcation within which the analytic ‘how’ and ‘what’ of interpretive practice operates.

A. Discourse on the satanic and satanic discourse: Elaborating on a stipulative definition

Both academic and non-scholarly definitions of Satanism frequently combine historical instances and contemporary trends by characterizing it in Christian terms of ‘belief’ in, ‘worship’ or ‘adoration’ of Satan as an entity (e.g. Faxneld, 2006: xiv; Introvigne, 1997a: 7-17; 2006: 1035). Beginning with the book chapter “Modern Satanism: Dark Doctrines and Black Flames”, my work has circled around a definition of Satanism that is clear of this heresiological bias to understand the autonomous nature of contemporary Satanism (Petersen, 2005: esp. 424, 443-44). This undertaking is not just motivated by exorcising implicit theological baggage from academic terminology. Intuitive classifications of ‘beliefs’ conjoined with ‘rituals’,

‘organization’ and ‘ethics’, for example, can compel observers into conflating mythical and historical cases of Devil worship, Black Masses, witches covens, pact-making and inversion of all that is good, just and true into a ‘paradigmatic’ Satanism to which modern Satanism is somehow aberrant. Deviance from the received model is subsequently judged either in a theological mode, as a loss of or a play with faith in pure opposition to Christian doctrine, or in a sociological mode, as evidence of secularization (again a loss of faith) and the erosion of traditional limits. In extreme cases, modern Satanism ‘proves’ the superficial nature of representations of evil in modernity, leading humanity (here mainly Westerners) to the schizophrenia of Holocaust and secular humanism (see e.g. Delbanco, 1995; Russell, 1986 for examples). But even when unaffected by such kneejerk catastrophism, such conclusions uncritically adopt the Christian framework of “traditional” Satanism, comparing mythological Satanists with real ones.⁵⁰

Rather than making inversionary sects or imaginary ‘others’ paradigmatic for modern Satanism, my suggestion is to bracket any *a priori* Christian or historical leads on the subject, only inviting them back in as we have distinguished the rationality of contemporary Satanism in its own right (Petersen, 2005: 427). Thus, a first order of business has been the distinction between *discourse on the satanic* and *satanic discourse*, already drawn on in part one and two. As originally formulated in article III and V, it is an analytical dichotomy between broader demonological narratives on Satan and Satanism circulating in Western culture and the narrower satanic discourse of self-declared Satanists operating within a satanic milieu. Although they are related in content, there is an important difference in a self-image constructed by pointing to what one is not through perceived ‘others’, motivating warfare on behalf of goodness which further contributes to identity construction, and an explicitly satanic self-designation pointing to radically different context of meaning. Any crossovers are thus part of discursive practice undertaken from a specific viewpoint and not categorical involvements.

However, what distinguishes the satanic discourse of contemporary Satanism is something apart from mere self-designation or “declaration of intent” (Petersen, 2009b: 3). As we saw in

⁵⁰ For example, Marcello Truzzi is forced to conclude that the “black” witchcraft of the Church of Satan is not satanic at all (as it uses Satan as a symbol) and not really religious, but rather ideological in scope (as it professes a naturalist and atheist worldview), yet partially overlapping with Neopagan groups (e.g. Truzzi, 1974: 645). Reender Kraanenborg’s “How ‘Satanic’ is Satanism?” (Kraanenborg, 2008) radicalizes Truzzi’s intimation by defining ‘satanic’ as “evil and harmful to people” (ibid.: 132), thus excluding most of what I consider in this dissertation as not satanic at all. The position that modern Satanism is in effect Neopagan and not ‘Satanism’ as such is also echoed by newer surveys contextualizing Satanism as witchcraft, magic, and occultism albeit without the normative confusion (e.g. La Fontaine, 1999; Partridge, 2004b).

the discussion of previous research, neighboring groups and individuals in time and/or space also appropriate and realign as self-image the mythical frame of ‘other-directed’ demonological discourse, most notably the ‘low-cultural’ popular and ‘high-cultural’ aesthetic and esoteric discourses on the satanic. While I have opted for an inclusive coverage when discussing Satanism as a social and cultural phenomenon, I am more exclusive when it comes to self-ascribed satanic identity as a religious or philosophical choice. In consequence, there is an identifiable yet fuzzy external boundary between satanic discourse in the satanic milieu and neighboring discourses on the satanic, partly determined by emic considerations of discursive independence from hegemonic cultural narratives of Satanism and partly by the polythetic nature of definitions operating through ‘discourse’ and ‘milieu’. Here, an important set of tools for making this distinction are the four traits of my stipulative definition proposed in article I and revised for the anthology *Contemporary Religious Satanism: Self-religion, anti-nomianism, self-designation and ‘subcultural’ ancestry* (Petersen, 2009c: esp. 1-4, 7-8). This working definition has developed from a more typological or classificatory tool (foreshadowed in Petersen, 2005) to an expression of the provisional and eclectic nature of Satanism today.

The first two traits are concerned with the *project* articulated by satanic discourse: A ‘self-religious’ orientation towards personal realization and authentic nature, whether framed as a carnal or esoteric truth (Dyrendal, 2009a; G. Harvey, 1995, 2009; Lap, forthcoming), and an ‘antinomian’ deconditioning from external authorities (Granholt, 2009; R. Sutcliffe, 1996). In addition, authority and legitimacy are intricately entwined with this project of the self calling for ‘de-traditionalization’ as the operating term: Authority is now associated with internal rather than external values, foregrounding subjective experiences of authority and introducing a new layer of interpretive practice before judging anything as legitimate (Heelas, 1996a, 1996b; Partridge, 1999). Satanic discourse thus formulates a project of dual identity construction with a positive dimension of self and the resources engaged with to facilitate its development, and a negative dimension of liberation from anything ‘in-self’ and ‘outside-the-self’ blocking its discovery or growth.⁵¹ As such, the self is the primary goal of Satanism, and whatever implications follow from this are the result of secondary elaborations discussed below.

⁵¹ Of course, several strategies to be covered below activate both positive and negative dimensions: for example, acts of artistic transgression are simultaneously building the self through expressivity or catharsis *and* engaged in the questioning of hallowed social boundaries. Thus, the reductions of analytical neatness and the complexities of real life frequently collide.

The second couplet of traits, self-designation and ‘subcultural’ ancestry, describes the *language* through which Satanism is articulated as an ‘antinomian self-religion’. Here, the emic self-designation of ‘Satanist’, the use of Satan and Satanism and a host of related mythological beings to describe themselves and a common culture is one obvious resource to frame discourse in a ‘satanic mode’, transforming floating signifiers into nodal points. Thus, ‘Satanists’, ‘Luciferian’ witches and ‘black’ magicians are both declaring and practicing a specific stance on adversarial self-religion by framing it as satanic, and they are actively using ‘diabolical’ aspects of mythology and popular culture to do so. Using the dreaded ‘S’-word (and related cognates) on oneself and one’s world is a distinct way of constructing identity through alterity. The final trait of subcultural ancestry or discursive genealogy dictates an emic engagement with the ‘world’ in which a ‘Satanist’ moves and the ‘ethos’ coloring the project, in other words calling on established groups and movement texts, explicitly invoking emic historiography and “de facto”-Satanists throughout the ages, or actively tapping into a common pool of literature, practices, social circles, aesthetics, and so on.

Two conclusions follow directly from these traits. One, satanic discourses are not operating in a vacuum, which is why we need a concept describing the site in which they evolve, grow and clash. This is the satanic milieu. Second, the project of Satanism is intimately connected to the construction of collective and individual identity and thus the ‘personalization’ of satanic discourse. This is the level of satanic self. What is of immediate importance when isolating satanic discourse as a site for analysis is how the four fundamental traits stipulate distinct and general elements.

On the level of project, Satanism has strong similarities with the New Age as cultural criticism (Dyrendal, 2009a; Hanegraaff, 1998 [1996]: 514-25), the subjective self actualization of the Human Potential Movement (Heelas, 1991, 1992, 1999; Lap, forthcoming; Wallis, 1985), and the antinomian self-deification of the Left-Hand Path (Drury, 2008; Granholm, 2005, 2009; Flowers, 1997; Urban, 2006). In effect, the first two traits circumscribe what is *general* in satanic discourse, indicating the commonalities of religious discourses formulated both in dialogue with and opposition to the ‘project’ of modernity. Such ‘alternatives’ or third options to cultural dogmas are common to the cultic milieu as a whole, but are of course prevalent in new religious movements, religious revivals and political radicalism as well. This project is articulated in negotiation with fields of discourse such as secularism, democracy and science embodied in the hegemonic centers of power-knowledge such as church, nation state and uni-

versity (e.g. Featherstone, 1991: 1-13; D. Harvey, 1990: 10-39).⁵² I will briefly assess this generality by exploring similar trait-based definitions I have been in dialogue with when stipulating my own.

The position of alternate option is especially clear in Hugh Urban's discussion of four "dimensions" of modern sexual magic in *Magia Sexualis*: An emphasis on the power of the individual self, sex as the "hidden truth" of the self, science as the most effective means to the self, and radical freedom and liberation as the associated goal (Urban, 2006: 6-7). These traits are connecting 'sexual magic', of which LaVey and many esoteric groups are considered a part, to modernity, by centering on the rediscovery of "the sacred in and through the most "profane" aspects of human life (...) through specifically transgressive forms of sexual experience aimed at the deliberate overstepping of moral boundaries and social taboos" (ibid.: 6). Although the present focus on satanic discourse precludes sex and science as *defining* traits, there is a definite congruence with my general project of individual self and antinomian liberation. Another strong influence is Stephen E. Flowers' *Lords of the Left Hand Path*, where he posits two "major criteria" for inclusion in (and mastery of) the 'Left-Hand Path': Deification of the self and antinomianism (Flowers, 1997: 4). He subsequently isolates four distinct elements in the first criteria: self-deification [sic], individualism, initiation, and magic, describing an individual project of "awakening" based on "stages" of the will and specific technologies (ibid.). As with Urban, the project is related to magical practice, an element covered in detail in article III; nonetheless, his criteria demarcate a discursive field of commonality spanning both explicit Satanism-s and related ideas.

In the later articles, I expand on the relations between the satanic project and the discourse of the Left-Hand Path milieu. As argued in article V, these fields share a discursive ground, especially the focus on a 'cthonian' orientation towards 'darker' gods and 'darker' pursuits – the carnal, the transgressive, and the subconscious. This marks a distinct take on the antinomianism inherent in the project of the self. For example, Nevill Drury provides five "key characteristics of the Left-Hand Path" in his analysis of modern Western magic: Individual self-empowerment, the 'dark' side of magic, antinomianism, the quest for self-deification, and the cthonic as mentioned above (Drury, 2008: 200-1), in effect subsuming Satanism as a whole into the Left-Hand Path (ibid.: 127-214). Parallel to Urban and Flowers, he builds his traits around magic. Yet it is evident that the first, third and fourth attributes belong in the general

⁵² All of these fields and centers are hopelessly heterogeneous and have waning authority, but that is not important in the binaries of emic self-understanding.

discursive sphere of antinomian self-religion, while the employment of ‘darker’ resources mirror my two specific traits, especially the category of subcultural ancestry. However, with the exception of the explicitly satanic groups, what is lacking is exactly the issue of self-designation as discussed earlier, *stating* or *marking* a boundary from ‘both’ sides. Paradoxically, his analysis simultaneously conflates and divides Satanism and the Left-Hand Path relative to his object of study, Rosaleen Norton and western esotericism, and a double understanding of Satanism as both a current within the Left-Hand Path and a social ‘other’ (ibid.: 128-132, 407-409).

In contrast to the sociological framing of Urban and the (too) inclusive categories of Drury and Flowers, Kennet Granholm argues a scholarly reappraisal of Satanism as an etic term (Granholm, 2009, forthcoming-a). Sinister ‘post-Satanisms’ and ‘non-Satanisms’ found in the darker corners of neighboring submilieus might avoid the name of Satan as a self-descriptor, and they might feel that Satanism is transgressed as a jejune adversarial discourse. This presents my stipulative definition with the reverse problem, of including too little because of the specificity of the discourse. Nevertheless, I argue in both article III and V that most of the ‘groups’ discussed by Granholm as ‘post-satanic’ (which in the majority of cases amount to literary outputs and informal networks) share the self-religious and antinomian traits as well as the use of magic and a notion of belonging to the Left-Hand path, and frequently utilize Lucifer, Satan, Kali and other adversarial gods and goddesses as metaphorical or magical resources in the same way. Indeed, his proposed etic definition of the Left-Hand Path (based on emic self-understanding) has many recognizable elements: The ideology of individualism, the view of man as a psycho-physical totality, the appraisal of life in the here-and-now, the goal of self-deification, and an antinomian stance (Granholm, 2009: 87-89).⁵³ As mentioned above, while we should not *ignore* the importance of self-designation, neither should we *rely* upon it as the necessary and sufficient condition for establishing a *satanic* discourse.

B. Historical developments and ideal types: Rationalist, esoteric, and reactive Satanism

In the light of these complications, how do we account for any distinctiveness of satanic discourse? Congruence aside, the level of language is designating the specificity of the *satanic* in contrast to neighboring fields, especially as the self-designation and genealogy is allied to the

⁵³ They are later shortened to three: Individualism, self-deification, and antinomianism, see (Granholm, forthcoming-a).

Prince of Darkness. Accordingly, when confronted with antinomian self-religion we should weigh the chronology, emphasis and application of the satanic, going on the one hand beyond the name ‘Satan’ in particular, but on the other hand restricting the usage of diabolic metaphors to a definite palette of options. Drawing lines become a key part of the stipulative endeavor, done on a case-by-case basis. Here, two principal issues based on internal developments become important points for elaboration: the historical conditions facilitating the emic self-designation outside a Christian context, and interpretive differences within the satanic milieu, which I have categorized in the ideal-types of rationalist, esoteric and reactive Satanism. Both of these issues are starting points for the journey towards the discursive practice of ‘how’ Satanism is constructed.

Regarding historical developments, all the articles reflect on the gradual historical dis-embedding of Satan from a Christian context, facilitating the contemporary metaphorization and re-embedding into new discursive contexts (Giddens, 1990; Hammer, 2001b). The most thorough discussion is provided in my introduction to *Contemporary Religious Satanism*, and I will paraphrase and elaborate on that analysis here (Petersen, 2009b: 10-14). Taking my cue from Peter Schock and James R. Lewis, I argue that Satan has moved from the Christian mould of evil opposition⁵⁴ to a position of ambiguous appeal due to socio-cultural changes challenging the normative validity of Christian dogma. As such, I chart various “stages of appropriation” borrowed from Olav Hammer (Hammer, 2001a: 155-181, esp. 158-9; 2001b: 50-51): from the early travel reports in 19th century romantic discourse over the gradual transformation of esoteric reappraisals in the 19th and 20th century to the “practice to be performed or experience to be sought after” in the satanic discourse of contemporary Satanism. This in turn is exactly what is producing the *satanic* milieu as an autonomous order of discourse dissimilar to both the original context and various discourses on the satanic found in neighboring milieus.

By applying a scale from “structurally conservative” to “structurally radical” to cultural products of reinterpretation, Olav Hammer provides another important element to the analysis of appropriation stages directly relevant to the fate of Satan (Hammer, 2001a: 33; 2001b: 46). Structurally conservative products might be adapted in their surface characteristics, yet they remain connected to the basic cultural dynamics from whence they came. This is the Satan figure of popular and aesthetic discourse on the satanic as discussed in part two. Thus the ro-

⁵⁴ Which in itself has developed from the Old Testament position as sanctioned adversary, see e.g. Kelly, 2006; Russell, 1977, 1981.

romantic and bohemian Satan exhibits new features as anti-hero and ambiguous ideal, partly through a strategy of counter-reading classical texts such as Milton's *Paradise Lost* and partly through a syncretization of Satan with Prometheus and Pan, for example. However, Satan is still understood through the Christian context.⁵⁵ Conversely, structurally radical products disregard the depth structure while retaining surface traits, an apt description of the disembedded Satan/Set found in the "trendsetting templates" such as LaVey's *Satanic Bible* and Aquino's *The Book of Coming Forth By Night* examined in article II and III. While the diabolical figure looks the part, it is in fact a wholly new creation reembedded in the project of religious Satanism outlined above. In between these two extremes, we find various positive appropriations of Satan that are nevertheless connected to Christianity, marking a disparate path from Christian 'matrix' to personal realization through esoteric work.

A useful parallel is Joseph Laycock's discussion of discursive changes in the meaning of the term 'vampire', producing a vampire community roughly equivalent to my satanic milieu. In *Vampires Today*, he proposes a four-stage process of emergence of the self-identified vampire: First, a category of person in language is provisionally identified with, subsequently 'de-otherizing' the cultural category. Third, it is transformed from within, which finally makes it a tool for constructing and defining the self (Laycock, 2009: 28-31, 135). This move from negative 'other' to positive 'self' can be applied to other discursive identities based on mythological narratives (ibid.: 106). More to the point, our categories of Vampirism or Satanism become statements of identity implying active ascription. Based on the historical outline above, this self-ascription is possible exactly because of a gradual process of disembedding which facilitate the engagement with cultural products as structurally radical. Popularly speaking, a dividing line is drawn between Satan as fulfilling a cultural script or being a hermeneutic of the self. This is directly relevant for the language of satanic discourse, especially in terms of subcultural ancestry, which can now be viewed as a milieu apart from a Christian 'underground' populated with actors retroactively using the historical people, processes and products to construct emic historiographies in ongoing struggles of ownership (Hammer, 2001a: 34-36 and part IV).

As I discuss in article I, this points to a second layer of distinction on a scale of positive and negative. On the one hand, the 'S'-words used, the ancestry invoked, and the peers imitated are not the same, a fact I try to capture in the three categories of rationalist, esoteric and reac-

⁵⁵ In addition, none of these features or strategies were applied in a consistent way, see Faxneld, 2010a; Luijk, forthcoming; Schock, 2003.

tive Satanism each with a positive position. For example, selected political and early aesthetic discourse is appropriated and upstaged by rationalist Satanists as they sanitize Satanism into a material, carnal, and adversarial current of ‘anti-morality’ which were always under the Devil’s fane – historical actors are de facto Satanists in the modern sense. Conversely, the esoteric discourse is foregrounded by esoteric Satanists as the proof of a living ‘tradition’ of Satanism stretching back through time. On the other hand, rationalist and esoteric Satanism-s are in themselves discursive positions constructed in relation to time and space, not least the reactive Satanists and their reactive satanic discourse which mark the incorporation of popular and recent aesthetic discourse on the satanic outside established discursive communities. Here, the three categories also define themselves by being separate from others, *occluding* the real ambiguities of the strategic construction of and appeal to tradition and authority. The concrete studies of discursive practice in article II, II and IV have prompted this development of my analytical schemes. I will briefly elaborate upon it in the following.

In my earlier discussions of rationalist, esoteric and reactive Satanism, the categories denote ideal types of social actors and cultural products based on substantive and rhetorical matters (Petersen, 2005: 425-26, 440-44; 2009b: 6-7). When used in this way, the categories are a condensation of four distinct elements: The conception of Satan, the primary mode of legitimation, the general collective ethos and the advocated goal. The specific nomenclature and content has developed in dialogue with a number of previous attempts at classification, most of which reproduce theological or normative assumptions (see Petersen, 2005: 440-444 for a discussion). Of particular importance here is the work of Massimo Introvigne and Joachim Schmidt. From Introvigne I have borrowed the distinction between various *types* of Satanism, based on the content and interpretation of Satan, and a scale of *formality*, here “adult” and “youth” Satanism. Regarding the types, he largely follows Marcello Truzzi, although Introvigne discards the ‘historical’ and ‘traditional’ elements: “Rationalistic Satanism”, “occultic Satanism”, “acid Satanism”, and “Luciferianism” (Introvigne, 1995: 158-62; 1997b: esp. 33-48). I have abandoned acid Satanism as irrelevant and combine Luciferianism and occultic Satanism into one category of esoteric Satanism, a less value-laden concept.

The category of reactive Satanism comes from Joachim Schmidt, who offers “reaktive, paradigmatisch konform Satanismus” as one of six types suggested in his book (Schmidt, 2003 [1992]: 10-11). Apart from the direct mimesis of Christian demonology, the types are “gnostisch umgewertete Satanismus” (positive dualism), “integrative Satanismus” (polar monism), “autarke, sekundär achristliche Satanismus” (modern religious Satanism), “synkre-

tistisch gebrochene Satanismus” (wider sinister currents on the Left-Hand path), and finally “literarische Verarbeitung des Satans” (fictional narratives) (ibid.: 10-14). The typology is based on a discussion of Satanism as “theologischer Satanslehre”, “theologisch projiziertem Satanismus”, and “explizitem Satanismus” as “sekundäre religiöse Orientierung” (ibid.: 7-10), a distinction somewhat similar to my initial division of satanic discourse from other discourses on the satanic. When compared to the discussion so far, we can see that ‘reactive’, ‘gnostic’, ‘integrative’, and ‘literary’ Satanism are more or less directly dependent upon a Christian worldview (what I have called structurally conservative popular, aesthetic and esoteric discourse on the satanic), whereas ‘autonomous’ and ‘syncretic’ Satanism completes the de-otherization and inserts Satan in non-Christian satanic discourse. I have summarized my classification through keywords lifted from the articles in the following table (table 2); for further clarification, refer to articles I through IV.

	Rationalist	Esoteric	Reactive
Conception of Satan	Symbolic: atheist (symbol for self) or ‘deist’ (impersonal force in nature)	Archetypal: gnostic or mystical (initiatory self)	Paradigmatic: theistic (inverted Christian demonology)
Primary mode of legitimation	LaVey’s <i>Satanic Bible</i> (rational, naturalized)	Left-Hand path as perennial philosophy (experiential, traditional)	Demonology and folklore (traditional, personal)
General collective ethos	Materialist, carnivalesque, Darwinist	Idealist, mystical, initiatory	Mythological, mimetic, nihilist
Advocated goal	Rational self-interest, indulgence, vital existence	Gnosis, self-deification	Identity, masculinity, opposition

Table 2. Ideal types/discursive positions of modern Satanism

As this tripartite scheme has developed in later articles, the types are now used analytically in two distinct ways. As satanic discourses, they are modeling hybrid practice rather than fixed identities. This suggests three modes of discourse (a rationalist, esoteric and reactive) which showcase the various resources and strategies recruited to articulate a specific position *within* the satanic milieu. When *examined in practice* (covered in more detail in the next section),

any ‘type’ articulates elements from all modes, as blends of positive and negative elements according to strategic need. In consequence, the classification has progressed away from the necessary categorical distinctiveness of ideal types to contested spaces that involves a range of strategic choices. These choices disappear when collapsing the discourse into a bounded category. On the other hand, when doing so, they map discursive positions (Hammer, 2001a: 30) that can analytically be set apart from competing positions as well as extraneous discourses on the satanic, offering three distinct takes on matters of content and legitimacy which are visible in concrete texts as expressed by satanic groups. Here they are analytical tools that illuminate general differences and similarities by sacrificing detail. It is a central dynamic of the articles to showcase both sides of this analytical duality, which is a direct implementation of the framework of ‘how’ and ‘what’. By attending to satanic discourses, the uncleanliness of making meaning is highlighted, complicating any easy typologization. Conversely, by focusing on distinct positions, the guiding metaphors and internal boundaries of the satanic milieu become clearer.

Before moving on to the other sites of representation, one final aspect of clarification needs to be accomplished, namely clarifying the tricky issue of ‘satanic religion’. In the initial discussion on definitions, I alluded to an inclusive and exclusive coverage of Satanism, depending on the aim of the study. On the one hand, all three types of satanic discourse shade into neighboring discourses on the satanic, the self, and the esoteric, underscoring the need for educated guesses (or at least informed decisions) on what to include and exclude when moving from Satanism as a socio-cultural topic to contemporary religious Satanism as a field of study. The decision mainly rests on the four traits, especially the specific self-designation as refracted through an articulated subcultural ancestry, in effect basing etic choices on an analysis of emic criteria of inclusion in the satanic milieu proper. However, as we have seen, there are multiple discourses to be a ‘member’ of and multiple actors mutually excluding each other. I concluded the methodology section by quoting Saskia Sassen on the endogeneity trap, a recurrent problem that becomes vitally important to address.

The conundrum is best dealt with by explaining a largely implicit ‘weak spot’ in the project as a whole: The tendency to treat reactive Satanism as a garbage bin mainly defined by being *not* rationalist or esoteric, something inherent in the connection to symbolic rebellion, adolescent ‘Satanism’ and direct mimesis. Such a position inadvertently incorporates the bias of established satanic groups to judge validity of satanic discourse. Article I and II largely ignores reactive Satanism to focus on established movement texts and spokespersons; article III and

IV treats all three, but still has a tendency to view reactive Satanism as less mature, serious, developed, or coherent. In the transformation from dumped ideal types to discursive positions charted above, pure categories have become hybrid, and it is now possible to explicate *in what sense* rationalist and esoteric satanic discourses are “organized, stable and systematic” in comparison to reactive ones (Petersen, 2009b: 6). Basically speaking, modern or contemporary Satanism-s have been analyzed as satanic discourse in contrast to demonologies and other ‘others’. On this level all three are valid as articulations of satanic discourse. However, when introducing the descriptor ‘religion’, as in contemporary religious Satanism, we expect something more.

This ‘more’ can be described through Bruce Lincoln’s four domains of religion presented in part two: discourse, practice, community, and institution (Lincoln, 2003: 5-8). Every discourse claiming authority and truth is ‘unfolded’ into “embodied material action”, rendering the discourse operational. This complex fosters sentiments of affinity and estrangement that reinforce identities and social borders, as well as creating a need for “formal or semiformal structures (...) authorized to speak and act (...)”. Such a continuity of speech and consciousness with social action and structure constitutes a ‘religion’, even though the actual unfolding leaves a lot of room for internal subdivisions and tendencies. Similarly, when unfolding satanic discourse, we expect a substantiality, functionality, and formality approaching that of prototypical ‘religion’ (cf. Petersen, 2009b: 1-2). When seen as such, there is indeed a permeable, yet definite boundary between rationalist and esoteric discourse capable of producing and sustaining satanic religions, and reactive discourse which is not. As stated in article IV when dealing with transgression, when a reactive commitment becomes mature, serious, developed, or coherent, that is a religious commitment, we consistently end up in the other two categories. As a position, reactive satanic discourse is dominated by the negative aspect of opposition to established norms through the ostension of stereotypes, and rather weak on the level of autonomous and lasting discursive substance. In other words, whereas rationalist and esoteric discourses are primary constituents of religious groups embodying religious Satanism, reactive discourse is sustained in fan groups, peer groups, and ‘scenes’ that lack the stability to constitute Satanism as a religious undertaking.

That said, all satanic religions are decentralized and fragmented, with a small core of elite practitioners and a large network of solitaries and affiliates. In “Entre metanoïa et paranoïa”, Alexis Mombelet promotes Olivier Bobineau’s definition of a ‘Satanist’ as a person who is self-declared, knows about the broader doctrines from significant spokespersons, practices

rituals understood as satanic, and belongs to a formal or virtual group (discussion board or social network) (Mombelet, 2009: 539, n. 1).⁵⁶ I think it works quite well as a guideline. Yet for this Satanist to be religious, we need a consistency of vision and some sort of commitment above pure eclecticism and parody. This evaluation is not normative in the sense of reproducing emic criteria of seriousness; actually, willful play with cultural stereotypes can be found in most satanic religion as well. But there is a difference in both degree and kind. To further understand this, we now move on to the interplay between the cultural orientation of the satanic milieu and the individual application of the satanic self.

III. 3. Satanic Milieu and Satanic Self

(...) [O]ne does not “find” one’s self. One creates one’s self. Magical power is accrued by reading unlikely books, employing unlikely situations, and extracting unlikely ingredients, then utilizing these elements for what would be considered “occult” ends. (Anton S. LaVey, “Occultism for the Millions”, in LaVey, 1992: 44)

The first site of satanic discourse has by necessity dwelt on the etic and ‘totalizing’ aspects of the research project, working as an abstract dimension of exploration: Classification and typologies. In addition, the elemental ‘substance’ and ‘mode’ of satanic discourse, while particular in style and implementation, has a general structure that can be understood in theoretical terms. This section is less about classification and more about the conditions of possibility sustaining and feeding the discursive practice of individuals and groups. From the earliest articles, the sites of satanic milieu and self arise in concert with the classificatory framework as two poles aligning the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of interpretive practice with the social aspect of decentralized religiosity (Petersen, 2005: 424-26, 446; 2009b). As such, the articles investigate the ‘depth structure’ of manifest Satanism-s through sociological, discursive, and interpretive perspectives arising from the combination of ‘cultic milieu’ and ‘self-religion’. In other words, the sites of milieu and self reconnect the social and the discursive, drawing upon both strategic and material perspectives. Here, I will investigate three central aspects of satanic discursive practice: The virtual ‘scape’, strategies of ‘world’-building, and technologies of the ‘self’.

⁵⁶ I have changed “qui pratique rituels sataniques” to rituals understood as satanic, as ‘satanic rituals’ inadvertently reproduce the idea that some rituals are inherently satanic.

A. 'Imagining' the satanic milieu

Beginning with article I, I associate Satanism with new religiosity by proposing a new sub-milieu oriented around satanic “trends”, “style and identity”, and “reference points”. In the early stages of the Church of Satan, Anton LaVey and several compatriots produce a new satanic ‘tradition’, which implies both a new satanic ‘take’ on various materials and a new ‘channel’ of communication. This clearly strengthens socialization and community within a young and fragmented collective, motivating boundary-work on the nascent satanic milieu to protect the specific and dominant articulation of modern Satanism. After the schism led by Michael Aquino, who forms the Temple of Set in 1975, and even more so after LaVey’s death in 1997, electronic media and popular culture increasingly function as pathways to and from established satanic religions. This in turn affects the tenuous homogeneity within the milieu, as the access to and articulation of ‘Satanism’ is restated as a plural affair.

To address this fragmentation, I call the satanic milieu ‘fuzzy’, invoking polythetic theories of prototypicality and family resemblance to explain the lack of coherence that is yet a cohesive ‘thing’. What is mostly unspoken and embryonic in the articles is that the concept of milieu is *emic and etic*, *identifiable and diffuse*, *grounded and virtual*. Consequently, it encompasses both the social dimension of satanic religions and the discursive dimension of positions and strategies in an attempt to supplant widespread notions of Satanism as for example a ‘movement’ (comparable to the New Age), a ‘new religious movement’ (as with Neopaganism), ‘current’ (reminiscent of Western esotericism), ‘subculture’ (as applied to the Goth scene, for example), or ‘community’ (akin to modern witchcraft). None of these concepts are totally off the mark, but neither do they hit home, which incidentally is the same with New Age, Neopaganism and so on. In particular, all of the concepts above imply a unity and coherence that is simply not there, whether we are looking at groups, individuals, discourses, or ‘movements’ as a whole. Consequently, the satanic milieu stretches from the most abstract of fields connected to macro-scale dynamics to the most local communities and solitary individuals. This is accomplished by situating both in a virtual meso-space, criss-crossed with temporal boundaries indicating more or less stable discursive communities with established positions and practices of production, distribution, and consumption. But both internal and external boundaries are subject to change, and strategies of inclusion and exclusion are continually in play when recruiting and articulating resources. Conversely, satanic identities connect the micro-management of individual selves with the offers given by the common culture, the groups most in line with the project, and the large-scale dynamics of modernity in force today.

Arising from the study of community in article V are the twin concepts of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. I use this couplet to point to both an *increase* in transmission, storage, and recontextualization of ‘alternative’ religion online, and to the fact that the cultic milieu has *always* been mediatized and located in fluid relations. What has changed is the nature and speed of transmission when moving from book to bit (Lyon, 2000). In addition, new resources are made available through popular culture, as occulture is absorbed and reworked through mainstream channels (Partridge, 2004b, 2005). As such, the geographical metaphor of ‘territory’ ties in nicely with the more abstract notion of disembedding and reembedding discussed above: When we study Satanism, we study both the ‘territory’ of global flows of disembedded material and the local re-territorializations, fixing flows in recognizable social and discursive contexts. Although we often begin in a local ‘neighborhood’, we cannot neglect the relation to the total milieu; conversely, we should not mistake the accessibility of ideas with the lack of boundaries (Kaplan & Löow, 2002: 5-6).

I have frequently alluded to the virtuality of milieus; this is not only referring to a virtual reality as in computer-mediated communication and imagery, but also the shimmering existence between scholarly concept, discursive potential, and social reality.⁵⁷ Although it is only visible as passing references in article II, IV, and V, my understanding of virtuality and fluid locality is influenced by Arjun Appadurai’s concept of *scapes*. As presented in *Modernity at Large*, scapes are “fluid, irregular shapes” that are “deeply perspectival constructs” (Appadurai, 1996: 33). What is important for the present discussion is that his theory of globalized culture is thoroughly de-essentialized, as the “disjunctive order” of late modernity cannot be understood through “center-periphery models”, but must be reframed as interrelated “dimensions of global cultural flows” (ibid.: 32-33; cf. Sassen 2006). Central here is his analysis of ‘imagination’ as the confluence of ‘images’, ‘imagined community’, and the ‘imaginary’ as a constructed landscape, complementing traditional notions of place, power, and the social with new conditions:

(...) the imagination has become an organized field of social practices, a form of work (in the sense of both labor and culturally organized practice), and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globally defined fields of possibility. (...) The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order. (Appadurai, 1996: 31)

⁵⁷ Incidentally, I think we can learn a lot by looking at the anthropological and sociological studies of virtual communities online – see e.g. Dawson, 2004a, 2004b.

Appadurai mentions five dimensions or “imagined worlds”: Ethno-, finance- and technoscapes concern the global infrastructure of people, capital and technology, while media- and ideoscapes concern images and imaginaries of information and ideology. In themselves, they provide only the basic scaffolding for a redescription of the satanic milieu. However, as several scholars have commented, there is nothing in the theory that prohibits a sixth dimension, a “sacroscape” (Tweed, 2006: 61) or “religioscape” (Waters, 1995: 186-87) to cover religion as another distributed imaginary between globality and locality. In any case, all cultural processes today should be studied as local “implosions” of global flows (Appadurai, 1996: chapter 7 and 9) in several polythetic dimensions (ibid.: 46). This returns us to the impact of mediation:

Electronic mediation and mass migration mark the world of the present not as technically new forces but as ones that seem to impel (and sometimes compel) the work of the imagination. (...) Neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound within local, national, or regional spaces. (...) the work of the imagination, viewed in this context, is neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined but is a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern. (ibid.: 4)

This is directly applicable to the wider complex of de- and reterritorialization in the satanic milieu. As with the cultic milieu in general, the very existence of these flows and scapes point to the establishment of transnational, deterritorialized relations *within* well-known territories such as nation states. This is a commonly recognized aspect of globalization, underscoring the discursive nature of milieus linking the social and the imaginary. In effect, Satanists interact through a discursive territory traceable in texts, virtual domains, appropriation strategies and so on. Conversely, any locality, including both physical and virtual, is constructed by engaging with the milieu and making a place to stand. This is the *extra-dimensionality* of milieus: As they are of a virtual kind, they exist as a potential or an extra dimension on everyday social life, invisible unless you are aware of them. A good example is the ‘New Age’, which is immediately recognizable in a shop in a side street, or the friend or family member that “goes New Age”, or an invisible lecture circuit, or TV-shows, or fairs, conferences and websites, and so on. Of course, the satanic milieu is more marginalized and less embedded in concrete ‘scenes’. But it still exists as books on a shelf in the bookshop, spokespersons appearing in the media, or small groups of peers. Because of this extra-dimensional character, the milieus can appear anywhere and are actively embedded in various localities: bodies, homes, concerts, summer parties, websites, discourses, traditions, and so on.

To move towards the *conditions* structuring the construction of satanic traditions and selves, religion scholar Thomas Tweed has offered two good metaphors for studying religion in a territorial mode: “Crossing” and “dwelling” (Tweed, 2006). By focusing on religions as flows, that is dynamic processes, Tweed highlights the interlinked spatial metaphors of “crossing boundaries” and “making homes” as central functions (ibid.: 54-79). Thus “crossing practices” involves marking boundaries and the prescription and proscribing of movement across them, discussed as journeys on a terrestrial, corporeal, and cosmic scale (ibid.: chapter 5), while “dwelling practices” take up four spaces of body, home, homeland, and cosmos positioning people, identities and hierarchies in time and space (ibid.: chapter 4). Although I work on a smaller scale and with lesser ambitions, I see the complicated flows of discursive practice in the satanic milieu as doing exactly that: Crossing boundaries and making homes, figuratively speaking.

To illustrate this, I will return to the treatment of the two processes and three themes presented in part two and discussed in detail in articles. This work has uncovered fault lines in modern Satanism that can be (and most surely *will* be) activated when constructing satanic ‘worlds’ and identities. These fissures run along social, institutional, imagined, ideological, and emotional fault lines, and they operate both on the small scale of subjective hermeneutics and through larger issues of ownership of cultural matters. As basic units of interpretation, the articulation of specific discursive positions including some and excluding others is one central dynamic in this study, whether seen on the level of spokespersons or groups *within* the milieu or on the level of the satanic milieu in contrast to neighboring fields. In the following, I focus on the complexity and ambiguity of these positions, mainly by pointing to the blind spots and implied ‘others’ in what seems like solid wholes. ‘Science’, ‘esotericism’, and ‘aesthetics’ are seen as both resources to use and practices to perform when crossing and dwelling. Accordingly, the three themes are discursive strategies of appropriation, related to authority and ‘tradition’, and technologies of self, concerned with transformation and identity.

B. Constructing satanic ‘worlds’: Strategies and positions in the satanic milieu

The extra-dimensionality of the satanic milieu addresses the somewhat time-dependent concept of deviance used by Colin Campbell to demarcate the contents and institutions of the cultic milieu from mainstream culture. As I mentioned briefly in part two, much in and of the

cultic milieu are far from deviant, as it is visible in popular culture, education, healthcare and so on (Heelas, 2008: 61; Partridge, 2004b: chapter 4). ‘Folk’ and ‘high’, ‘occult’ and ‘orthodox’ cultures are interpenetrating and have permeable and arbitrary boundaries. Hence there is some truth in redefining ‘alternative’ and ‘deviance’ not as opposition to ‘normalcy’, but rather as strategic choice (cf. Sutcliffe & Bowman, 2000: 11). Nevertheless, this is only a partial integration; “cultural gatekeepers” maintain discursive boundaries both within and without (Campbell & McIver 1987: 46-47).⁵⁸ These dynamics are clearly relevant in regards to the satanic milieu, as the ‘satanic’ exists in a necessary state of tension with the mainstream, which nevertheless has its uses for both satanic and non-satanic actors.

To understand this, we can go back to article I, where I posit a positive content and a negative tension as defining aspects of modern Satanism, investigated through negotiations of individuality and negotiations of the satanic. I further state that both have a positive and a negative side. This is developed from the very suggestive discussion by Graham Harvey, who asserts that modern Satanism should rather be viewed as a “liberation” of blasphemous discourse to become a “tool in self-exploration”, thus highlighting the adversarial and individual stance. In consequence, Satanists are “committed to their own Self, its development and expression” (G. Harvey, 1995: 295). Later, he changes the composition of his analysis to reflect a new and significant level of interrelation between self-identified Satanists and their social opponents, captured in the concepts of “alterity” and “othering” (G. Harvey, 2009: 27, 37-38). Thus, he provides a provisional reading of the double practice of alterity in constructing “satanic identities”. Satanic transgression of “polite society” is constructed in both the performance of Satanists and in accusations of performed cultural narratives of the evil other, which is further complicated by the fact that both groups ‘other’ *the other’s* alterities.

On a more general level, this points to the continuous re-articulation of the satanic between margin and mainstream, immortalized in Anton LaVey’s formula of “nine parts social respectability to one part outrage”. Article II, III, and V trace many specific groups and individuals and the positions they claim within the milieu. In their negotiation of internal and external pressure and management of discursive veracity, they appeal to select dimensions of science, esotericism, and aesthetics to reinforce both the ‘common’ and ‘particular’ aspects of their specific tradition, the exact ratio being different from group to group. Analytically, the three discursive positions of rationalist, esoteric and reactive Satanism thus mark three ideo-

⁵⁸ Campbell and McIver focus only on *external* gatekeepers, but spokespersons are internal guardians of truth *from within*.

logical ‘worlds’ in stark contrast both to each other and to societal notions of Satanism. However, as we saw in the previous section on satanic discourse, the positions of groups and central spokespersons are hybrid practices. To capture the polyvocal syncretic processes witnessed in the milieu, I have developed the dynamic strategies of ‘esoterization’ and ‘secularization’ related to epistemological authority, as well as ‘satanization’ and ‘sanitization’ focused on tactics of appropriation. These can be viewed as strategies of articulation and legitimacy in the production of satanic ‘tradition’, on the one hand undermining the boundaries of the discursive positions, but on the other addressing the ‘how’ of satanic discourse in more detail. I have summarized them in the following table (table 3).

	Commonalization and mainstreaming (modernity)	Particularization and marginalization (tradition)
Authority	Secularization strategies	Esotericization strategies
Appropriation	Sanitization strategies	Satanization strategies

Table 3. Strategies of articulation

The first couplet of ‘esoterization’ and ‘secularization’ point to the emic use of science and esotericism, and are discussed fully in article II and III as epistemological and performative strategies. Briefly, secularizing strategies appeal to ‘secular’ modes of authority through the use of theories, models, and terminologies stemming from secular and scientific sources, suffusing the target domain with a rational and scientific legitimacy. Conversely, esotericizing strategies appeal to esoteric authority from occult grimoires, revealed knowledge, secret historiographies, initiations, and personal experience, permeating the targets with traditional and esoteric legitimacy. What is important here is not only that the two operate from ‘opposite’ (or at least perceived opposite) domains of ‘secular’ modernity and ‘esoteric’ tradition, but also that they mark implicit others present in the articulation of the one. ‘Secularization’ is in fact a ‘secularizing’ of the esoteric and ‘esoterization’ a ‘esotericizing’ of the secular, building deeply ambiguous positions.

In article II, I combine the models of boundary-work and strategies of legitimation to open up the ‘sedimented claimsmaking’ of satanic groups. When followed over time, claims cohere into distinct positions, which can be conceptualized in the terms of ‘secularized esotericism’ and ‘esotericized secularism’. This is behind the typology of religious Satanism (as the esoteric and rationalist positions, respectively). Nevertheless, the discursive positions occlude the

temporary and unstable strategic processes that operate in time. The two strategies thus justify one position through the ‘mythic’ dimensions of the other, making any discursive position riddled with fissures and any satanic discourse talking in several registers. In terms of articulating Satanism, ‘secularizing’ and ‘esotericizing’ strategies function in concert, but can be emphasized according to the wanted level of marginalization. Hence secular strategies seem to emphasize what is common with modernity, while esoteric strategies appeal to particular domains on the epistemological ‘fringes’. This becomes clearer if we include the other set of strategies which are less involved with epistemology and more with the negotiation of alterity. ‘Sanitization’ is first mentioned in article IV in relation to the use of ‘sanitized’ symbolic violence and satanic imagery in religious Satanism. Specific modes of transgressive aesthetics thus establish a permeable boundary between the symbols of religious Satanism and the mimetic ostension of reactive actors. Coupled with ‘satanization’ and the two epistemological strategies, we can further illuminate the dynamics of positive and negative negotiation.

Satanization refers to the ascription of a ‘satanic’ mode to the discourse and practices of self or other. In its negative aspect, it is a particular version of the strategy of ‘othering’. By ascribing the terms Satanist, Satanism, satanic and related cognates to discourses, practices and communities of the unwanted or perceived dangerous, the cohesion of the community is strengthened by *exclusion*. In this case, ‘Satanism’ of course refers to societal and moral evil, often equal to the Christian demonological model or the secularized version proposed by secular agencies. As such, negative satanization is related to discourses of the satanic discussed in part two. Outside the satanic milieu, this strategy can be followed from large-scale social othering of pagans or witches to the smaller-scale othering *within* the pagan or Left-Hand Path milieus of those who are perceived to dabble in black magic, radical politics or perversion (Evans, 2007: 116-22, 175-76). As such, there is always a smaller fish to point to, an ‘us versus them’ tactic both isolating an unwanted other through estrangement and building a wanted sense of community through affinity (Lincoln, 1989).

What is important here is that the ascription rarely refers to real discourse and practice, but rather to what is *perceived* as satanic in the unwanted other, thereby clearing oneself of any association with the satanic. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, literature scholars Peter Stallybrass and Allon White describes this as a dynamic of the symbolic ‘high’ and ‘low’, where both elements are actively defining the other as unwanted or lacking. However, when correlated to social power, the ‘high’, with its satanization (called “demonization”) of the “world upside down”, is in fact *dominating* the ‘low’, but also selectively *engaging* with it

(Stallybrass & White, 1986: 4, 31, 56-59). Conversely, the ‘low’ can position themselves in relation to someone even lower, becoming a temporary and relative ‘high’ in the process, or they can shift from inversion of the symbols of the ‘high’ to a ‘hybrid’ mode of invention.

Negative satanization is also employed by satanic groups and individuals to distance oneself from naive, adolescent or simply dangerous interpretations of Satanism, which fit as symbolic ‘lows’ of the milieu with their mimetic and inversionary strategies. As such, the recurrent strategy of the Church of Satan of dubbing other types of Satanism “pseudo-satanic” or as “Devil-worship” discussed in article I, IV, and V, is exactly mirroring the satanization of societal actors while recovering and retaining un-qualified Satanism to the ideology and practice of the Church. By saying ‘we are satanic, they are devil-worshippers’, the Church is effectively *upholding* the demonological frame for other Satanists while *reforming* it for itself. This is actively repositioning ‘Satanism’ as a new ‘high’ in relation to other ‘lows’, thereby distancing the low of ‘pseudo-Satanism’, which is kept outside Satanism proper, and defining the Church through comparison. Conversely, the counterstrategy of dismissing the Church of Satan as a self-help group or a benign philosophy is an inverted variant of the satanization theme used by Black Metal-groups in the early 1990s and many esoteric Satanists today, in effect negating the rationalist interpretations of the Church from the standpoint of ‘true’ Satanism.

Within the satanic milieu, where Satan and Satanist is redefined as something positive, satanization is also used to recruit or reassess wanted allies to the cause. This positive satanization refers to the strategies of emic historiography and ‘emic sociology’ (cf. Hammer, 2001a), where marginal or misunderstood individuals or groups are reinterpreted *as satanic*, which now naturally refers to something good. This strengthens the cohesion of the community by *inclusion*. Sometimes this is done by accepting the previous satanization of others, but now in an ironic mode; in other cases, it is wholly new. For example, I show in article I, II, and IV how LaVey’s *The Satanic Bible* and *The Satanic Rituals* are peppered with re-readings of significant ‘others’ all recruited as satanic in the specific articulation espoused by LaVey: Freethinkers, renaissance men, romantics and decadents, scientists, bankers, leaders, entrepreneurs, avant-garde artists, and so on. Mirroring the strategy of negative othering as a strategy of appropriation, satanization now sets new boundaries of affinity down through the ages or within marginal groups, bolstering ‘Satanism’ as something widespread, powerful and naturally recurring, even without the name. Accordingly, a satanic ‘tradition’ is built by appropriating all groups with positive attributes as satanic, in effect discursively equating ‘satanic’ with whatever is congruent with the collective identity.

But this is not only done by LaVey and the Church of Satan. In article II, the Satanic Reds' recruitment of Advaita Vedanta and other ancient philosophical systems of anti-duality works as a combination of esoterization and satanization of the exotic, as does the very prevalent appropriation of Tantra and tantric discourses and practices in the satanic milieu. Perhaps the best example is the widespread adoption of Left-Hand Path, in the West traditionally a term of evil and perversion. As we saw in the section on definition, it is now adopted by a host of groups as a self-designation, including many satanic ones. In the nomenclature of Stallybrass and White, 'hybridization' facilitates the creation of modern Satanism as something 'satanic', which is both de-otherized as a positive identity in emic discourse, yet still connected to demonologies as something threatening, which gives it power through tension. This ambiguity is of course based on misunderstanding or misrepresenting the actual nature of the threat by both parties, a fact that leads us to the other side of the coin, namely sanitization.

As a general term, *sanitization* refers to the cleaning tactics of discursive articulation, for example through symbolization, terminological scientism, psychologization, secularization and aesthetization, all of which are discussed in article II, III, and IV. As discussed in article IV, all above-ground, formal satanic groups reinterpret the satanic as something ambiguous and morally 'sinister', yet legally 'clean'. LaVey and almost all successors stress that Satanism has nothing to do with child abuse, animal or human sacrifice and other stereotypical practices of mythical Satanists. As such, LaVey and by extension the Church of Satan is rather famous for the 'law-and-order' position, combining an adversarial stance of antinomianism, elitism and social Darwinism with a distinctly conservative respect for the body politic. This is of course a matter of self-preservation, in itself cited as a satanic virtue across the satanic milieu. The latent demonology of society, periodically activated as with the satanic panic of the 1980s, makes it imperative to disassociate from criminal acts as a matter of survival. In a wider perspective, sanitization also underlies the basic movement from Christian to non-Christian legitimation and so the specificities of the antinomian self-religions of the satanic milieu. Satan has come to embody very positive aspects, moving from a structurally conservative to a radical reinterpretation.

Again, this strategy has both a positive and a negative aspect, or self and other. In its positive aspect, sanitization is the natural correlative to positive satanization, effectively cleansing the satanic of any unwanted connotations, practices or aspects. As such, sanitization is a basic strategy of identity-work and a basic tactic in the construction of tradition. In the articles, several core constituents are variants of sanitization. One particularly good example is the aesthe-

tization and symbolization techniques analyzed in article IV. Here the violence and perversion traditionally associated with the satanic is aestheticized as an artistic programme or symbolized as a satanic practice that can be *misrepresented* as violent. Thus ‘violence’ is sanitized into transgression as an artistic statement or symbolic undertaking. It is not *really* violent, but only acting as such/looking as such; alternatively, it is only violent when looked at from a ‘binary’ or normative position – metaphysically, it is a wholly other, using antinomian violence as a means to an ‘a-nomian’ end. In any case, violence becomes *aisthesis* and *poiesis*, creative production through symbolic violence, rather than physical violence.

Another example is the secularizing strategies outlined above, effectively sanitizing the satanic of any *altmodisch* connections to Goetic magic, pacts, black masses and sacrifices. What was traditionally perceived as ‘of the Devil’ or ‘supernatural’ is now explainable in scientific, secular, psychological and/or natural terms, either as something fully understood, such as a psychological venting of emotions (e.g. LaVey’s catharsis) or as something soon to be explained (as in LaVey’s use of ‘supranormal’). Thus anything esoteric and occult is sanitized of the connection to the naively ‘real’, which again aids the satanization of various reinterpreted predecessors. Combined with violence above, LaVey for example reinterprets sacrifice as energy work, thus transposing the ‘simple’ sacrifice into more ‘advanced’ modes such as masturbation, discarding the violent blood sacrifice as unnecessary. In the same vein, the Devil is disembedded from a diabolical frame and reinserted into the self-religious discourse of empowerment and self-actualization. Inversely, we can also see the esoterization strategies of LaVey, Aquino and countless others as a sanitization technique, as they re-describe Satanism as something outside the purview of the Christian, demonological view. Satanism becomes something ‘clean’ exactly because it is misunderstood, just as paganism, witchcraft and other ‘occult’ and ‘deviant’ movements. Here the prevalent appeal to the Left-Hand Path is a case in point, redefining Satanism as species of antinomian religion pre-dating Christianity. Combined with the exoticism of Tantra, Advaita Vedanta and so on, Satanism is transposed from the fixed moral standpoint of Western Christianity to a religious discourse embracing both good and evil, but from a ‘third’ or ‘evolved’ perspective of non-duality.

Finally, as a negative aspect, sanitization can be ascribed to the ambitions of others as diluted, ironic or half-assed. In other words, within the satanic milieu, some groups see the sanitizing strategies of the institutionalized rationalist and esoteric groups as weak attempts at explaining the true force of the satanic away, namely the satanic itself: evil, transgressive and perverse/grotesque. LaVey’s ‘law-and-order perspective’, for example, while clearly functioning

as a role model for countless formal and informal groups in the satanic milieu, is denigrated by many reactive Satanists as Humanism devoid of any diabolical essence, as witnessed in the Scandinavian Black Metal subculture of the 1990s, for example. This position is also echoed by esoteric groups on the fringes of the margins, so to speak, where the antinomianism of the Left-Hand Path is reasonably invoked as a guiding principle, challenging the ‘tamed’ rationalist and esoteric Satanists to reassess their adversarial stance. Even so, they seem to be either small minorities or mainly literary, both because of a self-professed elitism and because of the untenable nature of such articulations. Given that this reactivation of the sinister plays into the social demonology, it is impossible to tolerate in the milieu as a whole.

In conclusion, particular articulations of satanic discourse can be said to move across ‘scales’ of authority and transgression to establish an equilibrium between Satan and the secular (or Darwin and the Devil) in line with their chosen expression of alterity. This points to the fact that mainstream success is dependent upon a careful sanitization of the satanic, where the extreme (however understood) is exorcised. Of course, such exorcisms frequently provoke reactions from competitors and, as time passes, new radicals advocating a return to the outrage that was lost in the process. Conversely, more local success within the milieu requires a unique vision, something often done through recombination rather than the introduction of wholly new ‘world’.

C. Constructing a sense of identity: Technologies and the satanic self

After these reflections on constructing ‘worlds’ to inhabit and boundaries to cross, focusing on the hegemonic aspect, I will wrap up by discussing the hermeneutical side of crossing and dwelling. The strategies discussed above dealt with discursive positions and fault lines of a religioscape, especially as seen through the strategic use of science, esotericism, and aesthetics. In the following, the themes denote three technologies or hermeneutics of the self through which ‘Satanism’ is implemented: Syncretism, magic, and transgression. As discussed in part two, the concept of technologies is Michel Foucault’s, introduced in the later part of his work to soften the massive attention to technologies of domination, producing subjects and objects through power-knowledge and disciplination (Foucault, 1980: 161-63; 1988: 18-19). Technologies of the self are various operations inculcated in individuals to permit them to act upon themselves. As such, they are still related to “training” and “modification”, implying an ongo-

ing dialectics with conditions and powers outside the self (ibid.). Nevertheless, the focus is now on “how the self constitute[s] *itself* as subject” (L. H. Martin, Gutman, & Hutton, 1988: 3-4), introducing a significant element of agency. Foucault examines a range of practices in Greco-Roman times, such as dialogue, the writing of letters, self-examination, and the interpretation of dreams, all of which are pointing to the construction of a “gnomic self” constituted through the “force of truth” (Foucault, 1980: 168-69, 179-80; cf. Foucault, 1988: 19-39). This catalogue is contrasted with analogous, yet drastically reinterpreted practices and wholly new ones in early Christian times, especially the twin concepts of *exomologesis* and *exagoreusis*. The technologies of public ritual penitence and the examination and verbalization of thoughts, respectively, are facilitating the *discovery* of a “gnosiologic self” (Foucault, 1980: 180; cf. Foucault, 1988: 39-49), a drastic break with the “pagan” project.

Neither the specific practices nor the chosen time periods have any bearing on satanic technologies of the self (although I will return to these issues below). It is rather the general thought of practicing the self through a series of identifiable acts upon body and soul, so to speak, which can work as a matrix for analysis. I would argue that this takes satanic self-religion a considerable step forward as an analytical concept, linking the detraditionalization and individualism of the subjective turn to concrete acts.⁵⁹ The first formulation of this perspective as a site of satanic agency is offered in article IV on symbolic violence. When transgression is *performative* and used in religiously motivated identity work, Satan becomes a role model, but in a sense removed from the direct mimetic performances of both traditional and ironic Devil worshipers. The discussion of satanization and sanitization strategies above illustrated that transgressive practices are potent means of inscribing and performing a satanic self, by confronting, negotiating and even supplanting the normative boundaries of society. Consequently, as a technology of the self transgression is connected to the second trait in my stipulative definition, the practice of antinomianism.

In the article, I discuss antinomianism via the simple dichotomy of transgression ‘to’ and ‘from’, highlighting the difference between transgression that *confirms* the norm by going to the limit, as in most *rites de passage* and ostensive acting, and transgression that *affirms* a new order (or even the permanent lack of order), as much of the aesthetic and magical practice in rationalist and esoteric Satanism. In a sense, the technology of transgression empha-

⁵⁹ It is rather amusing to note that Foucault himself called Christopher Lasch’s *The Culture of Narcissism* the inspiration for his own work. He saw a parallel between the late modern “turning within” and that of the Hellenistic era (L. H. Martin, et al., 1988: 4).

sizes the relative productivity of antinomianism as means to an end, whether posited by society or the Satanists themselves, in contrast to transgression as an end in itself. In both cases cherished ideals are questioned and unspoken rules willfully ignored; however, there is a difference between mimetic roleplay and the liberation of the satanic self. As argued in the section on satanic discourse, the antinomian, yet sanitized self-religions under scrutiny is placed in stark contrast to earlier Satanism-s, the decisive break being LaVey's formation of a satanic Church which associates Satan with individualism and opposition. As such, the focus is on "each individual to reach their own potential", among other things through a "rejection of socialization" (G. Harvey, 2009: 28-29). Based on the strategies of articulation, we can say that being a Satanist is based on both the de-otherization and sanitization of a negative other, indicating a *positive* take on Satan and the mythological 'Satanist' (Laycock, 2009: 28-31), as well as a *negative* dismissal of *other* possible selves, such as Christian, atheist, or Devil worshiper. One *is* something on account of what one *is* and what one is *not*, putting us squarely back into the interpretive practice of everyday meaning management.

The dynamics of religious creativity underlying the strategies above point us to a second technology, that of syncretism. I use syncretism or syncretization in the concluding discussion of article II as an analytical frame for the strategies of secularization and esoterization, locating the construction of 'tradition' in the satanic milieu in identifiable processes and sedimented rhetoric. Generally, syncretism refers to strategic processes of blending or mixture, intentional or otherwise, of two or more religious systems into one distinctive system; in this sense, it is a part of the meeting of cultures in general and thus related to concepts such as 'appropriation', 'bricolage', 'exchange', 'eclecticism', 'mongrelization', 'hybridization' and 'heteronomy' (Kraft, 2002; Lincoln, 2001; Rudolph, 2004 [1992]). Moreover, as a descriptor, syncretism is a baseline rather than an exceptional label to be used on specific religions. Accordingly, all religions, both the 'pure' and the 'hybrid', are inherently syncretic, making the 'how' of blending a more salient question (Benavides, 2004; Rothstein, 1996; Shaw & Stewart, 1994).

Apart from this delineation of a general dynamic, I also argue for seeing the "trading zones" of the cultic milieu as a particular hotspot for syncretism. In other words, the basic *practice* of syncretization, often guided by some variant of 'self-ethic' or inner guidance, is at the heart of the "ideology of seekership" (e.g. Campbell, 1972: 122; Heelas, 1996c: 27-28; Partridge, 2004b: 71-72; Possamai, 2005: 41-85). Although Satanists generally eschew any talk of self-discovery and inner guidance, I think it can be applied to satanic discourse when seen as a

whole. Specifically, when articulating Satanism modern Satanists navigate the interstice between the legitimacy of personal experience and external authority. Consequently, the operation of producing and managing a horizon of meaning is in itself a technology of the self. For example, the constant articulation of ‘true’ Satanism, as defined both in positive⁶⁰ and negative⁶¹ terms, is legitimated through conscious appropriation from a variety of external domains. Nevertheless, the focus of this work is always the narrative of the self, as underscored by movement texts from a range of positions, from Peter Gilmore’s *Satanic Scriptures* (2007) to Michael Ford’s *Luciferian Witchcraft* (2005). What differs is the constraints impelled by discourse and institution, toning the ‘self-work’ through a range of discursive positions.

The technological aspect of syncretism might be clearer when we tie it to the use of magic. As discussed in detail in article III, the satanic milieu hosts the gamut of magical practices, from the darkest diabolic summonings to the most cathartic of psychodramas. But magic is very seldom understood as traditional diabolism. It rather works as an instrumental tool, expression of the self, initiatory device, or total artwork *creating* the self through magical practice. This is addressed by the wide popularity of Aleister Crowley’s definition of magic(k) as “the Science and Art of causing Change to Occur in conformity with Will” (Crowley, 2004: 126). Crowley’s definition is tying magic (instrument) and will (self) together in one complex that can be interpreted in many ways, as secular and esoteric interpretations compete for hegemony. However, Satanists seem to agree on the efficacy of magic and the basic demand for insight in your own needs and wants, requiring a harmonization of your life with your principles and actions (whether framed as a philosophical, psychological or magical venture). In other words the definition becomes a demand for self-knowledge *before* doing anything; to do what you want, you need to understand yourself and your will. Of course, in understanding this ‘self’, interpretations diverge. In any case, the satanic self is affirmed and reinforced in magical practices, regardless of the doctrinal underpinnings of the specific performances.

So far I have elaborated on the three technologies in basic, general terms. Each of these thematic discussions has provided a small piece of the puzzle. We can get closer to the actual hermeneutics of the satanic by synthesizing the case studies provided in article II, III, and IV: the syncretic appropriation of science and esotericism motivated by different myths (article II,

⁶⁰ The positive dimension can be based on both collective authority, as when determining “inherent satanic qualities”, and individual choice, “what is satanic for me” (Dyrendal, 2008; Petersen, 2009b: 9; Possamai, 2005: 41-85). However, in both cases socialization is instilling a hermeneutics of the satanic self, whether this is explicit, as with established groups, or more implicit, as in the satanic milieu through consumption patterns of occulture.

⁶¹ As with the positive dimension, the negative can be collective, “that is not Satanism”, or individual, “this does not resonate with my understanding”.

III), the use of magic understood through different goals (article II, III), and the performance of symbolic violence and transgression, not as mimesis, but as alterity (article IV). The technologies of myth, magic, and alterity all describe ways of operating on the satanic self summarized in the following table (table 4). As with the strategies and discursive positions above, they are found in various mixtures in the discourse and practice of specific groups. Nevertheless, I will mainly discuss them as sedimented positions in the satanic milieu and refer to the articles for additional reflections on ambiguity and polyvocality.

	Rationalist	Esoteric	Reactive
Myth	Carnal existence Man the beast and the satanic self	Self-deification <i>Xeper</i> and <i>Sitra Ahra</i>	The grotesque Anti-morality
Magic	Utilitarian instrument and expressive artifice	Expressive creation and transformative work	Mimetic and ostensive performances
Alterity	Transgression to The Adversary The third alternative or satanic perspective	Transgression to The Other Hybrids	Transgression from The Rebel The monstrous

Table 4. Discursive positions as technologies of the self

In article II, I suggest the concept of ‘motivating myth’ to identify the basic ideological kernels articulated in specific satanic discourse to hold widely divergent material together. From a methodological viewpoint, the notion of a motivating myth is similar to Karen L. King’s narrative “overarching structure” and Anita Leopold’s “paradigmatic motif”, both of which facilitates the production of a totalizing discourse or “complete perspective” out of the borrowed material (King, 2001, esp. 467-78; Leopold, 2001, esp. 417-22). They can be thought of as nodal points or solid ‘whats’ in the ‘world’ of interpretive practice. As such, motivating myths are continually retold and affirmed in action, including magic and transgression, to construct a sense of satanic individuality and identity.

In tune with the self-religious impulse, a basic motivating myth in the satanic milieu is self-realization. In rationalist Satanism, this is narrativized in the notion of carnal existence. On the one hand, carnality points to LaVey’s own summary terms of ‘indulgence’ and ‘vital exis-

tenance' in opposition to "ascetic pipe dreams", reinforcing the material tone of this satanic position (LaVey, 1969: 25). That said, as I show in article II, things are considerably more complicated when we take a closer look. In fact, LaVey frequently invoke a more ambiguous "satanic self", or master narrative of the self-made man as exemplified by the life and work of the High Priest himself, alongside the secular myth of "man the beast", or biologism and naturalization. Thus carnal existence encompasses both a secular outlook and a practical take on esoteric trappings.⁶² In contrast, the basic perspective of esoteric Satanism is articulated through the Left-Hand Path concept of self-deification, positing the self as something *apart* from nature. This is strengthening the ties to the 'cthonian' discourse found in the neighboring milieus. In article III, I discuss Michael Aquino's concept of *Xeper* or 'becoming', which works nicely as a motivating myth for many Left-Hand Path-oriented groups in the satanic milieu. I have also included the "other side" or *Sitra Ahra* here. This term, taken from Qliphotic Kabbalah as the dark or 'night side' of the Tree of Life, describes the 'anti-cosmic' thrust of this position, going considerably further into traditional 'sinister' territory when narrativizing the journey of the self.⁶³ Finally, the "complete perspective" of reactive Satanism can be summarized in the myths of the grotesque and the perceived current of anti-morality. As discussed in article IV, cultural scripts of the grotesque are enacted in sonic, stylistic, or performative modes as self-dramatizations. This establishes a symbiotic role deeply enmeshed in the "world upside down", where the truth of the felt (an experiential and embodied self) is dependent upon the ambiguity of the said (the public and ideological discourse). When articulated, it is often narrativized through a reified 'history of anti-morality', mocking social expectations and experimenting with 'evil'.

A complementary dimension of self-realization in the syncretic and narrative mode is magical practice. Analyzed on a scale of utilitarian (or outer-directed) and expressive (or inner-directed) self-ethics, magic in the satanic milieu is both a tool for deconditioning the self of social inhibitions and a resource for creating new worlds and new selves. In article III, I call this "conscious life design" to point to the technological dimension, although the actual practice and explanation of magic is colored by individual myths. For example, Lesser and Greater magic of the Church of Satan is primarily seen as a creative outlet or venting mechanism. Although 'supernormal', it is basically understood as a natural and material tool. That said, I spend considerable time showing how LaVey's notions of "total environments" and

⁶² Together with these two, Peter Gilmore's insistence on the "alien elite" and the dictum that Satanists are "born, not made" (both formulated by LaVey), can also work as motivating myths for the contemporary church.

⁶³ Here it is of course important to emphasize that esoteric satanic discourse is still *secularized*.

“artificial human companions” illustrate an element of magical artifice and control, underscored by the complicity of secular and esoteric elements. As we saw above with the motivating myths, esoteric Satanism is just as pluralistic, but seems less tied to a secularized rhetoric. Article III provides a catalogue of practices from the purely instrumental to the blatantly blasphemous to show how magic ultimately works as a transformational tool in an idealist frame. For example, Michael Aquino speaks of “thought-forms” and “astral bodies” reminiscent of Victorian occultism. In contrast to both rationalist and esoteric discourse, when moving toward the reactive position, various goetic rites and idiosyncratic performances of a mimetic anti-Christian nature become common. In all three cases, we see an alignment of the conceptualization of magic and will with the basic gist of the motivating myths, supporting self-realization through the creation and performance of an extended self.

A third aspect of self-realization is transgression, which I have already outlined in some detail based on the reflections in article IV. Although satanic practices of transgression are many, they frequently target the popular holy cows of sexuality and the body, religion and politics, and violence, channeling self-work through ritual, performance, and art. In the case study, I use the “aesthetic terrorism” or symbolic violence of post-punk to illustrate the similarities and differences between the three basic discursive positions, now allied to the appropriation of an avant-garde aesthetics. Based on the discussion in article III and IV, we might postulate three identities of alterity: The Adversary, the Other, and the Rebel, based on the narrativization of tension with society. Rationalist Satanism posits an adversarial stance. This is based on consistently seeking the *third* perspective or satanic alternative, which could be called a satanic dialectics. Esoteric Satanism rather inhabits the position of wholly ‘other’, constructing hybrid ‘worlds’ questioning the mainstream from beyond. Finally, reactive satanic discourse is rebellious, using the detritus and the monstrous to stimulate the tension *needed* for collective and individual identity. What is most telling is that rationalist artists such as Boyd Rice, esoteric avant-garde icons like Genesis P-Orridge⁶⁴, and reactive black metal of the early nineties use parallel catalogues of transgression in their antinomian projects. What is different is the underlying ideology of transgression, shading non-conformist lifestyles, bohemianism and stage antics in very different directions. Nevertheless, one may be forgiven for mistaking one for the other, which is why sanitization and satanization strategies become so important.

⁶⁴ Genesis P-Orridge is not strictly speaking a Satanist, but rather a highly influential ‘bridge-builder’ between Industrial music, Left-Hand Path esotericism, Satanism, and visual culture (see e.g. Partridge, forthcoming).

As a way of concluding this final section, I want to venture a few words about the *context* of these technologies of the self. In article IV, I revisit Randall Alfred's article on the early Church of Satan (Alfred, 1976) to situate transgression beyond simple anti-Christianity. Reflecting on Max Weber's analysis of post-Reformation Western culture and Bryan Wilson's theory on the religious sect, Alfred concludes his analysis by positing Satanism as "another Protestant sect" (ibid.: 199). I have many reservations with this, not least his conflation of rationalist Satanism with Satanism as a whole; yet, his condensed analysis opens up for incorporating satanic discourse, milieu and self in the wider cultural dynamics of late modernity (ibid.: 200). In this sense, the basic conclusion of Alfred that Satanism is in fact a 'mutated' Protestant sect is both very wrong when seen from the inside and more to the point than even Alfred imagined when seen from the larger perspective of contemporary sociology. Let me explain.

As we saw, Foucault uses Greco-Roman and Christian sources to posit a gnomic and a gnosiological self, based on the basic premise of truth and will as something internal or external to the self. Accordingly, the Greco-Roman self is constructed and monitored in technological work, whereas the Christian self is rather discovered and disciplined. Based on the preceding discussion, I would argue that religious reinterpretations of Satanism, which here serve as hegemonic satanic discourses within the milieu, are a return to the Greco-Roman "care of the self", but seen through a *Romantic* lens of an expansive and expressive self. In the words of Colin Campbell, it is thus a "biodicy" of the self, aligned with late modern consumerism (Campbell, 1987: 182), instead of the divine contemplation of the Greek or the confession of the Christian.

In his examination of the historical roots of modern consumerism and the consequences for the Weberian thesis in the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Capitalism*, Colin Campbell proposes a "spirit of modern consumerism" connected to what he calls "modern autonomous imaginative hedonism" (Campbell, 1987: chapter 5; see also) (Campbell, 1983). In contrast to traditional outer-directed hedonism connected to the physical consumption of "pleasures", modern hedonism is inner-directed and connected to the experiential category of "pleasure" (Campbell 1987: 90). The imaginary character is reinforced not only in the fact that pleasure is found in the consumption of meanings, images and fantasies, but also in the cultivation of "longing" (ibid.: 85-95, 203) and a "desire to want to want" (Campbell, 1983: 282). To explain this, Campbell examines the "covenant" between the individual and the self (ibid.: 293) based on a "Romantic Ethic" that developed from an unlikely source, the Protes-

tant revolution. In other words, the Romantic affirmation of self-expression and uniqueness, the quest within and the opposition to utilitarian society, all driving forces in modern commercialism and consumerism (as well as the various ‘counter-cultures’), is a result of a historical development of Calvinism, leading not only to Puritanism and capitalism, but also to Sentimentalism and Romanticism (Campbell, 1987: 219). Today, both rational utilitarianism and romantic expressivism exists in a heterogeneous tension in late capitalist culture.

This exposition has several consequences for our understanding of satanic technologies of the self. If we focus on the Romantic Ethic, we can see a growth of self-consciousness objectifying the inner world of the self through a connection of experience, knowledge and pleasure (Campbell, 1983: 286-287; Campbell, 1987: 73, 184, 194). The ‘thing’-like character of the self is thus intimately connected to a Romantic discourse permeating modern consumer culture and thus by default modern self-religion:

The “self” becomes, in effect, a very personal god or spirit to whom one owes obedience. Hence “experiencing”, with all its connotations of gratificatory and stimulatory feelings becomes an ethical activity, an aspect of duty. This is a radically different doctrine of the person, (...) a self liberated through experiences and strong feelings from the inhibiting constraints of social convention. (Campbell, 1983: 286; cf. Campbell, 1987: 195-201)

Paul Heelas writes of the self-religious project: “[I]t is essential to shift from our contaminated mode of being – what we are by virtue of socialization – to that realm which constitutes our authentic nature” (Heelas, 1996c: 2). This is parallel to Campbell’s assertion of an immanentist doctrine:

The romantics conceived of man as an infinite reservoir of possibilities, possibilities which would “naturally” be realised if only the oppressive order of society could be removed. This immanentist doctrine proved a most powerful force to set against tradition, as the realization of personhood necessarily involved rebellion against whatever rules or norms were experienced as constraining. (Campbell, 1983: 286; cf. Campbell, 1987: 182-187)

The opposition to status quo and rebellion against bourgeois’ values entrenched in Romanticism, especially Bohemianism, is fully congruent with the satanic hermeneutics of the self. Both the immanentist realization of personhood and the liberation through experiences fit the technologies of myth, magic, and alterity, as self-realization is simultaneously a positive construction and negative delimitation of identity. In other words, the self of modern Satanism, while built on bohemian ideas of antinomian transgression, uniqueness, and expressivity (all encapsulated in the structurally radical interpretation of Satan *as* the ultimate individual) is in fact quite at home in the late modern world. Although the language is different, the project

resembles the popular consumerist creation of identity through the idea that the act of consumption is *constructing the sense of self* (Campbell, 1983: 288).

Interestingly, Edward Moody describes a range of rituals in the early Church of Satan through the lens of ‘deconditioning’ and ‘reconditioning’ of responses, prompting a “personality transformation” with social “benefits” (Moody, 1974: 367-381). Although this ‘sociopathological’ approach occludes benefits outside the purely psychological, Moody does seem to capture some elemental dynamic of socialization as turning social othering into a positive alterity, applicable to any ‘in-group’. In effect, Moody ends up in the same spot as Randall Alfred by linking modern Satanism to the human potential cluster, with the satisfaction of needs arising from conditions of modernity as a whole. Following this angle, his concluding remarks on the individualization of authority and wisdom (ibid.: 382), which are tied to his discussion of the secular and scientific basis for the Church of Satan worldview and view on magic (ibid.: 372, 380-81), inform the interplay between social stigma and productive alienation in the alterity of the satanic. The basic choice to call oneself a Satanist *is* odd; nevertheless, through the pervasive nature of the Romantic Ethic, we can conclude on the paradoxical note that even the most ‘other’ in the satanic milieu participate in the affirmation of subjectivity in late capitalism.

Part Four. Other Doors: Concluding Remarks

In the future, LaVey's ideas can only survive in so much as they constitute a living reality, and never as mere platitudes on the printed page or computer screen; and in the future, such ideas must be taken to the next level. They must be recognized as purely foundational. Not an end point, but a starting point. (Boyd Rice, "To Whom It May Concern", (Rice, 2010))

In early September 2010 Boyd Rice, prominent musician, author, tiki bar designer and Satanist, closed the organization he had been a member of since the mid-1980s with these words on his blog: "Consequently, my first official act as new leader and only true ordained High Priest of the Church of Satan is to declare that the organization no longer exists" (Rice, 2010). The problem with this clear and unequivocal decree is that Boyd Rice is not the High Priest of the Church of Satan. That office has been held by Peter H. Gilmore since 2001, following a four-year period of organizational confusion in the wake of Anton S. LaVey's death in 1997.

The brief declaration (about a page) and the implications underlying it are mouth-watering for any researcher of religious division. Leaving aside for now the irony of publishing an announcement of this magnitude on the Internet – a place he obviously abhors⁶⁵ – Rice speaks of "True LaVeyean Satanism", something very different from "the internet orthodoxy currently known as the Church of Satan", led by "bloggers, whose sole arena of combat is the internet" and constantly embroiled in "endless squabbles in cyberspace – rarely in real life or the real world" (ibid.). In contrast to this "monster", *true* Satanism is "manifested in deeds – in life and living". It is also an exercise in contradictions: inconspicuous, yet patently elitist; authentic and not commodified, yet focused on materiality; and closely tied to Anton LaVey, but not his Church. This is the spirit of LaVey's legacy and the only way to move forward – LaVey is a "starting point", a "foundation and a beginning", a "lived reality" (ibid.).

Rice also speaks of being "ordained" as the "handpicked replacement" by LaVey himself, bolstering his credentials through a line of infernal succession as Grand Master of the Order of the Trapezoid and now High Priest. He is in other words both in *direct* sequence with LaVey (his "close friend and mentor") and his tradition, and *in total conflict* with his Church (an "old error"), retaining the prophet but not his works. But by judging "real" and "online" Satanism as worlds apart, Rice in fact copies the stance of the Church of Satan rather closely.

⁶⁵ In an earlier newflash, "F.Y.I. (a message from Boyd)", he states: "I am not on the internet at all, and haven't been for years. I don't receive emails, send emails, post messages, blogs, et-cetera. I don't have a computer and seldom even look at them" (Rice, 2010).

Current High Priest Peter Gilmore calls online Satanism a “ghetto” and has little to do with such “devil worshipers”. Only in the Church of Satan and a small pile of foundational texts does one find modern LaVeyan Satanism (which is the *only* Satanism – the rest are “nuts”, as we will see in article I). In fact, the rhetoric of Boyd Rice’s “papal bull” mirrors any news reel on the Church’s own website, as does the clear deference to the charisma of the founder, the disdain for other ‘Satanists’ (the nuts – especially the online kind), and the focus on real experience.

The Church of Satan has kept silent about this disaffiliation of a well-known member. Most of the Satanists I have spoken to consider it amusing, if they know of the statement at all. It remains to be seen if this new ‘schism’ will have any effect inside the Church or outside, although it seems to be a long shot. On a more general level, LaVey and his little black book *The Satanic Bible* (1969) are absolutely essential for any understanding of modern Satanism whether you subscribe to the legitimacy and authentication strategies of the Church of Satan or not. The ‘badness’ of LaVey of the Devil has an age, status and sheer iconicity rivaled only by the inverted pentagram he himself helped popularize. Conversely, the widespread hatred for his organization shines a light on the respect given to the LaVey of the 1960s, as the two are frequently opposed.⁶⁶ In consequence, whatever the feeling towards LaVey and his creation, he is inescapable.

Going back to LaVey for legitimacy is nothing new, picking up on a recurrent schismatic trend that is far from particular to Satanism. At this juncture, it is time to move from the particularities of modern Satanism and into the generalities of the study of religion as an analytical discipline. In other words, it is time to reflect on consequences. As with other idiographic undertakings, a study of a critical or paradigmatic case provides an important element of substance to wider universal discussions (Flyvbjerg, 2001). To briefly recap a complicated discussion, modern Satanism is a theoretical conglomerate of satanic discourses within a satanic milieu. The satanic milieu is seen as an arena for strategic constructions of the ‘satanic’ based on strategic appropriations, such as the boundary-work of esoterization, secularization, satanization, and sanitization. Conversely, the deployment of these satanic discourses to build satanic selves and ‘worlds’ are unstable practical articulations of ‘Satanism’ in concrete expressions and practices as identity construction and authorizing statements. LaVey took one very influential path, in essence shaping modern Satanism as a religious option and the satanic mi-

⁶⁶ LaVey himself goes the other way by calling the early Church “phase one Satanism”, fun, but ultimately unproductive (Barton, 1990).

lieu as an autonomous entity. Michael Aquino and Peter Gilmore have taken other steps, as does Boyd Rice in his most recent attempt to forge a distinct position. As such, the ‘satanic’ is a culturally restrained discursive mode that is also transforming the restraints in feedback loops. In effect, we cannot see satanic selves and worlds without the context of a satanic milieu and the larger contexts of related milieus, the cultic milieu as a whole with its occultural resources, and the conditions of late modernity, particularly the subjective turn and the disembedding and deterritorialization of actors and materials.

As has become apparent in this study, the *tension* between self and society inherent in the Romantic Ethic is a potent force in the formulation of self-image. Self-religion is an ideal-typical manifestation of religion in modernity, centering religious authority and practice in subjective being rather than theological knowing. Modern identities are thus formed through engagement with malleable technologies and hermeneutics of the self with a history stretching back to Puritanism and Romanticism, and forward to modern hedonist consumerism. The milieu, in turn, especially when conceptualized as a deterritorialized religiouscape, is the virtual space facilitating the collective imaginings of the self through flows of people and discourse, as well as the consumption and appropriation of material with which to realize the self itself, a flow of objects. This has a far wider applicability than modern Satanism and other ‘alternative’ milieus; one could argue it is relevant for every religion today as they are stretched out between individual choice and orthodoxy/-praxis.

The basic mechanics laid forth here is relevant to all religions acting in the public arena of late capitalist, liberal democracies. Outside the specificities of Satanism itself (transgressive anti-nomianism, adversarial mythological beings and so on), this small-scale study makes clearly visible the dynamics inherent in all religious creativity and policing of boundaries, as the number of actors, institutions and interrelations are manageable. Thus ‘Christianity’ and ‘Islam’, for example, are just as polyvocal – indeed, that has become a truism in social commentary and analysis (e.g. Beyer, 2006; Dürschmidt & Taylor, 2007; Roy, 2004). What is more, studies of Islam or Christianity would actually benefit from being viewed as heterogeneous selves, worlds and milieus opening up to the conflicts, negotiations and reifications of ‘Christian’ or ‘Muslim’ discourses. ‘God’ or ‘Allah’ is affected by exactly the same destabilizing forces of the subjective turn as ‘Satan’ or ‘Set’, and ‘Christian’ or ‘Muslim’ is as situated and contestatory as ‘Satanist’ (in some cases even more so today). While the discursive constraints are of course quantitatively different, mainly through the supreme authorizing intervention of ‘scripture’ and doctrine embedded in orthopraxis, social institutions, official roles

and emotive communities, they are qualitatively similar. Again, size and age matters, but these issues should not blind us to the very real parallels that can be drawn.

To go back to the framework put forth in the first section, what I have extracted from modern Satanism in terms of conditions under which the articulation has taken place, says something quite general about modern religiosity, regardless of the choice of ‘world’. In the same vein, the underlying structure of ideal-typical actors, themes, arenas, and negotiations of authority and tradition, while tied to the concrete aspects of my chosen case, can at least be re-engineered to suit other studies. What I find particularly promising is to develop sanitization and satanization further, especially when related to the push and pull of religious and secular modes in the syncretic articulation of religion in the flow of religioscapes today.

Sanitization is related to a ‘watering down’ or ‘relational preaching’ of a given position, but also to a modern radicalization (in the original sense of going to the root). Through a reinterpretation of mythology and other ‘offensive’ elements, the basics, whether perennial, self-religious or existential, are extracted to form a sustainable religiosity in the face of modernity (science, politics, metaphysics, economy). This was done with Christianity in the reformation and through the de-mythologization endeavors in the early 20th century, and is occurring with certain new ‘euro-Islamic’ (and ‘third’-world, e.g. Pakistani) negotiations of islamic scripture and ‘tradition’ today. For example, the sanitization of Satanism, facilitated by the disembedding of Satan from a Christian context of moral evil and absolute inversion, is parallel to the sanitization of liberal Christianity. This is made possible through the disembedding of God from a mythological and philosophical context into discursive practice focused on the “spiritual, but not religious” (e.g. Heelas, 2008; Lynch, 2007). Of course I would not argue that this is unique, or linear, or simple; it has happened many times with all religions, but it is also happening today.

In the same vein, the positive and negative poles of ‘satanization’ can be seen throughout the flows of contemporary religioscapes, although ‘othering’ and ‘appropriation’ might be more generalizable concepts. To be a ‘personal Christian’ or ‘devout Muslim’ today involves a complex set of ascriptions to self and other. For example, many European Muslims seem to define themselves in opposition to both ‘bad’ fundamentalists, who do not even represent Islam or at best misunderstand it, and to secular atheists who are lacking moral fiber and communitarian spirit. This double negative ‘satanization’ should be seen in relation to the positive ‘satanization’ inherent in saying ‘I am a Muslim’ in countries struggling with heterogeneity

and stigmatization. A central issue becomes subduing the very polyvocality hidden behind 'Islam' as a totalizing concept (Roy, 2004). As with Satanism, it does not make much sense to state that Islam 'is' one thing; it is made one thing by actors activating some aspects and silencing others. There is nothing inherently wrong with this; but it is a political project and should be analyzed as such. On the other hand, we should of course be attentive to what could be called 'statistical' and 'semiotic' centers and peripheries in our examinations of heterogeneous entities. While it doesn't do to ignore the reactive Satanists as both a mirroring resource and a concrete articulation of Satanism, which is parallel to Muslim 'terrorists' and 'extremists', they shouldn't be extended beyond importance either.

With this point, we arrive back at the door of the symbolically central. Distinguishing the symbolic relevance of Satan in cultural discourse from satanic discourse in the breeding ground of the satanic milieu shows us how religious Satanism is much more complex, but also more normal, than simple mimesis and ostension. By investigating some concrete ways the other is articulated and appropriated, the articles urge us to distinguish what is central in social imaginaries *about* the other from local hybrids *of* the other. Connecting the general to the specific, further studies such as case- and people-oriented fieldwork on this and other 'alternatives' could indeed serve as a productive testing ground for the continued role of religion in modernity.

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ARTICLE I: TRADITION AND LEGITIMACY

”Satanists and Nuts: The Role of Schisms in Modern Satanism” is published in the anthology *Sacred Schism: How Religions Divide*, edited by James R. Lewis and Sarah Lewis for Cambridge University Press, 2009. It was commissioned and written in the summer of 2007 and accepted with minor revisions. The book is a companion to Olav Hammer and James R. Lewis’ edited volume *The Invention of Sacred Tradition*, Cambridge 2008, dealing with schismatic groups and developments rather than cultic innovation. As such, it is mainly thematic in scope. My chapter is placed alongside other chapters in Part IV, “Western Esoteric Traditions”.

CHAPTER 10

Satanists and nuts: the role of schisms in modern Satanism

Jesper Aagaard Petersen

There are no categories of Satanists – there are Satanists and nuts.
The Satanic know-it-alls try to fabricate a division.

Anton Szandor LaVey in Barton 1990: 70

Satanism – to many Western readers the connotations of the term bring to mind strife, hate, division and opposition. In a sense, this worldview must be the ultimate schism as it breaks away from all that is considered good, beautiful and just in Christian society. After all, “Satan” is *the* opposition, the accuser and later adversary to God. The dark-robed raving cultist or the suave, often British, but fundamentally evil gentleman are both typical stereotypes of the Satanist of popular culture, sadly brought to life by the moral panics of the Satanism Scare in the 1980s and 1990s that falsely attributed these fictional characters to real life. Even though it would be an important study, I will not attempt to write the history of Satanism as a schismatic movement within Christianity or the use of the allegation “Satanist” in medieval or modern-day religious hysteria.¹ In fact, I consider these interpretations of Satanism to be a subcategory of either theology or the sociology of moral panics and not a critical study of modern religion. There are other real-life Satanists, answering proudly to the term and fighting for their freedom of thought and expression. It is to these individuals and their disagreements we now turn.

Most committed contemporary Satanists share a modern outlook related but not reducible to Humanism, Atheism, Skepticism, the Human Potential movement and the wider New Age phenomenon in the West,

¹ On the first, see for example Jeffrey Burton Russell’s monumental, but sadly skewed theological history of the Devil (Russell 1977; 1981; 1984; 1986) and Gareth Medway’s thoughtful analysis (Medway 2001). On the second, Norman Cohn, Jeffrey Victor and Bill Ellis spring to mind (Cohn 1975; Victor 1993; Ellis 2000).

even though particular participants do not agree on much, as could be expected in a religion or philosophy claiming the Ego as God. Thus Satanism is an important part of the “cultic milieu” of Western culture (Campbell 1972), a sub-milieu, movement or current here dubbed the “Satanic milieu.” The only real connection to Christianity is the name and figure of Satan. And even though the interpretations vary from theistic to atheistic, Satan, Set or Sat-Tan is generally used symbolically or didactically as a statement of intent, namely the celebration of the individual – its vital existence, isolate intelligence or Life Force.

This chapter argues that the conflicts, innovations and schisms found within modern organized Satanism are a result of two interrelated dynamics: on the one hand the dual ideal of fruitful self-assertion and continuous non-conformity characterizing Satanism after its initial formulation by Anton Szandor LaVey, and on the other hand the constant renegotiation of the very term “Satanism” to refine and protect salient formulations from the pressure of the Satanic and the wider cultic milieu of which it is a part. Through complex ongoing *negotiations of individuality* simultaneously framed positively as empowerment and self-realization (a “self-religion”) and negatively as the *lack* of herd mentality and conformism (an antinomian stance) (Flowers 1997: 4; Harvey 2002; Petersen 2005: 425, 446), individuals and groups claiming authority define “Satanism” and “pseudo-Satanisms” in the milieu as a whole. As such, Satanism thrives on formulations of both positive content and negative *deviance* and *tension* in order to produce a coherent identity on the individual and collective level. In this sense Satanism differs little when compared to other religious trends of this type – innovations and schisms are the norm. They mark important breaking but also crystallization points for new spokespersons, new doctrines, new practices and novel organizations.

One has to be very cautious when the analysis moves from spokespersons, texts and organizations with established authority, doctrines and practices to individual practitioners of Satanism (Dyrendal 2004b: 50, 52). Thus, I have focused this chapter on a general level, a macro-analysis of innovations and schisms within the Satanic milieu through important movement texts and spokespersons (Hammer 2001: 37ff), and not on the microsociological how and what of the individual actor. The analysis of important cleavages is further inspired by Bruce Lincoln’s theory of *affinity* and *estrangement* and the constitutive character of discourse in the construction of social borders (Lincoln 1989). As an instrument of social construction, discourse can be thought of as both

ideological persuasion and sentiment evocation; a given society or group is thus *a collective* feeling likeness toward each other (affinity) and feeling separate from other groups (estrangement) (1989: 9). The rational and moral instruments are utilized to strengthen these general sentiments. This has several important consequences. First, it is a constructivist view, considering the strategic and tactical uses of discourse in the formation of collectivities. Second, it is an anti-essential position, which implies that borders are artificial and mutating constantly. Third, it is fractal and synthetic, in the sense that *any* collectivity has fault lines within it, thus necessitating a further look at subgroups within the group discussed (or even subgroups within those subgroups):

In practice there always exist potential bases for associating and for disassociating one's self and one's group from others, and the vast majority of social sentiments are ambivalent mixes in which potential sources of affinity are (partially and perhaps temporarily) overlooked or suppressed in the interests of establishing a clear social border or, conversely, potential sources of estrangement are similarly treated in order to effect or preserve a desired level of social integration and solidarity. (Lincoln 1989: 10)

Lincoln suggests that we investigate "segmentary patterns" of "fission and fusion" in order to analyze a social whole, subunits and sub-subunits (1989: 19). As the astute reader has already noticed, this theoretical apparatus is eminently suited to the study of innovations and schisms, especially in a fluid environment such as the cultic milieu. In fact, my concept of a Satanic milieu discussed below is in itself a subgroup within a given whole, and the groups sub-subunits within it.

Before venturing into the dark underworld of the Satanic milieu, a brief discussion of sociological typology is necessary, especially in relation to the concept of schism. When perusing the relevant literature, one cannot fail to notice the blatant disagreement over the definition of two central concepts of new religious movements, namely "cult" and "sect." Although all definitions focus on societal deviance, Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge define the concepts in terms of schismatic birth and thus as absolute terms (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: chs. 2 and 10), while Roy Wallis defines them through legitimation of authority along a continuum (Wallis 1974: 1975). While I do agree with their tripartite division of audience cult, client cult and cult movement, I do *not* agree with Stark and Bainbridge's definition of sect and cult as schismatic and non-schismatic deviant religions (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 24ff). I would rather use Roy Wallis's definition along a legitimation axis: a sect is a

uniquely legitimate, coherent and authoritarian group, while the cult is pluralistically legitimate, eclectic and egalitarian (Wallis 1974: 303–4; 1975: 40ff; Partridge 2004: 24ff). I have several reasons for this.

First of all, Stark and Bainbridge never use Colin Campbell's theory of the cultic milieu, even though they discuss the process of career paths of entrepreneurs and their borrowing from each other (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 178–83). As will be discussed below, the cultic milieu represents a milestone in the formulation of a coherent theory of contemporary religion, as it functions as the necessary backdrop in the analysis of individual seekership as well as the processes of cult and sect formation when religious movements mutate and evolve. Secondly, Stark and Bainbridge equate the concept of schism with the sect category, as it represents a group that breaks away from “organizational attachment to a ‘parent’ religion” (1985: 25). The cult, on the other hand, has no organizational ties and should thus be considered an import or innovation (1985: 25–6). While it is true that cults generally represent innovation rather than schism from a previously established religious *organization*, any successful innovation makes use of an available body of rejected material and recombines it through various strategies of appropriation, creating a unique interpretation of it, thus temporarily distancing the creation from the parent material and attracting interested seekers (Hammer 2001). This temporary assemblage could be described as an intellectual rather than a sociological schism – a large unit becomes smaller through new constellations of affinity and estrangement. Even though the general ethos of the cult and the cultic milieu is one of tolerance and eclecticism (Wallis 1975: 41), a cult is *not the same* as the cultic milieu. When it is, it is dead. Consequently, I consider innovation and schism complementary processes of fracture rather than two different kinds. An amicable break and recombination of ideas is still a break from a cultic organization, from a current of thought or even the cultic milieu as a whole.

In this sense, what defines the sect is epistemological authoritarianism, and the schismatic tendency of this category arises from this characteristic, not the other way around. The cult, on the other hand, is epistemologically individualist and based on innovation, and is, in its ideal-typical form of the audience and client cult, a fluid and non-restrictive movement, with little or no doctrinal authority or commitment (Wallis 1974; 1975). But it is still a definable current, a “more or less temporary association of seekers organized around a common interest, or the researches and revelations of an individual” (Wallis 1974: 306). That is exactly why the sect can develop

from the cult: spokespersons and leaders try to demarcate the group more strongly. In the following, I will utilize the concepts of *audience cult* and *client cult* to describe the ideal-typical cult in Wallis's model, while the term *cultic movement* represents the middle stage of the centralized cult (Wallis 1974: 325), and *sect* the product of unique processes of legitimation.

First, the chapter will attempt the obligatory circumvention of the field in question, namely modern Satanism, in order to demarcate the potentials of the Satanic milieu and differentiate the manifestations within it. Next, I will examine a concrete case of historical innovation, the early Church of Satan, to understand the selection processes that define rational Satanism but also perpetuate the ambiguity inherent in the milieu. Third, the schism producing the Temple of Set will be related to these ambiguities to understand the process as an activation of alternative potentials within the Church and the cultic milieu. Finally, I will conclude with a summary discussion of themes to transcend the chronological framework and assess the insights gained from the analysis.

MODERN SATANISM: A SHORT INTRODUCTION

As stated above, modern Satanism can be conceived of as a part of the cultic milieu proposed by Colin Campbell in his seminal article "The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization" (1972). As such, Satanism is a bundle of ideas and practices related to other ideas and practices in the "cultural underground of society" (1972: 122). This heterogeneous but single "assortment of cultural items" is held together by common traits, mainly deviance, syncretism, overlapping communication structures and the ideology of seekership (1972: 122–4). The point is that new religious movements continuously crystallize from this cultural field. It works as both the substantive and functional context for group evolution – it is the cultic milieu and not the individual groups that are permanent (1972: 122).²

The cultic milieu is a "fuzzy category" (Taylor 1995: 38ff; Saler 2000: 202ff); in order to have the necessary cohesion (*not* coherence or consistency) without losing its heterogeneous character, its contents are arranged according to the Wittgensteinian notion of *family resemblance*.

² Christopher Partridge suggests the terms "occultic milieu" and "occulture" to replace Campbell's "cultic milieu" (Partridge 2004: 66), but I find Campbell's term adequate when dealing with the sociological entity producing new religious movements (the functional side of "cult production"). "Occulture" is excellent when speaking broadly of substantial issues (the rejected contents themselves), but when all is said and done the terms are interchangeable.

Nevertheless some streams are more closely related than others, as some concepts, practices or influential formulations work as magnets, making clusters of related items, and these should be categorized as the broad prototypical currents of a *very* complex field of rejected knowledge and communication (Campbell 1972: 124–6; Truzzi 1972: 18; Partridge 2004: 71–84). I would propose to isolate a “Satanic milieu,” an important sub-field, current or reservoir alongside for example the neo-Pagan, UFO-related, New Age, Theosophical and Western Esoteric currents, as modern Satanism in its divergent forms is sufficiently distinctive to warrant this accentuation.

The Satanic milieu is in itself a polythetic category with fuzzy borders, and could be conceived of as a cult-producing substance of key terms and practices as well as the reservoir of ideas uniting the broad movement of modern Satanism, mirroring the larger cultic milieu in a fractal sense. Thus the Satanic milieu is a trend in popular culture (Baddeley 2000; Dyrendal 2005), a collective style and identity within Satanic neo-tribes (Hermonen 2002; Smoczynski 2002), and the reference points of the Satanic subcultures that crystallize around distinct interpretations or manifestations of Satanism today (Dyrendal 2004b; Petersen 2005). Even though few modern, self-professed Satanists feel part of a grand movement or clearly definable subculture (and some even attack the very notion of community implied in these words – see for example Barton 1995; Gilmore 1999, 2007: 170ff; Rose 2000), I would certainly state that from a historical and sociological point of view they do belong to a diffuse “occultural” movement and, in the case of organized Satanists, belong to subcultures within it with common identities, histories (both emic and etic), symbols, aesthetics, interpretations and practices; in short: identity, commitment, consistent distinctiveness and autonomy.³

Three broad categories or ideal types emerge within the Satanic milieu: Rational, Esoteric and Reactive paradigmatically conform Satanism (Schmidt 1992; Dyrendal 2004b: 48ff; Petersen 2005: 44off). As they are

³ This is an interpretation of subculture inspired by Paul Hodkinson’s analysis of the Goth scene. He suggests “4 indicators of subcultural substance”: identity, commitment, consistent distinctiveness and autonomy (Hodkinson 2002: 28–33), and writes: “Rather than these four comprising a definitive blueprint, each of them should be regarded as a contributory feature which, taken cumulatively with the others, increases the appropriateness of the term ‘subculture’, in the relative degree to which each is applicable. The combination of this degree of malleability with a set of specific criteria should maximize the potential for meaningful use of the concept at the same time as recognizing the greater relevance of alternative terminology – in the form of Maffesoli’s notion of neo-tribe perhaps – to describe more fleeting or superficial forms of affiliation” (2002: 29–30). Understood in this way a Satanic subculture is a matter of more-or-less, not either-or.

analytical constructs, they are fuzzy as well; individuals and groups move from one to the other as the Satanic milieu mutates and grows. The categories could be conceived of as points in a triangle, where Rational and Esoteric Satanism occupy a bi-polar scale of organized, mature and systematic worldviews with “reactive paradigmatically conform Satanism” as a catch-all category of popular Satanism, inverted Christianity and symbolic rebellion. Thus reactive paradigmatically conform Satanism is reactive in the sense that it is in opposition to society, but in a way that reiterates central Christian concepts of evil, making it paradigmatically conform to a Christian context. *Satan* is the Devil, and *Satanism* the adolescent or anti-social behavior of transgressing boundaries and “living out” a mythical frame. In the analysis of innovations and schisms in the following, I will only discuss this type of Satanism where it is relevant as a sounding board for the self-religions found in the two next categories.

Rational Satanism is an atheistic, skeptical Epicureanism as formulated by Anton Szandor LaVey in *The Satanic Bible* and other writings (LaVey 1969; 1972; 1992; 1998). It considers *Satan* to be a symbol of rebellion, individuality, carnality and empowerment, and *Satanism* the material philosophy best suited for the “alien elite”; catchwords are indulgence and vital existence. Although ritual practices are described and an ambiguous diabolical anthropomorphism is present from time to time, both are interpreted as metaphorical and pragmatic instruments of self-realization. Science, philosophy and intuition are advocated as authorities, and productive non-conformity the highest goal of the individual. *Esoteric* Satanism is more theistically oriented and uses the esoteric traditions of Paganism, Western Esotericism, Buddhism and Hinduism, among others, to formulate a religion of self-actualization. The understanding of *Satan* is clothed in platonic or mystical terms; although often spoken of as a literal entity, it is not a god to be worshiped, but rather a being or principle to be emulated or understood. *Satanism* is therefore a path to enlightenment in a Left-Hand Path sense of non-union with the universe or true individuality (Flowers 1997). The ritual practices and organizations of this type of Satanism often correspond to other initiation-oriented groups within Western Esotericism, though this may vary considerably.

Finally, it would be useful to summarize by briefly discussing the main traits in a minimum definition of organized Satanism within the Satanic milieu. I would suggest self-religion, antinomianism, the use of certain “S”-words and a formulated ideological genealogy, often in the form of some relation to Anton Szandor LaVey, as the four major factors to be

taken into consideration. First of all, self-religion and antinomianism are both ideological core terms. In fact, *self-religion* is shared with many other streams within the cultic milieu as such, and could be a common core for the epistemologically individualist and self-actualizing groups and individuals found within it.⁴ Even though the self-annihilating mystic, the goddess-worshipping pagan and the Black Magician have very little in common, they are all focused on the self: “A project to discover, empower and enact our authentic (inner) nature currently contaminated by socialization” (Harvey 2002: 55). Whether it is humanity’s animal nature or the isolate intellect, the goal of modern Satanism is found within, not outside, the individual. When it is combined with *antinomian* and elitist interests, we have a project of self-actualization transgressing the moral boundaries of society, setting the self above the conventional expectations and mores. Indeed, as it is contaminated by socialization, the self must confront and dispense with this influence to realize itself (Flowers 1997: 3ff).

A certain self-designation is also important in order to differentiate between prejudice and modern Satanism proper (see Dyrendal 2004b: 48), and to set it apart from other formulations of the cultic milieu. Thus the antinomian self-religion needs to be framed through a use of the words Satan, Satanism, Satanic and Satanist (and related words, of course: Devil, Lucifer, etc.), although the anti-Christian stance of organized Satanism is rooted in an anti-repressive ideology that targets all negative conditioning of the self; these groups are *not* subgroups of Christianity. Rather Christianity is understood as the prime example of a totalitarian, oppressive moral force – other enemies are capitalist society’s dictum of consumerism and passive entertainment; “liberal” society’s “universal” human rights and bland equality; and the blind obedience and irrationality of the herd in all religions (Flowers 1997: 195–6).

Finally, all individuals and groups construct some sort of genealogy, a time-line of subcultural ancestry. Furthermore, most if not all groups and individuals relate this to the writings of LaVey, especially *The Satanic Bible* (1969). Some relations are positive, others negative, but all have to wrestle with the Beast, so to speak. The interpretations of LaVey range from Black Pope and midwife of the Satanic age to huckster and joke, but they all have an opinion. He is a common denominator of some sort of entry into the Satanic milieu – some stop there and protect his

⁴ See Heelas 1996 and Partridge 2004; 2005 on self-religion, and Flowers 1997, Harvey 2002, Dyrendal 2004a; forthcoming a and Petersen 2005 on Satanism as a self-religion.

formulation of the Satanic philosophy and others move on and criticize it, but he is necessary as a dark prophet, a vanishing point that plays an important role in all genealogies.

A SCHISMATIC *PASODOBLE*: THE CHURCH OF SATAN
AND THE TEMPLE OF SET

In my presentation of modern Satanism (Petersen 2005), I divided the history of the milieu into three distinct phases, primarily modeled on the history of the Church of Satan (CoS). The first phase, from 1966 to 1975, marks the emergence of organized Satanism and the growth and decline of Anton LaVey's creation. The second phase, from 1975 to the mid 1990s, begins with the schism that produces Michael A. Aquino's Temple of Set (ToS) and ends with the introduction of the Internet. The third phase, from the mid 1990s to the present, kicks off with Anton LaVey's death in 1997, which results in a proliferation of new Satanic movements online, battles within CoS over legitimate authority, and fierce struggles both within CoS and in the Satanic milieu in general over the ownership of the term "Satanism." Even though the dust has settled, the development has left CoS an authoritarian movement and the Satanic milieu as visible and diverse as never before (2005: 426ff).

The present diachronic analysis is focused on the early phase between 1966 and 1975, as further studies have shown that important sub-phases can be isolated in order to clarify important reorientations and reformulations in CoS and the Satanic milieu. Throughout the analysis, I will engage with relevant theory in order to explicate the strategies and motivations underlying the innovations and schisms, especially the typologies of Wallis and of Stark and Bainbridge discussed above, the concept of syncretism and anti-syncretism proposed by Mikael Rothstein (1996: 18ff), the legitimation strategies of Max Weber (2003: 45–173, 309–357; Lewis 2003: 10–12) and the practical concepts of emic historiography and appropriation systematized by Olav Hammer (2001: 85ff). Taken as a whole, they can conceptualize the ebb and flow of affinity and estrangement in the Satanic milieu.

Cultic innovation: Anton Szandor LaVey and the Church of Satan

The first important fault line in the history of modern Satanism is not a schism in the strict sense but an example of cultic innovation, although the consequence is an analogous *break* with the cultic milieu, as argued

above. The establishment of the Church of Satan on April 30, 1966 is a symptom of Anton Szandor LaVey's complete rejection of Christian society and the surfacing of a coherent formulation of thought and practice within the Satanic milieu that is at odds with the reactive paradigmatically conform Satanism and the Christian stereotypes found in Western culture. In this sense, the first major fracture is LaVey's formulation of a specific, new current within the cultic milieu that separates *rational* Satanism from traditional negative interpretations, an antinomian religion of the self, appropriating Satan as a positive symbol:

Is it not more sensible to worship a god that he, himself, has created, in accordance with his own emotional needs – one that best represents the very carnal and physical being that has the idea-power to invent a god *in the first place?* . . . If this is what the Devil represents, and a man lives in the devil's fane, with the sinews of Satan moving his flesh, then he either escapes from the cacklings and carpings of the righteous, or stands proudly in his secret places of the earth and manipulates the folly-ridden masses through his own Satanic might, until that day when he may come forth in splendor proclaiming "I AM A SATANIST! BOW DOWN, FOR I AM THE HIGHEST EMBODIMENT OF HUMAN LIFE!" (LaVey 1969: 44–5)

As such, LaVey can be described as a charismatic spokesperson for a cultic movement with positive relations to the liberal *Zeitgeist* of the late sixties in terms of individuality, freedom, anti-authority, new forms of association and interest in esoteric pursuits, even though the form it takes is somewhat darker than that of the mainstream counterculture. Indeed, LaVey's studies of esoteric lore in the 1950s and 1960s, culminating in the formation of the informal Magic Circle in the mid 1960s, is in fact a perfect parallel to Campbell's ideology of seekership as a "problem-solving perspective" or "quest" (Campbell 1972: 123–4) and the definition of audience cult described earlier. A cursory glance at the official LaVey biography supplied by Blanche Barton's *The Church of Satan* and *The Secret life of a Satanist* (1990; 1992) confirms this picture, even if it is partly fictional, as the biography has been shown to be (Aquino 2002; Dyrendal 2004a).⁵ His activities both inwardly and outwardly reflect the common activities of an individual in the cultic milieu: he studies arcane tomes,

⁵ As Dyrendal shows, schismatic spokespersons such as Michael A. Aquino actively downplay LaVey's knowledge of the occult (Dyrendal forthcoming b: 4). This can be expected, as a thorough understanding of esoteric lore is hard currency in the cultic milieu and an obvious angle of attack. Nevertheless I agree with Dyrendal that the esoteric milieu of the period is fairly small, that LaVey has probably socialized with the esoterically inclined and that his books show a working knowledge of these matters, demythologizing notwithstanding (forthcoming b: 5).

philosophical treatises and scientific expositions, visits fellow seekers, works as a psychic investigator, and later performs rituals and gives lectures and so on.

This is all well and good. In reality, the picture is much more complicated, as LaVey actively utilizes positive and negative syncretism in order to arrive at the specific formulation of Satanism shown above. As Mikael Rothstein states:

“Syncretism” as a cultural phenomenon corresponds to “no syncretism.” By this I imply the fact that religious identity and the construction of religious meaning sometimes are the results of conscious concentration on one tradition in opposition to others. A religious body may well consolidate itself by deliberately disregarding other religious constructions, thus fertilizing what is significant to itself while ignoring foreign religious concepts and social systems. In doing so, however, the officially disregarded religious traditions are in fact being considered. (Rothstein 1996: 18–19)

I agree and would go even further: an entrepreneurial soul might use this tactic to maximize confrontation with and separation from other currents in the cultic milieu, the counterculture and society at large. I consider this, especially embodied in the carnival language and imagery of CoS, the true essence of LaVeyan Satanism. In relation to Anton LaVey, Randall Alfred sums it up quite well: “He spent many years studying various occult subjects in what he now regards as a wandering in the wilderness before stumbling on the true path, the ‘Left Hand Path’, of Satanism” (Alfred 1976: 186). In the following, I will discuss three major strands of strategic syncretism that are visible in the early CoS and its “true path”: the use of the Devil is ambiguous, making the anti-Christian and antinomian aspect highly visible; the use of the cultic milieu is highly critical, focusing on the darker aspects; and the magical and religious aspects of the cultic milieu are in themselves reread through a pragmatic, materialistic, *scientific* lens. Through a negotiation between different positions, CoS constantly reorients itself to capitalize on “respectability” and “outrage” (Alfred 1976: 187; Barton 1990: 16) in its formative period from 1966 to 1970.

The first aspect, the deliberate use of inverted Christianity, including diabolical anthropomorphism and the *enaction* of Devil worship, is most visible in the very early stages of the Church of Satan’s existence (in the period 1966–7), although it is also manifest in two important (some would say definitive) movement texts: *The Satanic Bible* and *The Satanic Rituals* (LaVey 1969; 1972). In this strand, CoS is playfully emulating

historical cases to shock and gain new recruits – again the carnival springs to mind. As a result, the early CoS confirms most paradigmatic expectations, appealing to the traditional authority of Christian myth. Examples abound: Satan is invoked in black masses, Satanic baptisms, weddings and funerals with nude altars; Satanic strip shows are performed, and the high priest wears a hooded cape and dark robes during rituals (see LaVey 1972: 31ff, 203ff; Alfred 1976: 189; Barton 1990; 1992; the plates in Aquino 2002). In this sense, LaVey's use of the Christian tradition is highly ambiguous, as it is used to distance CoS from competing ideologies, attract a decidedly anti-Christian segment of the cultic milieu, but also "clear the air" of Christian hypocrisy in a cathartic way: "The rituals for the first year were largely intended as cathartic blasphemies against Christianity. Many of the elements were consistent with the reports of Satanic worship from the famous writings of diabolists" (Barton 1990: 16).

The second aspect, interrelated with and growing out of the first, is the highly selective use of rejected knowledge found within the cultic milieu (as the quote above from Alfred 1976 shows quite clearly). Thus, the diabolical imagery is tempered with an appeal to a different type of tradition, namely select parts of the cultic milieu in the construction of a "true Satanism" apart from Christian stereotypes:

LaVey wanted to establish something new, not strict doctrines awash with attitudes of blind faith and worship, but something which would smash all concepts of anything that had come before, something to break apart the ignorance and hypocrisy fostered by the Christian churches. Something, too, that could free people to apply the black magic he and his Magic Circle were using. . . There had always been a Satanic underground, centuries old, but there had never been an organized Satanic religion, practicing openly. LaVey decided it was high time there was. (Barton 1990: 9, 10)

The appeal to a "Satanic underground, centuries old," "black magic" and freedom from "strict doctrines" is indicative of an immersion in the cultic milieu; when constructing an emic historiography (Hammer 2001: 85ff), LaVey is constantly searching for traditionally "evil" aspects to incorporate into a working myth of the "Satanic underground," but also reinterpreting them to fit his self-religion through an appeal to charismatic authority: "something new." The rite of legitimation of the High Priest on Walpurgisnacht 1966 is a case in point:

LaVey shaved his head as part of a formalized founding ritual, in the tradition of medieval executioners, carnival strongmen, and black magicians before him, to gain personal power and enhance the forces surrounding his newly-established

Satanic order . . . Shaving his head is also traditional to the Yezidi devil worshippers as a rite of passage that the emerging adept must perform. (Barton 1990: 11–12)

This is unquestionably a very personal reading of the tradition, but it is also a very common legitimation strategy. Thus, although LaVey is highly critical of most parts of the cultic milieu, perpetually distancing himself from “white witches” and traditional magicians like Gerald Gardner, Sybil Leek, Eliphas Levi and Aleister Crowley (LaVey 1969: 21; 1971; 1992: 146–7; 1998: 166–7f; Fritscher 2004: 10, 24ff), he is also, through reinterpretation, using it to bolster his authority as the Devil’s representative.⁶ But he is also distancing himself from traditional paradigmatic anti-Christianity and antinomian behavior. This becomes clearer in the phase from 1968–9: “After that original blast’, LaVey remembers, ‘there was no need for the ongoing public spectacle and outrage of an inverted Catholic Mass anymore . . . There were plenty of other sacred cows to attack’” (Barton 1990: 29). Indeed there were. LaVey’s negative relation to the counterculture is a case in point: he is described as a “law-and-order-man” (Alfred 1976: 7) and as against drugs and compulsive sexuality (LaVey 1969; Truzzi 1972: 28; Alfred 1976: 186–7; Lyons 1988: 118). The pendulum swings toward respectability.

This leads us to the third and later dominant strand in the early CoS: the appeal to science and rational authority to distance Satanism from the supernaturalism of the cultic milieu: “I realized there was a whole grey area between psychiatry and religion that had been largely untapped,’ said LaVey. He saw the potential for group ritual used as a powerful combination of psychodrama and psychic direction” (Barton 1990: 16–17). This is in turn based on a view of human nature as an animal (LaVey 1969: 25, statement 7), thus appropriating natural science as a worldview (Lewis 2003: 106–7) and legitimating an individualistic self-religion with the human being, indulgence and vital existence as its natural center.

Nowhere is the appeal to science more visible than in the rationalization of lesser and greater magic found in *The Satanic Bible*, *The Satanic Rituals* and *The Satanic Witch* (LaVey 1969; 1972; 1989). Although the very use of the word “magic” to describe these psychological techniques is

⁶ An interesting example is his visit to a Thelemic lodge in Berkeley: “As early as 1951, LaVey’s growing convictions about Satan led him to try to seek out a group of ‘official’ Devil worshippers. He had heard that followers of Crowley were practicing Satanists, but when he visited the Order of Thelema in Berkeley, he was sorely disappointed. He found a gaggle of mush-minded card readers who emphasized the study of Eastern philosophy, Oriental languages, astrology and contemplation to reach an unnamed mystical oneness with the Universe. This wasn’t LaVey’s idea of Satanism” (Barton 1990: 41).

in itself an indication of the complex conglomeration of diabolism, magic and science through positive and negative syncretism (Dyrendal forthcoming b: 11), and although LaVey is deliberately vague when discussing science and magic (LaVey 1969: 110–13), the trend toward secularization is evident in the scientific terminology used to explain “the change in situations or events in accordance with one’s will, which would, using normally accepted methods, be unchangeable” (1969: 110). Lesser magic is manipulation, greater magic emotional release, but both lie between psychiatry and religion (Truzzi 1972: 28). Thus, his understanding of ritual is paradigmatic to his formulation of a *rational* Satanism and in accordance with the scientific legitimation strategies of the Human Potential movement and the New Age (Hammer 2001: 201ff).

With the appeal to science, the complex relation between LaVey’s understanding of the occult on the one hand and the eclecticism, syncretism and pluralism of the cultic milieu (the “many paths to truth” argument) on the other is amply illustrated. In a sense, LaVey takes the epistemological individualism of the milieu to the extreme, as he constructs a pragmatic combination of science, philosophy and religion to suit his needs, while at the same time discarding much traditional material as “baloney.” Thus the whole concept of LaVeyan Satanism is a negotiation of individuality over and against the traditional legitimation strategies of the cultic milieu, and a suggestion that each and every Satanist critically exercises his or her faculties when confronted with them. He considers Satanism a pure and, more importantly, *working* distillation of occultism and mystical religion:

Summing up, if you NEED to steep yourselves in occult lore, despite this diatribe, by all means do so. But do it as a ritual in itself, i.e., *objectively towards subjective ends!* Read on, *knowing* that you won’t learn a damn thing in principle from Levi, Crowley, Regardie, (or Sybil Leek either!) that isn’t extended one-hundred fold in *The Satanic Bible* or *The Compleat Witch*, *but* that you’ll have the spooky fun, ego-food, and *involvement* which invariably accompanies a curriculum concerned more with the gathering of ingredients than the application of principles. (LaVey 1971: 3)

Thus, the early Church of Satan is both steeped in the occult underground and holding it at arm’s length. LaVey is effectively creating a centralized cultic movement out of his syncretistic reading of the rejected materials of the cultic milieu, and in the process both *confirming* the general dynamics of cult formation and the available strategies of legitimation, and *rejecting* most of the rejected persons, practices and ideas for

a less pluralistically legitimate reading of the sacred traditions. Consequently, LaVey is constantly restating sentiments of affinity and estrangement to make the most of his creation.

Whether these strands are underlying aspects of LaVey's thought that are simultaneously present from the start or made up as the Church moves along is difficult to answer – what is obvious is that they contribute to the doctrinal and organizational ambivalence that ultimately results in schism. While they are all effective legitimation strategies in a smaller circle with easy access to the charismatic glue that is the High Priest himself, the ambivalence is increasingly problematic in the long run – in effect, CoS becomes too popular for comfort, attracting a wide variety of people whose worldviews are mutually exclusive (Barton 1990: 29ff, 119ff; 1992: 125–7). This in turn highlights the conflict between individual empowerment, and thus individual authority to construct a worldview on one hand, and Church doctrine on the other.

In the intermediate period between the publication of *The Satanic Bible* in January 1970 and the formation of the Temple of Set in 1975, the fluctuation between anti-organization and centralized organization becomes more apparent. Two aspects are worth discussing before moving on to the major break ahead. The first is the impact of *The Satanic Bible*, and the other the experiment with decentralization called the grotto system.

The Satanic Bible is in many ways *the* central text of the Satanic milieu, as it holds a privileged place in many Satanists' autobiographies (Lewis 2003: 117) and has a notoriety far exceeding the humble story of its birth (2003: 112; Aquino 2005: ch. 5). It is thus important not only for the organization CoS, but also for the milieu as a whole. This is in large part because the book advocates all strands of Satanism discussed above, scattered throughout the four books of Satan, Lucifer, Belial and Leviathan. First, it includes a mission statement from Satan himself, a list of infernal names and a cookbook of black magic to name but a few paradigmatically conform items (LaVey 1969: 27ff, 58ff, 107ff). Second, the inclusion of the Enochian keys (1969: 153ff) is the appeal to a very old tradition within the cultic milieu, though they are reinterpreted as "Satanic paeans of faith" (1969: 156) and presented with the true translation (by Anton LaVey himself, of course). Third, the entire book of Lucifer and the discussion of Satanic magic touched upon earlier is clothed in rational authority and secular philosophy (1969: 37–107, 110–14). In the words of Ole Wolf, a critical ex-member of CoS: "The Satanic Bible thus represents an occult-nick slam dunk: most readers will agree with certain portions of *The*

Satanic Bible as long as they are either atheists on a rational level, deists with symbolism but no supernatural beliefs, or even theists believing in God and/or Satan but not particularly caring about their sentences in the afterlives” (Wolf 2002: 263). It is therefore an eminent example of the ambiguous style of the early CoS and the potentialities present in both rational Satanism and the wider Satanic milieu.

The second aspect is the grotto system implemented after 1970 (Aquino 2005: 86) and the simultaneous withdrawal from the public of the High Priest and the Central Grotto in San Francisco (Barton 1990: 29, 119) in the early seventies. Though the grottos are conceived of as formal independent lodges within the Church, a cell-structure with responsibility for local activities and authority on a regional level, thus alluding to the increasing number of geographically dispersed members within the organization, some element of control is still in the hands of the High Priest, as the Central Grotto screens members and publishes both the Church newsletter the *Cloven Hoof* and later *The Satanic Bible* and *The Satanic Rituals*. Furthermore, the degree system is elaborated,⁷ which functions both as a delegation and maintenance of control, and a *Manual for Grotto Administration* and some *Articles of Protocol* are composed (Aquino 2002: 160, 280). In essence, this structure is a way to continue working as a centralized cultic movement without the publicity and day-to-day micro-management. All in all, the “absolute” power of the High Priest and Priestess is still asserted: “The position held by Anton LaVey as High Priest is monarchical in nature, papal in degree, and absolute in power” (LaVey in the *Cloven Hoof* in 1970, quoted from Flowers 1997: 181).

Nevertheless, the problems start immediately. As documented by Michael A. Aquino in his history of CoS, practically all grottos experience crises of different kinds: personal animosities, criminal acts, etc. (Aquino 2005; see also Lyons 1988: 116ff and Baddeley 2000 for shorter presentations). Splinter groups appear in 1973 and 1974, although all are short-lived (Lyons 1988: 116ff). Thoughts of restructuring the organization are apparently aired by LaVey to Aquino as early as 1972: “I’m sure you haven’t forgotten one of the first letters you wrote to me, projecting the hypothesis that as Satanism becomes a reckonable force in the world, so will the formal structure of the Church become increasingly distilled,

⁷ The system has five degrees: (1) Apprentice or Active member, (2) Warlock/Witch, (3) Priest/Priestess, (4) Magister and (5) Magus (apparently the last two had no female equivalents). The three upper degrees compose the Priesthood of Mendes. In addition, the High Priest (LaVey) and High Priestess (his wife Diane) are rulers for life.

rejecting external organization out of necessity so that the Satanic ‘gadfly’ may be given freedom to spread and multiply. I reckon that time has come” (Aquino 2005: 191). The distillation is essentially a marketing of “Satanic goodies to low-level gadflies” (2005: 192) and a withdrawal of authority from the grotto system. These thoughts are later reformulated as the implementation of “phase IV” in an overall “master plan” of the Church of Satan:⁸

When the High Priest accepted the Infernal Mandate to assume his office, a Master Plan for the long-range development of the Church of Satan was instituted. This plan was divided into a series of phases, each characterized by a radical readjustment in the overall composition and posture of the entire Church at a precise moment in time. The success of each phase depends in part upon a general ignorance of its successors. The Nine understand that a new phase must now commence . . . In the strictest Orwellian sense we now enter a phase whereby the cohesiveness of Satanism will be reinforced by its individuality and dispersion. Thus an empire will be forged which can be magnetized and rejoined ten millionfold at a future date. At present, in unity there is chaos; in dispersion there is strength . . . We will no longer huddle together for mutual comfort among those who have demonstrated security by their presence. (Aquino 2005: 793–6)

Writing as John M. Kincaid on behalf of the ruling body, the Council of Nine, Anton LaVey here hypothetically reasserts the top-down hierarchy, creating a “cabalistic underground” (Barton 1990: 29) with coherence on a center-to-individual rather than center-to-group level. It is in effect quite the opposite, namely the creation of an audience cult: “No new member will be placed in contact with another, nor will existing Agents, Grotto leaders, or clergy be notified of new members. Only by this procedure will the potential of each surface . . . All Grottos will be formed through individual initiative, drawing from the **outside** rather than the **inside**” (1990: 29). In reality, this constitutes a major reshuffling of authority and membership affinity, and the solutions offered are indicative of the schism to come.

The major schism: Michael A. Aquino and the Temple of Set

All of these different factors – the ambiguous formulation of rational Satanism, the organizational anarchy, the apparent monopolization of

⁸ The term is mentioned in Aquino 2005: 117, in a letter from 1971, but is first used by LaVey as a developmental plan from 1974. According to Aquino: “I doubt that an actual master plan ever existed, but it was a suitably impressive and mysterious oracle to invoke, if nothing else” (2005: 357).

power, the ubiquitous master plan, as well as mounting confusion and/or dependence (whether you are reading Aquino or LaVey) – contribute to the chaos that is modern Satanism’s “dark reformation” in 1975. What can be determined as fact is that a group of disgruntled members of the Church of Satan – the number varies from twenty-eight (Lyons 1988: 126) to a hundred (Aquino 2005: 869) – led by Michael Aquino, leaves in the summer of 1975 and forms the more esoteric variant of modern Satanism called the Temple of Set. This organization is a cultic movement along much the same lines as CoS around 1970, with “pylons” replacing grottos, Set replacing Satan, and Aquino and his wife Lilith Sinclair acting as High Priest and Priestess, although the High Priest seems to have less power and the focus of the organization is guided self-initiation through the practice of magic.⁹ Here I will focus on the narrative strategies surrounding the schism and discuss relevant divergences and similarities between the two organizations in order to understand the fracture.

The why of the schism is narrated in two strategic versions: Anton LaVey claims that he planned it all along according to the master plan, while Michael Aquino calls upon the shift in emphasis from meritocracy to more pecuniary motives in CoS: the selling of Priesthood degrees. Other narratives focus on theological differences: an atheistic or theistic conception of Satan, the distribution of power and intellectual vs. carnal understandings of Satanism (Lyons 1988: 126). What is important in the two spokespersons’ narrativization of the event in the light of the preceding discussion is the ideology used to authorize the schism and the rhetorical and practical acts undertaken to substantiate the claims. Let us examine the two major narratives as they are formulated in relevant publications.

Michael Aquino’s version is extensively corroborated in his self-published e-book *The Church of Satan* (Aquino 2005), which documents the rise and fall of CoS over 986 pages and 161 appendices. It is composed linearly, leading to the eventual climax that is the schism, and builds up suspense along the way. Certain indicators, such as the aforementioned letter from LaVey to Aquino in 1972 advocating the marketing of CoS goods, the crisis of the Stygian Grotto (Aquino 2005: 190ff) and the enigmatic fourth degree of Magister given to LaVey’s personal chauffeur Tony Fazzani (2005: 399–400), are subtle hints of the catastrophe to come. On May 20, 1975, Aquino receives a letter from the LaVeys in his role as editor of the *Cloven Hoof* with a decree from the High Priest

⁹ On the Temple of Set, see Harvey 1995: 285ff; Flowers 1997: 215ff; Aquino 2006.

stating that “professional services, funds, real estate, objects of value, etc., which contribute to the tangible, worldly success of the Church of Satan are qualification for elevation to both II* and III*” (2005: 407, emphasis deleted). He replies:

let’s not “sell” our degrees. The symbolism and image of the degrees are sacred to those who presently hold them, and a price could never be set upon them. To do so would be to lose the lifeblood of the Church as an institution destined to revolutionize human history. We have the ignoble fate of Crowley’s organizations as a case in point. (2005: 408)

A conflict ensues – the correspondence is analyzed in chapter 35 and primary documents included as appendices 127ff in *The Church of Satan* – and finally, Aquino replies on June 10 with the schismatic words:

I reaffirm my degree as Magister Templi, and I reaffirm the degrees of all those who have won them and honored them according to the standards Satan himself has upheld since the dawn of human civilization. Since you – Satan’s High Priest and High Priestess – have presumed to destroy these standards and replace the true Church of Satan with a “Church of Anton,” the Infernal Mandate is hereby withdrawn from the organization known as the “Church of Satan, Inc.” and you are no longer empowered to execute your offices. The degrees you scorn are no longer yours to administer, but shall be safeguarded according to the Will of Satan. (2005: 833–4)

The rhetoric is unmistakably religious: “the standards Satan himself has upheld,” “Infernal Mandate,” “The Will of Satan.” This is a far cry from the rational Satanism developed by LaVey and a curious mix of traditional diabolism and esotericism. Thus the authority used to legitimize the claims is a combination of the traditional, “diabolical authority” of the Satanic tradition and the anthropomorphic Satan (the “Infernal Mandate”), and a bureaucratic, rational-legal authority found in the degree system of the now superseded organization (“I reaffirm my degree . . .,” “the true Church of Satan”), underscored by an obvious but unstated transferral of charisma. In other words: science is gone and replaced with the Mouth of Satan. In this sense, the entire quote is a speech act, a “hereby”-action transferring authority in the religious as well as the secular sphere, redrawing the boundaries in the Satanic milieu. But this is only the beginning, as the following letter from Aquino to the defectors shows:

When it became evident to me that the Church of Satan was to be destroyed, I sought an explanation via ceremonial invocation. Since the 9th of June I had received a series of indications that the overall situation and my own actions therein were not haphazard. Consultation of *The Book of Thoth* on Friday, June

13th, for example, yielded the following sequence: 2 of Cups, 7 of Disks, 9 of Disks, 2 of Wands, The Devil. But I had not received what I considered to be a conclusive answer to these events . . . It is the right of a Magister Templi to evoke the Prince of Darkness if it is his Will to do so. During the night of June 21–22, year X, therefore, I addressed such an evocation by means of the first Part of the *Word of Set* [as I had since come to understand as the original “Enochian Keys”]. The evocation was effective, and an answer was received. (Aquino 2005: 412)

This answer is the *The Book of Coming Forth by Night*, a book confirming the transferral of the “Infernal Mandate” from LaVey to Aquino (Aquino 1985: 20ff) and reorienting modern Satanism toward the cultic milieu from whence it came. Three aspects stand out: the use of tradition, the revelatory practice and the focus on degrees, all interrelated. With regard to tradition, the influence of Aleister Crowley is not only alluded to by the Egyptian setting and the use of concepts such as Aeon, Magus and Will, but also directly discussed in the text (1985: 14ff.). Thus, Aquino is constructing an emic historiography (Hammer 2001: 85ff), a sacred legitimating timeline from the dawn of time, including Set, Horus, Crowley, LaVey and himself, and connecting the timeless void, the Prince of Darkness, the authority of Crowley and Temple of Set, to aid the transition from the Age of Satan to the Aeon of Set.¹⁰ This indicates an entirely different underlying ideology much closer to the “mainstream” of seekership in the cultic milieu, a procedure utilizing the traditional legitimation of authority through sacred history in comparison to LaVey’s more ambiguous and critical approach.

This brings us to the revelatory practice and the transferral of charisma; Aquino is also emulating Crowley, as well as a host of previous schismatic leaders, through the use of prophecy and revelation as legitimating practice (Wallis 1974: 308; 1979: 177). Notice for example the use of the Tarot in the quote above (suitably including the Devil), alluding to Crowley via *The Book of Thoth*, and the reappropriation of the Enochian Keys (also found in *The Satanic Bible*), translated into a Setian frame as LaVey translated them into a Satanic. What is most important, though, is the activation of a more theistic concept of the Prince of Darkness with whom one is able to commune. Even though he later indicates that this process in no way resembles ecstasy or enthusiasm, as there is an equality between the subjective and objective universes (Dyrendal forthcoming b: 17, 19), he nevertheless affirms an intimate connection with and authority from Set. This is used as a powerful weapon of delegitimation against

¹⁰ On the connections between Crowley, LaVey and Aquino, see Dyrendal forthcoming b.

LaVey, whom he earlier supported through revelatory books such as the *Diabolisticon* and the *Ninth Solstice Message* (both found as appendices in Aquino 1985).

Lastly, the rhetoric and practice are much more doctrinally charged and organizationally motivated than LaVey's. This can be seen in the formulation "the lifeblood of the Church as an institution destined to revolutionize human history" from the first letter, the whole tone of the second letter, where the disappointed bureaucrat "revokes" the High Priest's administrative powers, and the invocation of the "right of the Magister Templi" to call upon the Prince of Darkness himself in the third letter. Aquino is suitably given the degree of Magus by Set (LaVey's degree in CoS) and later assumes the degree of Ipsissimus, the highest degree in ToS and another appropriation from the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley (see Flowers 1997: 220). Thus one of Aquino's primary interests is the reinstating of "the true Church of Satan" as a less anarchistic and less "Anton"-oriented religious group. Although I would hesitate to call the Temple of Set a sect, as it is indeed as pluralistically legitimated as any cultic movement, the group reestablishes the true church with a bureaucratic structure of degrees, gets the doctrine and practice back on track, and revitalizes the Satanic milieu with a new formulation of very old and rejected material: organized esoteric Satanism is born, which is a very different amalgamation than its rational counterpart.

As could be expected, LaVey interprets the schism in light of the phase model outlined earlier, which is in effect a spring cleaning of the overburdened Church, as well as a reinforcement of the rational interpretation already enjoying hegemony. In the letter "Hoisted by his own Patois" (Aquino 2005: 850-1), dated June 20, 1975 and addressed to the recipients of the schismatic second letter quoted above, LaVey states that the diabolical imagery and rhetoric of the Church is "symbolic, not literal," that the organization "is progressing according to plan (including schism)" and that "I am running this outfit." Most importantly, the letter accomplishes two things: first, a redefinition of "Michael Aquino" as an insecure, pompous and very un-Satanic character, regarding both his personality and his doctrinal eclecticism, in whom LaVey has been dissatisfied for a long time, and secondly a clarification of the Church of Satan and consequently true Satanism as "an organization dedicated to rational self-interest, indulgence, and a glorification of material and carnal elements." He continues: "I held these beliefs in the beginning as I do now. If others re-interpret my organization and philosophy into a

fundamental kind of supernaturalism, it stems from their needs to do so.” In effect, this is a rational-scientific appeal to authority, but also the very beginning of a rational-legal appeal through routinization of charisma (“my organization and philosophy”), later turning into a full-blown tradition to be protected (Lewis 2003).

This is confirmed in “The Church of Satan, Cosmic Joy Buzzer” (LaVey 1976). Here LaVey reveals the master plan earlier alluded to and interprets Church history through a five-phase development plan: emergence, development, qualification, control and application (LaVey 1976 in Barton 1992: 250–1). The development is in effect a pendulum swing from outrage and antinomianism over respectability and self-religion to alienation and elitism. Thus LaVey acknowledges “Phase One Satanism” (outrage and antinomianism) (Barton 1990: 29) as a necessity in the early stages of the Church, the emergent phase, but also the inevitable “phasing out” of these individuals, the isolation of a Satanic “ideal” (Phase four, control, in 1972) and the subsequent stratification of individuals (Barton 1990: 119–23). The schism in 1975 thus coincides with (or rather *is*) Phase five, application, where only the “productive aliens” are left in the “Church of Satan back on track,” namely “a forum, a loosely-structured cabal” (Barton 1990: 30). In brief, this is an affirmation of alienation and elitism as the key words for “true” Satanism. The Church of Satan is thus equated with a sociological experiment in group dynamics (Barton 1992: 250).

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Summing up, I really do believe the organizational angle, as it is propagated by both spokespersons and in essence encapsulates other salient features of the rupture. In my opinion it is a question of the negotiation of individuality, antinomianism and leadership. LaVey wants to construct an anti-organization that best supports his radical vision of productive alienation and thus his formulation of antinomian self-religion that has taken form from the early 1970s, while retaining as much power as possible with the least amount of work: he wants to be the manager in a Carnival. He also needs to clear the air internally of the ambiguity present from the inception – the diabolical and traditional baggage – and affirm the scientific legitimation strategy: Satan is a symbol, man is an animal. To do so, he needs to clean the Church of both the very committed members and the rebellious anti-Christians. The pecuniary angle is not original, but I think it is safe to say that it is a

fitting carnevalesque, even commonsensical way of putting subtle pressure on these unwanted members. When reading Aquino's documentation, I do indeed see a distance forming on exactly the "scam" versus "school" conceptions of the Church from around 1972.

Aquino, on the other hand, wants an organization with clear demarcations of authority, such as degrees and color-graded medallions, comprising the top percent of isolate intelligences out there and giving them freedom to pursue their Satanic studies as they see fit: he wants to be the principal of a university.¹¹ He too needs to clear the air internally of the ambiguities – but in his case toward an affirmation of the traditional esoteric elements of the cultic milieu and a more theistic conception of Satan as a First Principle. In this respect, LaVey's early diabolism becomes a clear indication of *true* revelation and authority, and his later symbolic reinterpretation a fall from grace – right into Aquino's lap. The Temple of Set *is* the Church of Satan, but with the necessary focus on self-actualization rather than antinomy. To this almost academic understanding of Satanism, money and play is a rather insulting degradation of the serious business of becoming. All in all, personal ambitions, doctrinal differences and organizational ideas coincide to produce the schism, reinforced by nascent sentiments of affinity and estrangement.

The reformed Church of Satan becomes an audience cult that seeks "a few outstanding individuals," but almost disappears into the cultic milieu (Lewis 2003: III). LaVey retreats into solitude and concentrates on the artificial companions and total environment of his Black House. In practice, LaVeyan Satanism is almost exclusively propagated by *The Satanic Bible* and other works by the High Priest. This leaves the Satanic milieu less ambiguous, perhaps, as both the rational and esoteric types of modern Satanism now have spokespersons, movements texts and visible organizations, but also more divided, as a fault line in the milieu has been activated and reinforced, supported by new variations of doctrinal syncretism, new constellations of authority and new feelings of community. The end result of the schism is a complex array of internal articulations in the Satanic milieu that can be used in a variety of ways in the negotiation of identity, attributing "Satanism" and "pseudo-Satanism" along different lines.

One of these is the formulation of the Satanic worldview itself. First of all, we have the ontological or metaphysical themes of *materialism versus*

¹¹ He is a successful army man, Boy Scout and academic, while LaVey is more of a carnival man (compare the biographies in e.g. Flowers 1997: 175ff and 217ff)

idealism and *atheism versus theism*. The Church of Satan and related rational groups regard more idealistic or theistic conceptions of the world as paradigmatically conform stupidity: they are at best intellectual mistakes and at worst Christian nonsense. Supernaturalism in any form is a “New Age mish-mash of ideas masquerading as philosophy” (Gilmore 1999: 3). True Satanism considers humanity’s carnal and Satan’s symbolic nature as self-evident. On the other hand, the Temple of Set and other esoteric groups have a broader notion of Satanism corresponding to the more explicit relation to other currents within the cultic milieu. Set is a platonic ideal and a being with an objective existence, Sat-Tan is Being and Becoming (Petersen 2005: 439). The LaVeyan personality cult of the modern Church of Satan is mistaken (Flowers 1997: 179), barring the true self-realization of the individual. When the relation is articulated in a positive way, as in Stephen E. Flower’s book on the Left-Hand Path, rational Satanism is viewed as an *immanent* Satanism with a focus on antinomianism in contrast to the *transcendental* Setianism that pursues self-deification (1997: 5), but there is no doubt that the Temple of Set has the more holistic view.¹² Naturally, the theism of these groups never takes the form of a horned Devil with a pitchfork, but is rather a “psyche-centric” (1997: 5) or mystical conception. The Christian Devil is as pseudo-Satanic as LaVey’s degrees up for sale.

A related fault line is the appropriation of *science versus religion*. Indeed most groups within the cultic milieu will seek an alliance with science, as Olav Hammer has amply illustrated (Hammer 2001: 201ff), and regard religion as herd mentality of the worst kind. Nevertheless, as I have shown earlier, rational Satanism generally eschews the term “religion” and appropriates science and philosophy as *genuine* Satanism, whereas esoteric Satanism is much more inclined to view certain “spiritual technologies” in a positive light, as resources to be used in the personal project of actualizing the Black Flame within. This difference is less clear-cut and more tactically keyed than other themes, though the swear-word “religion” tastes like Christian Devil worship whether you are rationally or esoterically inclined. In this sense, it is surely one of the defining characteristics of *pseudo-Satanism*, whoever is on the receiving end. The Satanic underground championed by LaVey is also engaged selectively by

¹² For example, the Temple of Set concludes the book and is thus the crown jewel in the manifestation of Satanism in the West, and positive contributions of the Church of Satan to the Left Hand Path are restricted to the formative years between 1966 and 1975 (Flowers 1997).

the modern Church of Satan (Gilmore 1999: 4), a sure sign that the ambiguity discussed earlier is alive and well.

Another important cleavage forms around two traits in my minimal definition, namely *self-religion versus antinomianism*. The post-schismatic LaVey and Church of Satan definitely reorient themselves around the concept of the “alien elite,” the non-joiners and productive misfits, thus keying true Satanism emphatically to the negative statement of non-conformity, whereas the Temple of Set is more quiet and withdrawn, and considers self-deification the natural occupation of all isolate intellects. But again, not only are the two terms intertwined; they are also employed strategically. As such, they are useful not only as positive articulations of one’s own philosophy, but also as negative descriptors for the other groups on the “pseudo-Satanic fringe” (Peter H. Gilmore, quoted in Wolf 2002: 276). *True* individuality and *true* non-conformism is represented by exactly the form of Satanism the speaker is promoting, but it is always more fun to point out that the Temple of Set, for example, is filled with conform joiners and degree-hunters (Gilmore 2005), or that the LaVey-cult of the upper echelons of CoS is in fact a crypto-fascist devotion to the guru “Doctor LaVey” (Wolf 2002).¹³ When all is said and done, the antinomian behavior of the reactive paradigmatically conform Satanist, whether it is a Devil-worshiping teenager or a serial killer claiming that he is doing the will of Satan, is condemned as the worst kind of conformism.

If we now turn to the organizational themes prevalent in the negotiations of identity within the Satanic milieu, the *legitimation of authority* garners a lot of attention. The complex negotiation between individual worldviews and a Church doctrine suggests that there is a pluralistic doctrinal environment within CoS from the very beginning, as long as one does not criticize the High Priest nor try to make individual syncretisms the official party line (Baddeley 2000: 218). The serious enemies are first the hypocritical Christians and later “pseudo-Satanists” in the Temple of Set and other splinter groups. In a very real sense, you can believe almost anything, as long as you don’t rock the boat. On the other hand, arguments proposed by LaVey in the wake of the schism in 1975 already point toward a formulation of “orthodox” LaVeyan Satanism,

¹³ The reason for the title is unclear. Stephen Flowers states that it is the proper address for a Magus (Flowers 1997: 183), while Blanche Barton writes that “[h]is closest associates call him ‘Dr. LaVey’, ‘Doc’ or ‘Herr Doktor’ as, he says, ‘a term of affection and respect – much as a circus calliapist or whorehouse pianist was once called ‘Professor’” (Barton 1990: 45). Indeed this discrepancy clearly illustrates the organizational differences of ToS and CoS.

although this is a fluid concept; this process is accentuated after 1997, mainly because of the Internet's effect on the Satanic milieu (Petersen 2002) and the death of LaVey that year. What is clear is that LaVey's charismatic authority is routinized into a tradition and a legal bureaucracy (Lewis 2003), clearly demarcating what is authentic Satanism as that which is of the Church – itself quite ambiguous. Thus it is somewhat easier to say what Satanism is *not*: all which is not formulated or sanctioned by LaVey (see for example Anthony 2000 and Gilmore 2000). I agree with Ole Wolf that this complex strategy is in fact an “enforced dogmalessness”: “if a follower revises his or her view, then the new view is Satanism, too. It is only when the follower does not accept other views as Satanic that the Church of Satan administration typically responds with an explanation that the follower's ‘one true way’ attitude is not appreciated” (Wolf 2002: 281). Thus the Church continues the fluid strategy devised by LaVey, although his charisma is now routinized (the *Satanic Bunco Sheet* [n.d.] is a good example). This semi-unique legitimation strategy has indeed sprouted new splinter groups and resentment from the Satanic milieu, which unfortunately is beyond the scope of this chapter.

Paradoxically, the Temple of Set is as pluralistically legitimated as other cultic movements: it is definitely not a sect, even though its legitimacy derives from a unique revelation, *The Book of Coming Forth by Night*. This is mainly because Setians regard Aquino as exemplary, not unique. On the whole, ToS is very close to the cultic milieu and esoteric groups with a focus on seekership and individual ambition. Group cohesion is in large part the result of the degree system, Aquino's huge literary output and the creative management of the heritage from the cultic milieu.

The final theme is a Satanic Procrustean Bed: *individuality versus collective*. How can one balance the *individual* right to express a personal view of Satanism (which is obviously *true*) with the just as valid need to debunk *alternative* interpretations as misunderstood? It is not even remotely a problem when you are alone or when other Satanists are invisible – but it is very much so when Satanic subcultures clash on the Internet or in real life. The question of legitimation is a central concern for most Satanic *groups* I have encountered, and it is connected with an articulation of collectivity. In a more philosophical mood, this is a pure manifestation of the problem with relativism. Is the unique interpretation of the self-professed Satanist or the minimum standards of a definition more important? Or on a collective scale: individuality or group cohesion?

This classical problem is solved differently in different formulations of Satanism, but is a constant source of tension within the Satanic milieu and groups born from it. This is part of the inheritance that is the ambiguity of LaVey and the very pluralistic strategies it nurtures.

In conclusion, Gavin Baddeley provides a fitting coda: “The conflict between promoting individuality and presenting a united front plagues every serious Satanic organization. LaVey’s solution was typically perverse: an organization dedicated to liberty, but run like a dictatorship. That LaVey’s ideal – of a church of productive misfits, a club for non-joiners – hasn’t been too contradictory to survive is remarkable in itself” (Baddeley 2000: 218). This is a very perceptive statement, but the only way it *has* survived is by spawning a host of churches and clubs – a natural consequence of the oxymoronic project. On the one hand Satanism is a pure breed of the cultic milieu, confirming many central assumptions; on the other, the very ambiguity of LaVey’s construction has a certain bizarre authoritarian effect. Thus modern Satanism, understood as a Satanic milieu comprised of significant themes and their strategic deployment, inspires perpetual negotiations of identity, affinity and estrangement that nevertheless relate to the same constant pool of doctrines, practices and organizational structures.

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ARTICLE II: SCIENCE AND AUTHORITY

“‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’: Modern Satanism between Secularized Esotericism and ‘Esotericized’ Secularism” is published in the anthology *Handbook of Religion and the Authority of Science*, edited by James R. Lewis and Olav Hammer for Brill, 2010. The chapter was written in the winter of 2008-2009 and accepted with minor revisions. It is based on a paper with the same title presented at the INFORM/CESNUR conference *Twenty Years and More: Research into Minority Religions, New Religious Movements and ‘the New Spirituality’*, April 16-20, 2008, London School of Economics, London, United Kingdom.

The book is part of the Brill series *Handbooks on Contemporary Religion*, supervised by James R. Lewis and an editorial board of five acclaimed scholars. Previous volumes include anthologies on New Age and Neopaganism. The volume on science is mainly thematic in scope, although its 900 pages are divided into many subsections. My chapter is in the section on “Theoretical [Approaches]”.

“WE DEMAND BEDROCK KNOWLEDGE”: MODERN SATANISM BETWEEN SECULARIZED ESOTERICISM AND ‘ESOTERICIZED’ SECULARISM¹

JESPER AAGAARD PETERSEN

I. *Introduction*

I have conducted what sociologists might call an “unfounded research project.” Much of what I have synthesized in my sometimes overly-scattered pursuits will to many readers appear utterly mad, ridiculous and outrageous. Much is based on the scientific evaluation of others. Perhaps even more will be condemned as having “no known or accredited scientific basis.” Fine. All I know is it works. And if it works, I don’t knock it. (LaVey, 2002 [1971], p. 26)

In *The Satanic Witch* the founder of the Church of Satan, Anton Szandor LaVey, presents “The LaVey Personality Synthesizer”, a simple instrument to ascertain the personality of the witch and potential partners in relation to body mass and shape. The synthesizer is modelled on a clock and is based on impressionistic studies of somatotypes (LaVey, 2002 [1971], p. 25). For example, twelve o’clock is “most male core”, has a V-shaped, hard body and is associated with fire and masculine traits; six o’clock is “most female core”, has a pear-shaped marshmallow body and is coupled with water and feminine traits, while the intellectual three o’clock is a tube, associated with air, and the emotional nine o’clock is apple-shaped and related to earth (ibid., inner covers; cf. pp. 21–73). The diagram is a condensation and visible representation of LaVey’s theory of lesser magic, glamour and manipulation, which in turn rests on his theory of identity and ultimately his conception of Satanism itself. The theory can be found scattered in various books, essays and reading lists, and feeds on the sciences of psychology, social psychology, sociology, etology, biology and theories of visual communication, as well as the ‘occult’ or ‘rejected’ sciences

¹ This article is based on a paper with the same title presented at the international INFORM/CESNUR conference *Twenty Years and More: Research into Minority Religions, New Religious Movements and ‘the New Spirituality’*, April 16th-20th 2008, London School of Economics, Houghton Street, London, UK.

of body analysis, temperaments, the esoteric elemental circle and so forth. Consequently, the Personality Synthesizer and by extension “Laveyan” Satanism could be understood as a blend of scientific and religious discourse. But what does that mean?

A basic framework for studying modern Satanism is Colin Campbell’s imaginative concept of the cultic milieu, grounding the study of the seemingly marginal, alternative or counter-cultural to established orthodoxies in a sociological entity, namely that of an heterogeneous field of beliefs, practices, affiliations, institutions, individuals and networks of communication (Campbell, 1972). Although it has been criticised for an excessive reliance on deviance as a common trait, necessitating a softening of the stark contrast between underground and orthodoxy and the inclusion of popular culture as a mediating factor (Partridge, 2004b), it remains a very fruitful model of modern de-institutionalized religion in western societies.

I have previously classified modern Satanism as a whole in the broad types of rationalist and esoteric Satanism in a satanic sub-milieu of the cultic milieu (Petersen, 2005, 2009a, 2009b); while acknowledging the diffuse and fluent borders of these ideal types, they shine a light on a basic tension, namely the respective appeal to scientific theories, models and terminology versus the appeal to esoteric knowledge, historiography, experiences and vocabulary.² Nevertheless most satanic discourse contains appropriations of and appeals towards both scientific and religious discourse, in effect producing a wide variety of ‘creolizations’ or ‘syncretisms’ on a religion-science axis (Campbell, 1972, pp. 124, 126). Stretched out between the “problem-solving perspective” of the individual seeker, the “enormous diversity of cultural items” and the “pressure to syncretization” arising from “marked tolerance and support” (ibid., pp. 122–123), specific spokespersons and groups walk an ambiguous path between openness and closure *vis-a-vis* this religious ecology (ibid., pp. 121, 128). In order to successfully grasp the complex inclusions and exclusions of ‘religion’, ‘science’ and ‘esotericism’ within and between the plurality of positions, I would suggest seeing the flows in the milieu through processes of syncretization, secularization and

² A final type, reactive Satanism, appeals to Christian stereotypes, popular culture and mimetic acts in a construction of ostensive and mythical Satanism. It is less important in this study.

esoterization, thus highlighting both the ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘why’ of Satanism, esotericism and science.

After presenting a framework of ‘secularizing the esoteric’ and ‘esotericizing the secular’, this study will first examine Anton LaVey’s Satanism in depth, followed by briefer studies of three formulations of modern Satanism in the satanic milieu, to show how both the sources of authority and the traditions themselves are malleable and strategic. Finally, this investigation is related to the theoretical discussion surrounding the concept of syncretism to further understand the processes and motivations involved. In effect, modern Satanism is both a secularized esotericism and ‘esotericized’ secularism, as satanic actors construct their worldview as discourses with material at-hand in ever-widening relations: to other actors, competing groups, the networks of the satanic and cultic milieus, popular culture and ‘occulture’, and finally hegemonic discourses of society at large.

II. *Secularized Esotericism and ‘Esotericized’ Secularism*

All New Age religion is characterized by the fact that it expresses its criticism of modern western culture by presenting alternatives derived from a secularized esotericism. It adopts from traditional esotericism an emphasis on the primacy of personal religious experience and on this-worldly types of holism (as alternatives to dualism and reductionism), but generally reinterprets esoteric tenets from secularized perspectives. (...) New Age religion cannot be characterized as a return to pre-Enlightenment worldviews but is to be seen as a qualitatively new syncretism of esoteric and secular elements. (Hanegraaff, 1998 [1996], pp. 520–521)

As a first move I will unlock some pertinent dimensions in Wouter J. Hanegraaff’s concept of ‘secularized esotericism’ in order to contextualize the syncretism of the satanic milieu and launch a parallel counter-strategy, namely ‘esotericized secularism’. As we can see from the quote above, Hanegraaff proposes the concept as an explanatory device in his influential analysis of the New Age movement (Hanegraaff, 1998 [1996]). New Age religion broadly rests on cultural criticism as secularized esotericism, marking both continuity and a break with “traditional esotericism” before the Enlightenment; it is a “qualitatively new syncretism”. Hence alternatives are formed on the basis of two broad historical movements, namely occultism and romanticism, both of which are results of the meeting of secularism and esotericism, understood respectively as Enlightenment ideals,

mechanistic science and (later) evolution on the one hand and the holistic “form of thought” described by Antoine Faivre through his six characteristics on the other (*ibid.*, part III, especially pp. 406–410).

In the analysis, he taps into Colin Campbell’s concept of the cultic milieu as a way to conceptualize New Age as a movement (*ibid.*, pp. 14–16, 522), but on the whole the analysis works on the level of the history of ideas. I would suggest we use this link to a sociological model to open up the discussion of secularized esotericism as a *strategic* process. If we do so, it becomes obvious that the heavy reliance on substantives and ‘-isms’ occludes the fact that secularized esotericism is a strategic way of adapting to modernity *for social actors*, something Hanegraaff himself repeatedly states (e.g. *ibid.*, pp. 422, 516; Hanegraaff 1999, pp. 151, 154; 2003, p. 359; 2004, p. 496). Thus secularized esotericism becomes a synchronic concept built on slicing up a diachronic process in order to analyze it, as the cultural critique of the cultic milieu utilizes the dual strategies of ‘secularising’ the esoteric and ‘esotericizing’ the secular when constructing and legitimating tradition.

This reappraisal relates directly to the problematic Weberian survival of ‘disenchantment’ (e.g. Partridge, 2004a, 2004b) and to the wider discussion of the sacred and the secular in secularization theory (concisely summed up in Beckford, 2003). If we differentiate secularization on macro-, meso- and microlevels, here respectively the functional differentiation of society, changes in the religious economy and decline in individual performance and adherence (Dobbelaere, 1989, 2004; cf. Hammer, 2001, pp. 30–31), we can bracket the universal theoretical problems and concentrate on more manageable matters such as the concrete syncretic processes of the cultic milieu and its character as both the *reservoir* of raw materials from which to create religion and the *network* in which to do it.

In turn, this pinpoints the relation between structure and actor, the ready availability of material and the apparently unproblematic crossing of boundaries between sacred and secular in modern religious creativity. On the macro level of functional differentiation, secularization is pointing to a historical fact, namely the differentiation of modern western society and decline of authority of institutionalized religion in the plausibility structures of western societies. However, this assessment must be seen in relation to the micro level, where people are “no less religious today than they were two hundred years ago” (Stuckrad, 2005a, p. 141, n. 149), as well as the meso-level of discourse and

institutions, where they nevertheless *communicate* religion in a different way, through new avenues of legitimacy. A pressing question becomes: how do we conceptualize these flows?

Motivated by an interesting analysis by Cheri Sun-Chin Chan (2000), Christopher Partridge proposes a necessary interrelation between “sacralization of the secular” and “secularization of the sacred” in order to transcend the difficulties inherent in secularization theory in general and Hanegraaff’s concept of “disenchanted magic” in particular (Partridge, 2004b, p. 44, 2005, p. 2). Chan states that:

The ‘sacralization of the secular’ is a process by which the sacred sphere expands its boundary to encompass part of the formerly secular sphere. In parallel with this process is the ‘secularization of the sacred,’ through which secular elements permeate the sacred world. In a continuum of values between the sacred and the secular, the sacralization process ratifies and sanctifies the originally secular realities. The secular realities, simultaneously, function actively in the sacred cosmos and manifest a secularization dynamic. (Chan, 2000, p. 46)

This is used as a starting point by Christopher Partridge to examine re-enchantment through the hybrid nature of occulture; a term proposed to transcend the subcultural and ‘cultic’ limitations of Campbell’s cultic milieu (Partridge, 2004b, pp. 66–68, 84–85). What is most important for the present discussion is that these conceptual dialectics describe ongoing discursive strategies available in the construction of traditions, as sacred and secular claims reorient the constituents and hence the legitimacy of meaning-making with matters at-hand. In the words of Bruce Lincoln, myths, rituals and classifications are “modes of discourse”, usable instruments in the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of society, a boundary work constantly undertaken by social actors (Lincoln, 1989, 1994, 2006). Social and discursive boundaries between science and religion are constantly challenged and redrawn, although the clashes are very different in the mainstream of orthodox science and on the margins, in the individualized and loosely constrained *bricolage* of the cultic milieu itself.³

Such dialectic models of boundary work can be profitably combined with Max Weber’s immensely influential analysis of the legitimation of

³ On the very evocative and useful concept of boundary work, see Cozzens & Gieryn, 1990; Gieryn, 1999. Its use within STSS-studies makes it even more relevant in studies of religion and science. For examples, see Hess, 1993; Rothstein, 2004.

authority (e.g. Weber, 1978, pp. 212–301, 941–1372; 2003, vol. 2, pp. 45–188). Weber himself worked with three ideal types of charismatic, rational-legal and traditional authority according to the specific claims to legitimacy they make; today, this somewhat static model is mirrored in Wouter Hanegraaff's strategies to find 'truth': reason, revelation and gnosis (e.g. Hanegraaff, 2004, p. 492). In contrast, James R. Lewis has tried to extend Weber's original schema into more dynamic legitimation strategies utilized in various combinations—they are *possibilities* of appeal (Lewis, 2003, 2007)—whereas Olav Hammer outlines three major strategies of epistemology in the cultic milieu, namely tradition, scientism and experience (Hammer, 2001), again as an extension of a Weberian framework. The latter model is interesting because it incorporates the dual aspect of concrete tactics, such as narrativization, pattern recognition and imitation, with the more strategic aspect of validity. Thus claims to legitimacy can be framed through age or exotic provenance, through scientific terminology and systematic method, or through the life-story of the experiencing self, a decidedly more discourse-oriented approach to Weber's basic classificatory insight.

I suggest we delineate 'esotericism' and 'esoteric' along the discursive lines advocated by Kocku von Stuckrad and Olav Hammer: As *claims* to absolute knowledge and the *means* to attain this knowledge, seen as a dialectic of the hidden and revealed (Stuckrad, 2005a, p. 10), which again should be related to an initiatory discourse and organization precisely because it is mediated (Hammer, 2004).⁴ 'Secular' and 'secularism', on the other hand, points to claims based on the rationalization of nature, body and psyche and the differentiation of society in the modern West, related to non-religious ideals and practices resulting from the project of modernity (Asad, 2003; Zuckerman, 2008). By understanding the concepts of the secular and the esoteric in a processual and verbal sense as modes of discourse within strategic positions rather than closed and fixed systems of tradition, we can focus on the "religious economy" and the meso-level of formulated discourse, strategies and combinations (Hammer, 2001; Hanegraaff, 2007; Stuckrad, 2003, 2005a, 2005b).

⁴ Although literary esotericism complicates the sociological correlation with structured groups, it is nevertheless involved in social processes in the cultic milieu through response networks and audiences.

Combining the dialectical model of boundary work with legitimation strategies, *secularizing the esoteric* points to the transformation of authority of materials traditionally classified as esoteric (texts, images, discourses, practices etc.) in the light of appeals to secular modes of legitimacy: modern contexts, theories, models or terminologies stemming from psychology, quantum physics, medicine or political science, for example. We can say that a secular and scientific myth suffuses the esoteric structure; it is no longer uniquely connected to esoteric modes of legitimation, but is disembedded and secularized, and thus connected to secular authority for legitimacy. Conversely, *esotericizing the secular* points to the transformation of authority of texts, images, discourses and practices associated with the secular sphere—they too are disembedded, but are now justified through esoteric modes of legitimation, such as claims to absolute knowledge, a secret historiography, personal experiences and initiated vocabularies. Here an esoteric myth permeates the secular narrative.⁵

In addition to this synchronic use, we can also conceptualize the ‘sedimentation’ of authority over time, as suggested by Gustavo Benavides (Benavides, 2001, p. 498), in ideal types to describe “hegemonic interventions” or attempts at discursive closure of boundaries (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001 [1985]). As I discussed earlier, Campbell’s cultic milieu rests on a measure of tolerance and support, thus highlighting both the flow of individuals and information in a vast network. But this aspect is inversely related to the interests of spokespersons and group coherence; when strengthening the group, ties to the milieu weaken and vice versa (Lewis & Lewis, 2009, p. 7). As such, Campbell’s science-religion and instrumental-expressive axis (Campbell, 1972, pp. 124, 126) is a valid grid on which to base a typology of modern Satanism, as broader vectors of sedimented claimsmaking within the satanic milieu.⁶

Studies of the Church of Satan, the writings of its High Priest, Anton Szandor LaVey, and the modern offshoots and spokespersons of this tradition has frequently asserted the materialistic, atheistic and (semi-) scientific bias of this strand of modern Satanism (e.g. Alfred, 1976;

⁵ Aside from Christopher Partridge and Cheris Sun-Chin Chan, I am here inspired by Jennifer Porter’s brilliant article “Spiritualists, Aliens and UFOs”, where she discusses American Spiritualism’s dialectics of ‘rationalising’ the miraculous while simultaneously asserting spiritual truth through embracing the extraterrestrial—in essence a double idealization of science through appropriation and critique (Porter, 1996).

⁶ I will return to Benavides’ ideas as well as the concept of syncretism in the theoretical discussion in part V.

Lewis, 2003; Petersen, 2005). Two readings have been made from this assertion. In a more integrative formulation, the Satanism of LaVey is seen as a watered down version of esoteric discourses and practices, or, less provocatively, as a secularized esotericism. In this sense rationalist Satanism in the Laveyan tradition partakes of strategies similar to ‘self religion’ within modern esotericism, New Age religion and the Human Potential Movement (Heelas, 1996, 2002), negotiating between esoteric and mythologized scientific rhetoric in order to legitimize and authenticate itself in the cultic milieu today. In essence it is a squarely modern this-worldly self-deification which aims to actualize, realize or assert the satanic self rather than any transcendent entity. Keywords become detraditionalization and eclecticism in a satanic milieu (Dyrendal, 2004, 2008, 2009; Petersen, 2009a, 2009b).

Other studies, in contrast, emphasize a more radical understanding of the discursive manoeuvres within the Laveyan tradition, stressing the emic othering of spirituality discourses as well. In “Anton LaVey, The Satanic Bible and the Satanist tradition”, James R. Lewis states that

When LaVey founded the Church of Satan in 1966, he grounded Satanism’s legitimacy on a view of human nature shaped by a secularist appropriation of modern science. Unlike Christian Science, Scientology and other groups that claimed to model their approach to spirituality after the *methods* of science, LaVey’s strategy (...) was to base Satanism’s “anti-theology” in a secularist *worldview* derived from natural science. The appeal to a worldview based on “our scientific and technological advances” provided LaVey with an atheistic underpinning for his attacks on “obsolete” Christianity and other forms of supernatural spirituality (he quotes from Barton, 1990, p. 13; Lewis, 2003, p. 105).

In this view rationalist Satanism strongly asserts the differences from mythological Christian and esoteric formulations of Satanism, as well as the broader ‘spiritualities’ of the contemporary West, by affirming a materialistic and secular basis (cf. Dyrendal, 2009; Lap, 2008; Petersen, 2009a). It is not religious or even ‘spiritual’, but a secular philosophy actively distancing itself from more recognizable ‘religious’ competitors in the milieu. Whereas the motivations behind the appropriation of science by religions are normally legitimizing claims that *reinforce* the religious agenda (Lewis, 2007; Rothstein, 2004), in the case of rationalist Satanism the appropriation is *naturalizing* and based

on the critique of a religious worldview: an “Un-religion” (Crabtree, 2002b; Paradise, 2007, p. 150).⁷ Lewis concludes:

In terms of Weber’s schema, we would say that LaVey’s appeal to human nature (meaning, for LaVey, the Darwinist vision of human nature) was a rational legitimation of authority. In other words, LaVey claimed that Satanism was a legitimate religion because it was rational. As a corollary, traditional religion was irrational (unscientific) and therefore illegitimate (Lewis, 2003, p. 106).

While it is important not to be too overtaken by these rhetorical manoeuvres of the Church, I consider this angle of inquiry fruitful for several reasons. First of all, it can explain why rationalist Satanism is often marginalized in broader studies of modern esotericism and alternative religiosity in the West; it is seemingly considered either too trivial or too philosophical, neither of which is true. Secondly, it highlights some important methodological problems regarding the use of science in religious *bricolage*. The radical angle illustrates a problem with the softer, integrative approach above, namely the need to *respect* the emic formulations of identity. Laveyan Satanism clearly tries to navigate waters similar to other currents and groups in the cultic milieu, but with a different focus and outcome compared with secularized esotericism in a strict sense.

On the other hand, by excluding rationalist Satanism from esotericism, we *accept* the contestatory discourse of LaVey and his successors, which is obviously an interpretative fallacy. Many new religions distance themselves from ‘religion’ and utilize mythologized science both as ideological content and a basis for legitimation (Hammer, 2001; Hanegraaff, 1999, 2000; Lewis, 2003, 2007; Rothstein, 1996, 2004). In addition, Laveyan Satanism appropriates religious elements as well. Lewis writes:

At the same time, LaVey went beyond contemporary secularism by suggesting the reality of mysterious, “occult” forces—forces he claimed were not supernatural, but were, rather, natural forces that would eventually

⁷ Scientistic and scientism generally has two meanings: The religious appropriation of science, the mythologized science 1 of new religions (Hammer, 2001, p. 206), and the belief that science is the ultimate master narrative, mythologized science 2 (Midgley, 1992). I use “naturalizing” for scientism in the latter sense here.

be discovered by science. In his notion of mysterious forces that could be manipulated by the will of the magician, LaVey was really not so far from the mentalistic technology of Christian Science, Scientology, etc. (Lewis, 2003, p. 106).

Consequently rationalist Satanism also utilizes traditional and charismatic legitimation strategies, both in the early phases, when LaVey is actively constructing a satanic tradition, and in the later phases, when the authority of Anton LaVey and *The Satanic Bible* often supplants rational legitimation.

Nevertheless, these ambiguities aside, the sedimented rhetoric of Laveyan Satanism is part of a wider construction of tradition that could be heuristically classified as *esotericized secularism* in the sense that LaVey's project has an anti-religious thrust that attempts to build a tradition on a disenchanted worldview. This is appropriated and radicalized by successors both within the Church of Satan and in splinter groups, thus producing a distinctive esoteric secularism I have called rationalist Satanism. In contrast, other groups falling within the category of esoteric Satanism re-open the boundaries set by LaVey and thus partake in strategies found in the cultic milieu in general. Here it is religious conceptions and practices that set the standard to which science and secular ideals should conform. The end result is a mythologized science legitimating a religious construction of tradition, a *secularized esotericism*.

Let me illustrate this difference through some examples. In the analyses to follow, I have chosen material from a variety of sources (internet sources, movement texts and informal texts) in a time-span from the late 1960s to the present. The central themes will be the concrete use of science and rationality in the selected satanic material and the concurrent legitimation strategies within them that authorize claims of Satanism as a *legitimate* discourse.

III. *The Bedrock Knowledge of the Church of Satan*

Magic requires working in harmony with nature. Bearing that in mind, I can assure you that I have stumbled onto something. Magic works. I would do it whether people attended the Church of Satan and did it with me or not. (Barton, 1990, p. 16; originally from B. Wolfe's *The Devils Avenger*, 1974, p. 98)

Satanism, as LaVey describes the modern philosophy (...) starts as a secular philosophy of rationalism and self-preservation (natural law,

social Darwinism, animal state) and wraps these basically sound ideas in religious trappings to *add* to its appeal. A Satanist enters the supernatural realm by *choice*, with eyes open and hearts clear (...). (Barton, 1990, p. 123)

Broadly speaking, the Church of Satan’s stance towards science and materialism can be synthesised from two currents in Anton LaVey’s writings, succinctly summarized by himself as “Ayn Rand with trappings” (Klein, 1970, p. 20). On the one hand is the critical replacement of God by carnal man in LaVey’s ideological intervention: “a secular philosophy of rationalism and self-preservation (natural law, social Darwinism, animal state)” (Barton, 1990, p. 123). On the other is the magical technology promoted by LaVey, gathered from various esoteric traditions as well as psychotherapy and theatre: “Satanism, realizing the current needs of man, fills the large grey void between religion and psychiatry. The Satanic philosophy *combines* the fundamentals of psychology *and* good, honest emotionalizing, or dogma” (LaVey, 1969, p. 53). The respective strength of these currents changes over time, but they are dialectically related in his thinking as secularizing and esotericizing trends, ultimately negotiating a secular worldview.

Nevertheless, we should discern between content and effect; the “secular philosophy” is a specific use of and appeal to secular and scientific material that becomes a *secularizing* trend when engaging esoteric material; inversely, the “trappings” or use of and appeal to esoteric material becomes an *esotericizing* trend in the application of science. I will examine this complicated chiasm of legitimation and counter-legitimation by first studying the appropriation and use of secular elements and suggest some aspects of “esoterization” involved, before secondly elaborating on the esoteric elements and the concomitant secularization and “esoterization” in more depth.

Secular Elements and the Undercurrent of ‘Esoterization’

A cornerstone in LaVey’s secular philosophy is the view on the human animal. The basic framework of satanic anthropology (and by implication ontology) is summarized in “The Nine Satanic Statements” in *The Satanic Bible* (LaVey, 1969, p. 25). The statements can be divided into three major groups: The first three on “indulgence”, “vital existence” and “undefiled wisdom” present a positive view of the satanic self as a carnal, physical and pragmatic being. Ideals of enjoyment of physical existence (rather than abstinence) and a clear view of this-worldly

truth (rather than pipe-dreams and self-deceit) are thus promoted as the core values of Satanism, echoing Darwinism, Epicureanism and hedonism as well as the iconoclastic philosophies of Friederich Nietzsche and Ayn Rand (Dyrendal, 2009; Lap, 2008; Lewis, 2009; Mathews, 2009).

Statement four, five and six turn to the ethical dimension through the keywords of “kindness to those who deserve it”, “vengeance” and “responsibility to the responsible”, in essence painting a harsher picture of society and human relations than most competing groups in the Aquarian Age by focusing on justice rather than love. These elements have frequently been described as a social Darwinist or even proto-fascist current in the Church (e.g. Lap, 2008; Lewis, 2009; Mathews, 2009). The final three are explicitly negative in their rejection of the dignity of man, sin and the Christian church. Man is “just another animal”, sins a catalogue for gratification and Christianity (and by extension all religion) is business. Here the antinomian aspect of Satan as adversary comes to the fore in support of the previous six statements, with non-conformity as a core ideal.⁸

This is of course only the barest of scaffolds by which to build a worldview, and the body of LaVey’s work sets out to explain the theses in more detail. A highly influential element is the “Book of Lucifer” in *The Satanic Bible*, lodged in between the dramatic hyperbole of the “Book of Satan” and the magical primers found in the “Book of Belial” and “Leviathan”. This book, subtitled “the Enlightenment” and associated with the element of air, contains twelve essays, based on the “rainbow sheets” produced in the mid-1960s and in circulation in LaVey’s “Magic Circle” and Church of Satan before mass publication in 1969 (Lewis, 2009, p. 48; cf. Aquino, 2009, chapter 5). The twelve texts are mainly in the genre of popular culture criticism, discussing various aspects of being a Satanist and the ailments of modern Christian culture in secular terms.

For example, in “Some Evidence of a New Satanic Age” and “Indulgence... NOT compulsion”, theories of pent-up emotions and the necessity of release (or in the case of sexual fetishes, the acceptance of them as natural), appeals to popular psychology (LaVey, 1969, pp. 53, 81). In “*Wanted!*: God—Dead or Alive”, the picture of the uncaring causal universe and existential man invokes mechanistic

⁸ I return to the formal aspects of and use of Satan in the statements below.

physics (ibid., p. 41), as do the “balancing factor” in nature and the universe that is mentioned as a powerful, impersonal force—behind the anthropomorphism lies a fundamental constant or natural law (ibid., p. 40). What is notable is the fact that the tone, even when discussing esoteric subjects such as satanic names or the history of the Black Mass, is always philosophical and frequently invokes the spectre of biology, sociology and/or psychology. Yet the appeals are unsubstantiated and frequently seem like rhetorical flourishing, and there are no direct references or a bibliography. These can be found in later literature, especially *The Satanic Witch* and the hagiographic volume *The Church of Satan* by Blanche Barton (Barton, 1990, pp. 163–167; LaVey, 2002 [1971], pp. 267–274). On the basis of the literature mentioned, various appeals to philosophy and science, including outright ‘scientification’, can be reconstructed and compared.

Ayn Rand’s Objectivist philosophy is a good place to start. Neither bibliography includes any works by Rand, and although the connection is explicitly stated as mentioned above, it remains an echo, especially through the use of the phrase “rational self-interest” (e.g. in “The Goodguy Badge”, LaVey, 1992, p. 22) and the pragmatic this-worldly orientation of LaVey’s criticism.⁹ The basics of Objectivism as laid out by Rand, namely “objective reality”, “reason”, “self-interest” and “capitalism” (cf. Rand, 1962), become one facet of an anti-idealist and individualist worldview constructed by LaVey in opposition to the undirected mysticism, bad politics and idealist philosophy of the times. Hence LaVey extracts a core of rationalist individualism and the general impetus of ‘getting things done’ which is celebrated in Rand’s works (both fictional and non-fictional); the Satanist, as Howard Roark in *The Fountainhead* (1943) or John Galt in *Atlas Shrugged* (1957), is independent, egoistic, materialistic (in both senses: opposed to idealism as well as greedy), iconoclastic, and decidedly anti-Christian—essentially a productive outsider (eg. Barton, 1990, pp. 29, 68, 111, 122–123). These are definitely “Randian” traits, but not Objectivism as such (cf. Aquino, 2009, Chapter 5 and appendix 11; Lewis, 2003, pp. 113–114; Mathews, 2009, pp. 35–36, 66). What they do is provide a

⁹ This might be because Rand is among “such standards as Ira Levin’s *Rosemary’s Baby* or John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*” that should go unmentioned because of their basic nature (Barton, 1990, pp. 166–167). Michael Aquino writes that her works were cited on circulated reading lists of the early Church (Aquino, 2009, p. 55).

rationalist tone of ‘clearing out the clutter’ to the satanic tradition, a tone that is supported by other philosophical forebears.

One such source for pragmatic ‘doing’, materialism and anti-Christianity is Frederick Nietzsche and his philosophy of Will. Nietzsche is mentioned in the reading list of *The Church of Satan* (Barton, 1990, p. 164) as well as the (now discarded) dedication list in the first *Satanic Bible* (Flowers, 1997, pp. 172–173). Again, although the notions of the *Übermensch* and the herd, master and slave morality, the magical use of Will or subjective individualism and constructive nihilism (to which we return below) are found in LaVey’s work, they remain an undercurrent tied to a general culture critique, a antinomian practice made meaningful by the positive values embraced.¹⁰ More importantly, the ghost of Nietzsche leads us to the first explicitly *scientific* discipline actively used by LaVey, Darwinist biology. Biology has both a metaphorical and an ideological dimension in LaVey’s appropriation—metaphorically as a general underscoring of animality, ideologically as a social, political and ethical interpretation, as in Herbert Spencer’s socio-biology and Thomas Malthus’ social engineering.

The metaphorical aspect can be seen in LaVey’s description of man as a carnal being, recalling the second and seventh statements: “He no longer can view himself in two parts, the carnal and the spiritual, but sees them merge as one, and then to his abysmal horror, discovers that they are only the carnal—AND ALWAYS WERE!” (LaVey, 1969, p. 45) Lavey’s Satanism thus contains a clear biologism anchored in a materialistic understanding of the human animal, strongly opposed to metaphysical notions; children and animals represent the *natural* expression of being (LaVey, 1969, pp. 87–90; cf. Dyrendal, 2009; Lap, 2008, pp. 9–11), and reason and emotion are tied to the very carnality of humanity’s existence (e.g. LaVey, 1969, pp. 64–65). This is bolstered by various references. Charles Darwin is mentioned in *The Satanic Witch*, but curiously only with *The Expressions of the Emotions in Man and in Animals* from 1873 (LaVey, 2002 [1971], p. 267), while other more popular books mentioned are Desmond Morris’ *The Naked Ape* (1967), Hans Brick’s *The Nature of the Beast* (1960) and quite a lot of works on sex, smell, gender and the body—including two books on

¹⁰ See Petersen, 2009a. This is misunderstood by Chris Mathews (2009, pp. 31–33, 72–74, 160–162).

endocrinology (Grollman and Hoskins, both from 1941).¹¹ This ‘metaphorical biology’ becomes especially important when seen together with Lavey’s notions of personality and sexuality, summed up in the Personality Synthesizer, which will be covered shortly.

Regarding the social, political and ethical uses of biology, several critical treatments have traced a misanthropic LaVey and tied it to a social Darwinist current in *The Satanic Bible* and later works (most notably Mathews, 2009). While it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when specific passages have been written (as all books are anthologies of previous material, often published in the Church journal *The Cloven Hoof*), there is definitely a moral and political biologism present from the start, which seems to grow stronger in the late 1970s and 1980s as LaVey’s general resentment grows and the Satanic Panic makes life difficult. Both Herbert Spencer and Thomas Malthus are mentioned in the bibliography of *The Church of Satan* (Barton, 1990, pp. 163–164; cf. pp. 59, 82), alongside G. B. Shaw and J. London, for example; social Darwinist stratification and eugenics are also discussed, most notably in the essay “Pentagonal Revisionism: A Five-Point Program” (reproduced in Barton, 1990, pp. 82–89; Barton 1992, pp. 259–260; LaVey, 1992, pp. 93–97), advocating the reinstatement of the Law of the Jungle and ghettoization to support the satanic elite.

In the early works, this Spencer-Malthusian framework is most visible in the “Book of Satan” (LaVey, 1969, pp. 27–35), the “infernal diatribe” associated with the element of fire that introduces *The Satanic Bible*. As has been noted by previous studies, this book is heavily dependent upon Ragnar Redbeard’s *Might is Right*, a late-19th century misogynistic, anti-Semitic and social Darwinist manifesto (Aquino, 2009, Chapter 5; Lap, 2008, p. 10; Lewis, 2003, pp. 112–113; Mathews, 2009, pp. 56–57, 64–66); what is equally important, though, is that LaVey removes misogyny and anti-Semitism and strengthens the anti-Christian tone (Gallagher, 2009; cf. Mathews, 2009, p. 65). While not neglecting the darker possibilities of this use of biology, the application of force and moral right to the strong should be seen in relation not to politics, but to the composition of the Bible as well as the activities of the ritual chamber, again clearing out the clutter to realign the

¹¹ As with Ayn Rand, classics such as *On the Origin of Species* (1859) or *The Descent of Man* (1871) must be books the Satanist naturally gravitates towards.

self. Although ostensibly a scientific ethics, its use is dependent upon *esoteric* legitimation (Petersen, [forthcoming]).¹²

To complete the description of LaVey's secular philosophy, two additional scientific disciplines of importance should be mentioned. One is *sociology*, especially of crowd behaviour and public performance. For example, we find references to three books by Erving Goffman and two by Orrin Klapp in *The Satanic Witch* (LaVey, 2002 [1971]); the latter is also in the lost dedication list of *The Satanic Bible* (Flowers, 1997, p. 173). Elias Canetti's *Crowds and Power* (orig. 1960) and aforementioned H. Spencer figure in the bibliography of *The Church of Satan* (Barton, 1990). The other is *psychology*; more biologically based works by Sigmund Freud, Sandor Ferenczy and Wilhelm Reich, as well as somatological personality typologies by Ernst Kretschmer and William H. Sheldon, can be found in *The Satanic Witch* (LaVey, 2002 [1971]) alongside Mortimer Ostow & Ben-Ami Scharfstein's *The Need to Believe* (1954) and Abraham H. Maslow's *Motivation and Personality* (1954), for example. *The Church of Satan* refers to Reich, Freud and Carl G. Jung, as well as Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* (1965) (Barton, 1990), while *The Satanic Rituals* have a brief mention of Thomas Szasz' anti-psychiatric *The Manufacture of Madness* (1970) (LaVey, 1972, p. 16).¹³ Together with biology, these two disciplines figure heavily in the reassessment of Satanism as a scientific philosophy, especially through the ambiguous reframing of magic as a symbolic technology. LaVey's Personality Synthesizer is a good example.

As I described in the introduction, the basic model is a clock coupled with 12 personality types associated with specific body types. These are simplified versions of psychologists Ernst Kretschmer's work on constitutional types (leptosomic, athletic and pyknic) and William H. Sheldon's work on somatotypes (ecto-, meso- and endomorph) (LaVey, 2002 [1971], p. 25; cf. Barton, 1992, pp. 167–168; Lap, 2008,

¹² Contrary to Chris Mathews' argument, modern Satanists *do* cover the whole political spectrum (Lewis, 2001) and they *can* discern between politics and religion (e.g. Shankbone, 2007; Wardinski, 2009). In addition and in strong opposition to Mathews' thesis, *Might is Right* is neither the single most important influence on LaVey nor modern Satanism. An analysis of rationalist Satanism based on the consequences of this book alone neglects a host of facts that indicates a much more selective appropriation of social Darwinism and biology both within the Church of Satan (eg. Mathews, 2009, pp. 76, 78) and in the satanic milieu (see Crabtree, 2002a; Crabtree, 2002c; O. Wolf, 1999). "Satanism is fascism" remains Mathews' confirmation bias, not a conclusion.

¹³ On references to psychology, see also (Lap, 2008, pp. 9, 11).

p. 11). This in turn is related to a host of lifestyle choices, fetishes and motivations, and is the underlying framework for success as a satanic witch (LaVey, 2002 [1971], pp. 21–73). Behind this practical tool for manipulation and self-reflection are two additional psychological theories developed by LaVey, namely the theory of majority and demonic minority self, and his notions of Erotic Crystallization Inertia (ECI).

The general structure of the self resembles Carl G. Jung’s theory of shadow self and Anima and Animus, although this connection is unacknowledged; behind the “outer” layer lurks the demonic minority self, an inversion of both the “apparent” and “true” personalities that are the same (so one “can tell a book by its cover”) (ibid., pp. 21–25). Inside the “fat man” is a fat man surrounded by a skinny woman, and the prospective witch should learn to appeal to this meso-level self rather than the core. In addition, she should evaluate herself to be better able to shapeshift into other roles, hence the synthesizer (the opposite on the clock denotes the demonic minority self). The theory of Erotic (or emotional) Crystallization Inertia is alluded to in *The Satanic Witch* (ibid., pp. 143, 180) and further discussed in various essays from the 1970s onwards (e.g. Barton, 1992, pp. 170–171, 229; LaVey, 1992, pp. 72–75; cf. Flowers, 1997, pp. 206–207). It is basically a Freudian or Reichian model of establishing sexual, emotional and aesthetic choices in childhood; pleasure and fulfilment is thus derived from deep-seated psychological structures, and can be exploited by the crafty Satanist, both in the manipulation of others and in the construction of “total environments” and “artificial human companions” for maximum stimulation (LaVey, 1992, pp. 94, 130–139, 1998, pp. 152–154).

If this sounds like self-help psychology, it is because LaVey is very close to Humanistic Psychology (cf. Maslow in the reading list) and the general orientation towards self-actualization (Lap, 2008); he even claims the birthright of the Human Potential Movement (Barton, 1990, pp. 16, 48). In two recent studies by Asbjørn Dyrendal and Amina O. Lap, LaVey’s Satanism is presented as a self-spirituality on the secularized and this-worldly edge of the scale between expressivism and utilitarianism (Dyrendal, 2009, pp. 71–72; Lap, 2008, pp. 5, 14), closer to the “prosperity wing” of the Human Potential Movement than the idealism of romantic New Age, for example. Although Dyrendal stress the possibility of an expressive dimension and both keep open the esoteric reading, the specific diagnosis, goal and cure, or in Lap’s words, damaged self, satanic self and actualized self, generally follow

materialistic lines and are couched in the language of biology, sociology and psychology. The damage is due to repressive socialization (mainly of a Christian sort); the goal is a healthy ego who indulges in vital existence and personal as well as material success; and the way is through practical means such as liberating self-expression, ritual drama and therapeutic techniques. Both conclude that LaVey's Satanism is anchored in values and practices taking centre stage in contemporary Western countries (Dyrendal, 2009; Lap, 2008).

As we can see in this presentation of secular elements in LaVey's philosophy, they point in four general directions: Individualist philosophy, biology, sociology and psychology. They are also without much explanatory power, as LaVey mainly uses outmoded or "home-grown" science, if science is used explicitly at all; Kretschmer and Sheldon's body types, endocrinology from the 1940s, and Darwinian and Spencerian biology devoid of modern genetics¹⁴ are examples of the first, while the theory of ECI is an example of the second. In the same vein, both atheism and individualism remain undeveloped axioms (Mathews, 2009). This is because it is not the sciences in themselves nor philosophical reasoning that is important, but firstly the 'synonymization' of the faculty of reason and man's inherent carnality with scientific theories, models and vocabulary, and secondly the metaphorical extension of science into a secular worldview, a double scientific strategy (Hammer, 2001, p. 206). LaVey's scientism is taken as fact, even though much of his 'science' is or can be disproven (Davies, 2009; Lap, 2008; Lewis, 2009). What is important is stating a secular, natural, material and rational worldview, not presenting the newest scientific theories. This suggests that something apart from science is playing a part in legitimizing Satanism, namely the esoteric "trappings" or *motivating myth* of modern Satanism to be engaged with "eyes open and hearts clear" (Barton, 1990, p. 123).

As a prolegomena, an instance of the secular philosophy can be singled out as an indication of this motivating myth, namely the view of the self. In the discussion of A. Rand and F. Nietzsche, I suggested that it was the pragmatic and iconoclastic nature of these (very different) philosophies that appealed to LaVey—in both, the 'self-made man' was in evidence. In fact, LaVey is always promoting the *application* of science and philosophy, not useless theorizing. Biology becomes

¹⁴ The DNA model is proposed by Watson and Crick in 1953.

practical anthropology and politics, psychology becomes magical manipulation and liberating therapy and so on. In essence, it is the experience of practical application or *experiential authority* that undergirds LaVeyan scientism—science is true because it resonates with satanic reasoning—which points to esoterization. For example, the development of the Personality Synthesizer is described in this way:

I have conducted what sociologists might call an “unfounded research project.” Much of what I have synthesized in my sometimes overly-scattered pursuits will to many readers appear utterly mad, ridiculous and outrageous. Much is based on the scientific evaluation of others. Perhaps even more will be condemned as having “no known or accredited scientific basis.” Fine. All I know is it works. And if it works, I don’t knock it. (LaVey, 2002 [1971], p. 26)

Rationality here is not merely logic, but ‘esoteric empiricism’, so to speak, connected to the satanic individuals’ understanding of the mechanisms of biological and material nature. This view is supported by LaVey’s auto-hagiography, where he is always attracted to practical knowledge and applied science, especially the ‘carny’ ideal of ‘fooling the rubes’ and ‘getting it done’ (Barton, 1990, pp. 33–46; cf. Barton, 1992); in fact, we count at least a dozen books on carnival culture, circus stage magic and the burlesque in the bibliography of *The Satanic Witch* (LaVey, 2002 [1971]). To fully appreciate this, we have to examine the appropriation of esoteric elements.

Esoteric Elements and the Undercurrent of Secularization

In the early period, Satanism is associated with the ‘occult explosion’ of the late 1960s, especially the witchcraft revival (Alfred, 1976; Freedland, 1972; Klein, 1970; Moody, 1974a, 1974b; Roberts, 1971; Marcello Truzzi, 1971; M. Truzzi, 1972; Marcello Truzzi, 1974a, 1974b). Perusing the early triad of foundational texts, *The Satanic Bible* (1969), *The Compleat Witch* (1970)¹⁵ and *The Satanic Rituals* (1972), as well as the halo of media material arising from popular attention from 1966 onwards, it is obvious that Anton LaVey is involved in heavy borrowing from a variety of esoteric sources. He is also a consummate showman, staging a variety of satanic ceremonies and public appearances while practicing magic, writing books and leading occult seminars. As

¹⁵ Later renamed *The Satanic Witch*.

an indication of his embeddedness in the cultic milieu, a quick glance at the bibliographies used above reveals some usual suspects, such as Maurice Bessy's *Pictorial History of Magic and the Supernatural* (1964),¹⁶ E. A. Wallis Budge's *Amulets and Talismans* (1961), Richard Cavendish' *The Black Arts* (1968), H. Kramer & J. Sprenger's *Malleus Maleficarum* (in the 1948 Montague Summers translation), and L. Pauwels and J. Bergier's *The Morning of the Magicians* (1964) (LaVey, 2002 [1971]). We also find scholarly titles such as Eliot Rose's *A Razor for a Goat* (1962) and Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen* (1970); in fact, LaVey seems more updated on the literature of the cultic milieu and historical or anthropological research than the natural sciences.

His position changes somewhat after 1970, where "Phase One Satanism" or public blasphemy is discarded for a cabal-like cell structure of "productive misfits" (Barton, 1990, pp. 29, 105, 119), and especially after the schism in 1975, where many esoterically inclined depart the Church to form other groups, such as Michael Aquino's Temple of Set (Petersen, 2009b). This leaves the Church of Satan as more of an atheist ideology of culture criticism and less of a traditional 'satanic' organization; the esoteric activities are privatized and the rhetoric secularized. Nevertheless, both esoteric material and blasphemy lives on in the literature.

Four esoteric elements stand out in LaVey's esoteric *bricolage*: The figure of Satan, a reconstructed genealogy of "anti-morality" or counter-culture, occult terminology and models, and finally the use of magic (cf. Petersen, 2009a; Petersen, 2009b). Satan is frequently used as a symbol or metaphor for the carnal and individual self: "We don't worship Satan, we worship ourselves using the metaphorical representation of the qualities of Satan. Satan *is* the name used in the Judeo-Christian tradition for that force of individuality and pride within us" (Barton, 1990, p. 71). Satan becomes a psychological and motivational shorthand for "the accuser or the one who advocates free thought and rational alternatives" (ibid.). This is reflected in the *Nine Satanic Statements* discussed earlier. Formally, the statements are consciously mirroring the antitheses from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5,17ff): They are brief, concise propositions of what "Satan represents (...) instead of" something (except in the final statement,

¹⁶ The Baphomet pentagram is apparently taken from this book (P. H. Gilmore, 2005 [2000]).

where “Satan has been”). In this, we see an indication of the *symbolic* nature of Satan as used by LaVey; he *represents* rather than *is*, indicating an atheist take on the Devil that naturalizes and sometimes even dissolves any external being.

On the other hand, Satan is retained in an ambiguous position, as LaVey never closes the door completely on “anomalous phenomena that might actually exist” (Barton, 1992, p. 164). From the anthropomorphic language of the “Book of Satan” (“He has shown himself to be a model of deportment, but now he feels it is time to shout back”, LaVey, 1969, p. 29 (cf. Barton, 1990, p. 93)) to the almost deistic “dark force of nature” in several essays (“This powerful force which permeates and balances the universe is far too impersonal to care about the happiness or misery of flesh-and-blood creatures on this ball of dirt upon which we live”, (ibid., p. 40, cf. pp. 62, 110)), Satan alludes to the mysterious nature of reality acknowledged from pre-Christian times (ibid., p. 55–63). On the whole, however, we can say that Satan is secularized and used as a representation of internal states, which is then used as an esoteric legitimation, as the self is connected to both a satanic (and even Christian) tradition and Satan as a trope of experiential truth:

I have felt his presence but only as an exteriorized extension of my own potential, as an alter ego or evolved concept that I have been able to exteriorize. With a full awareness, I can communicate with this semblance, this creature, this demon, this personification that I see in the eyes of the symbol of Satan—the Goat of Mendes—as I commune with him before the altar. None of these is anything more than a mirror image of that potential I perceive in myself. (...) Satan is, therefore, an extension of one’s psyche or volitional essence, so that the extension can converse and give directives through the self in a way that mere thinking of the self as a single unit cannot. In this way it *does* help to depict in an externalized way the Devil *per se*. The purpose is to have something of an idolatrous, objective nature to commune with. (Fritscher, 2004 [1973], pp. 6–7. Emphases in original)

In the same vein, the forefathers of the “Satanic underground” (e.g. Barton, 1990, pp. 10–12, 59; cf. LaVey, 1969, pp. 99–105) are rewritten as rational iconoclasts or sensual freethinkers. In fact, Satan’s association with knowledge, often of a *material* sort (through inversion or absence of Christian virtues) and thus by extension with the natural sciences, makes a Satanist out of any engineer, artist, occultist or philosopher that understands the value of being opposed: F. Rabelais, The Yezidis and Mark Twain are only some of the “de facto” Satanists

that are *made* of the Devil's party (Barton, 1990, pp. 10–12, 70).¹⁷ A parallel strategy is visible in essays such as “Some Evidence of a Satanic Age” and “Some Evidence of a Satanic Age, Part II”, where important advances of secularization are ‘recruited’ into a satanic genealogy, in effect bolstering the authority of Satanism through appropriating social developments (LaVey, 1969, pp. 46–54, 1992, pp. 86–88). This becomes almost megalomaniacal in *The Church of Satan*, where the occult explosion is an effect of LaVey's magical “working” on Walpurgisnacht 1966, instating the Age of Satan and founding the Church, and the popularity of Metal music and self-help psychology are direct consequences of Anton LaVey's “influence of international directions and perspectives” (Barton, 1990, pp. 10, 48, 89).

Regarding occult terminology and models, one such appropriation is the use of the Baphomet or goats-head pentagram within two circles and adorned with Hebrew letters (see the cover of any book by LaVey for an illustration). Whether as a colour-coded necklace, banner or personalized emblem, the symbol is enmeshed in the history and dogma of the satanic underground (P. H. Gilmore, 2005 [2000]) while also psychologically potent; alongside the trapezoid, this geometrical shape can affect human emotion and action (Barton, 1992, pp. 159–167). Similar borrowings are found in the very structure of *The Satanic Bible*, namely the association of books and elements: fire, air, earth and water for Satan, Lucifer, Belial and Leviathan (LaVey, 1969). Although never used explicitly, they give the book a composition resembling a grimoire's while activating elemental and demonological lore, reinforced by demonic names and the “Book of Leviathan's” 19 Enochian Keys (conveniently translated into satanic idiom by LaVey himself) (LaVey, 1969, pp. 57–60, 153–272).

Another example of this reframing of esoteric content is the “Personality Synthesizer” which, in addition to self-help diagnostics such as personality tests and theories of body types, draws on astrological knowledge and imagery, with its 12 points in a circle, elemental values and correspondences, thus actually *feeding upon* or even *working as* authorising discourse through the traditional authority of astrology and the Craft circle of modern Witchcraft. However, this is specifi-

¹⁷ The entire book *The Satanic Rituals* can be seen as a comprehensive appropriation of all things satanic in the history of western esotericism, from the Templars to H. P. Lovecraft (LaVey, 1972), playing on their transgressive nature while secularizing their meaning. I will return to this work below.

cally addressed in the distancing rhetorics of the chapter “Means of Divination”, where LaVey advocates the study of astrology mainly for its motivating value in manipulating the “rubes” (LaVey, 2002 [1971], pp. 222–228); of the twelve reasons listed, not one accept the legitimacy of astrology on an ‘emic’ level. Astrology works, because everyone believes it does, it is modelled on human behaviour and it is embedded in our collective unconscious (ibid.).

In sum, all occult elements are heavily secularized and de-traditionalized; their authority is only nominally tied up to a general appeal to the “Left-Hand Path” (eg. Barton, 1990, p. 104; LaVey, 1969, pp. 52, 137, 151). When specifically discussed, they are liable to be disembedded from traditional authority structures and legitimated through aesthetic appeals, the Satanist’s personal quest and experience, and/or through rational means. But they are also the material through which the esotericizing of the scientific is mediated; actually, they are retained within a recognizable ritual context, that of magic. Magical practice thus becomes the very nodal point around which LaVey’s appeal to scientific authority revolves.

LaVey defines magic as “the change in situations or events in accordance with one’s will, which would, using normally acceptable methods, be unchangeable” (LaVey, 1969, p. 110), a clear allusion to Aleister Crowley’s famous dictum “The Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will” (cf. Flowers, 1997, p. 144). Just as Crowley, LaVey perceives magic as essentially scientific, although “[m]agic is never totally scientifically explainable” (LaVey, 1969, p. 110); on the other hand, he distances himself from Crowley and the esoteric traditions in rejecting much of the literature and practice as “sanctimonious fraud” (ibid., p. 21), exhibiting a general predilection for psychologization found in secularized esotericism (cf. Asprem, 2008, pp. 141–142, 163; Hanegraaff, 2003, pp. 368–371). This generally takes two forms: Psychology, sociology and biology “as” magic, or the inverse reading of magic “as” applied psychology etc. While the first framing is fundamentally esotericized secularism, the second form is built on esoteric elements legitimized scientifically.

LaVey operates with two categories of magic: Lesser, or manipulative, and Greater, or ritual magic (LaVey, 1969, p. 111). Lesser magic is of the first type, psychology etc. *as* magic, exemplified by the “Personality Synthesizer” and the insights gained by psychology, biology and sociology. Apart from the brief elucidation in *The Satanic Bible* (ibid., pp. 111–113), it is covered in depth in *The Satanic Witch* (LaVey,

2002 [1971]; cf. Barton, 1992, pp. 167–176) as discussed in the previous section. In the present context of the secularization of magic, an additional appeal is worthy of mention—namely William Mortensen’s *The Command to Look* and the heavy reliance upon his theory of visual composition (Mortensen, 1940 [1937]). Ostensibly a “formula for picture success”, Mortensen’s book describes three phases of creative reflection: The use of imperative patterns to command attention by triggering the fear response (chapter 3 and 4), the use of emotional appeal, here the evocation of sentiments of sex, sentiment and wonder to hold the subject’s interest (chapter 5), and finally the presentation of elements inviting participation to stimulate enjoyment (chapter 6).

The book itself and especially the first two phases are promoted by LaVey as elementary *magical* priming: Through odour, colour and patterns, the satanic witch should “utilize the command to LOOK”; through role-playing sex, sentiment and wonder, the witch should manipulate the unwary (cf. Barton, 1992, pp. 160–161; LaVey, 1969, pp. 111–113). LaVey himself is of course a master of this ‘magical’ work, formed by his extensive experience of human nature and the force of his personality. These universal elements of aesthetics are thus reframed as magical technology, reinforced by the myth of Anton LaVey (Barton, 1990, pp. 33–46; Lewis, 2003, pp. 105–111; Mathews, 2009, p. 47).¹⁸

This reliance on psychologization of esoteric material, intertwining rational and esoteric modes of legitimation, is strengthened in greater magic, discussed at length in the “Book of Belial” and the first part of the “Book of Leviathan” in *The Satanic Bible* (LaVey, 1969, pp. 107–140 and 141–152), the companion volume *The Satanic Rituals* (LaVey, 1972, especially pp. 11–27) and the chapter “How to Perform Satanic Rituals” in *The Church of Satan* (Barton, 1990, pp. 93–113). What is most important in the present context is that greater magic, in contrast to lesser magic, is fundamentally *made of* esoteric lore: The examples provided are all ceremonial in nature, with altar, candles, bells and prescribed roles, Enochian calls and ritual scripts, all of which are *legitimized as* psychological techniques.

The magic of the ritual chamber is presented as an “intellectual decompression” or carefully negotiated transgression: “The formalized

¹⁸ Though not an esoteric writer, William Mortensen was connected to the cultic milieu in California and had an interest in stage magic, psychic phenomena and esoteric subjects—sharing that interest with notables such as Manly Palmer Hall (Sahagun, 2008, p. 57).

beginning and end of the ceremony acts as a dogmatic, anti-intellectual device, the purpose of which is to disassociate the activities and frame of reference of the outside world from that of the ritual chamber, where the whole will must be employed” (LaVey, 1969, p. 120). Whether personal or collective, this “contrived ignorance” and use of ritual pageantry facilitate various ends: the psychodynamic release of or ‘acting out’ of hang-ups, in case of the “psychodrama” of the “Black Mass” (LaVey, 1972, pp. 31–60) or the “Shibboleth Ritual” (Moody, 1974a, pp. 378–379); the confirmation of biological facts of existence, as in “Das Tierdrama” (LaVey, 1972, pp. 76–105); or the manifestation of Will, as in the three “Conjurations” of Lust, Destruction and Compassion (LaVey, 1969, pp. 114–118, 132–134, 147–152) or “Die Elektrischen Vorspiele” (LaVey, 1972, pp. 106–130).

The usual framework for explaining these technologies are in secular psychological terms: “fantasy world”, “objectively enter the subjective state”, “psychodrama” etc., taking us back to the congruence with the self-religion of Human Potential movements (Dyrendal, 2009; Lap, 2008). But other frameworks are consistently at play. The psychological strategy is supported by LaVey’s frequent appeal to “bio-electricity”, straddling the fence between “religion and psychiatry” through the appeal to “adrenal” energy and biology (eg. Barton, 1990, pp. 16, 24, 28; LaVey, 1969, pp. 87, 135; LaVey 1972, p. 107). Ironically, they are also frequently associated with esoteric traditions, doubling their authority; “Das Tierdrama”, for example, “was originally performed by the *Order of the Illuminati* (...) by Dieter Hertel in Munich, 31 July 1781” (LaVey, 1972, p. 78), and “Die Elektrischen Vorspiele” is lifted from various Black Orders: “*Vril, Thule, Freunden von Lucifer, Germania, and Ahnenerbe*” (ibid., p. 106). According to context, then, magic can be a manipulation of energies, “honest emotionalizing” or just plain encounter therapy or dramatic performance. Ritual catharsis and magical creation are seen through esoteric terms as Reichian bio-power and through secular frames as constructive self-deception. The statement “magic works” can indeed be read on many levels.

Satanism remains something apart from mere social Darwinism and applied psychology because of this preservation of esoteric material and the very concept of magic; the motivating biological myth of “man the beast” is tempered with another, magical myth, where the materialistic and scientific claims are made *truly satanic*, and thus true, through an appeal to esoteric principles and a satanic tradition.

IV. *The Fate of the Bedrock: Science and Scientism in the Satanic Milieu*

Herein you find will find truth—and fantasy. Each is necessary for the other to exist; but each must be recognized for what it is. (LaVey, 1969, pp. 21–22)

Now, this ambiguity can be interpreted as duplicity on LaVey's part to maximize recruitment and please as many subcultures as possible (a position taken by Mathews, 2009, for example). In this light, the strategy is complementary to the parallel construction of tradition of 'true' Satanists, freethinkers and "de facto"-Satanists found in history as a misunderstood cabal dubbed Satanists by lesser men. In this sense, LaVey's double take is a strategy to swell the ranks both in past and present.¹⁹ But other interpretations are possible. First a genre-dependent one of "relational preaching"; LaVey is speaking to different people at different times and thus clothe the complexities in whatever serves the argument. This interpretation is a less critical version of the former, in that the message must be translated to be grasped. Another possibility is that LaVey is a confused thinker saying whatever comes into mind (this seems to be implied in Mathews' argument).

I would rather interpret LaVey's use of science in light of the ideology itself and the nature of the cultic milieu: LaVey is attempting, as are other spokespersons in the milieu, to bridge the digital dichotomies of science and religion, either-or, in order to present what we might call a synthesis, but better a selection and recoding. When applied to carnal, bedrock knowledge, the apparent inconsistencies dissipate; this strategy is similar to mystical gnosis and the experience argument popular within the milieu, but is crucially connected to a materialist basis:

The essence of Satanism, and Satanic practices, is the integration of apparent opposites. We blend magic and rationality together, without compromising either, in the same way we integrate different aspects of one person into the same body. (Barton, 1990, p. 98)

This is the principle of the "third side" or "satanic alternative" (LaVey, 1998, pp. 29–33), going beyond apparent "irreconcilables" to negotiate both science and esoteric material:

¹⁹ Pointing out a laundry list of notable individuals has the same effect as similar lists of leaders of secret societies or reincarnation 'careers' that legitimizes the group or ideology by both quantity and quality.

You cannot blend mysticism and rationality, no matter how a group may fancy-dance around it. (...) You *can* blend rationality with mystery, magic, ritual and ceremonies—these are completely different things from the “mystical experience.” But, as explained in *The Satanic Bible*, it is a highly conscious act and the separation of the two elements are deliberate and clear. (...) By using all the most effective, evocative techniques at your disposal, by concentrating your entire being to reach your goal, you may very well contact something beyond yourself. But this comes from personal experience, not “faith” or “belief,” and you don’t try to sell this experience to anyone else. (Barton, 1990, pp. 125–126)

In this way, LaVey can appeal to personal experience, magical techniques and scientific reason in one sentence, capping it off with the enigmatic invocation of “truth—and fantasy” to be sorted out by the reader. In the following I will present three brief readings to illustrate how different individuals and groups have interpreted the truths and discarded the fantasies of LaVey, further selecting and recoding cultural material.

Routinizing the Doctor: Peter Gilmore and the Myth of Dr. LaVey

The Church of Satan has always looked for knowledge to science, both Western and Eastern. We call this “Undefined Wisdom,” and this is the ever-deepening understanding of the nature of the beast-called-Man and the Universe in which he exists. We don’t accept faith or mysticism. We demand bedrock knowledge—Understanding—which can come from outward research and observation as well as carnal intuition (P. Gilmore, 1999).

The first example is the Church of Satan, which lost its founder in 1997. Today, in the era of Peter H. Gilmore as Magus and High Priest, the atheistic tone from Anton LaVey has been strengthened. The High Priest usually presents Satanism as “atheism first, Satanism second”; in this sense, Satanism is built on a foundation of skeptical Epicureanism incorporating atheism and materialism and its ‘denial of God’ into a self-religious affirmation of man’s own godhood (Anonymous, 2010 Shankbone, 2007). The basic ideological resource is Peter Gilmore’s *The Satanic Scriptures*, a collection of essays from a twenty-year span published in 2007 (Gilmore, 2007) which, alongside *The Satanic Bible*, *The Satanic Rituals* and *The Satanic Witch* by LaVey, comes as close to the position of satanic dogma as possible. In addition, Gilmore has intensified the public relations dimension of the Church, often appearing on television and podcast radio, as well as authenticating the documentary

“Inside the Church of Satan” and presiding over the anniversary High Mass on July 6th 2006 in Los Angeles, for example.²⁰

The focus of the contemporary Church of Satan thus continues to be indulgence and gratification combined with rational self-interest and responsibility to the responsible. The door remains open to magic and mysticism, but mainly as a theatrical canopy to a basically secular metaphysics built upon the authority of psychology and the natural sciences. A good example of Gilmore’s rhetorical framing is the document “A Map for the Misdirected”, written in 1999 but continually updated and presented on the organization’s website (P. Gilmore, 1999). In this article, Gilmore tackles nine “significant falsehoods” and offers some magisterial advice to the fledgling Satanist as well as the “pseudo-Satanists”. In terms of the appeal to science and LaVey’s dual legitimization strategy, there are some interesting formulations in the document.

First of all is the ever-present appeal to the authority of “Dr.” LaVey, a widespread practice in the Church that is concurrent with the constant reproduction of the orthodox hagiography seen in Blanche Barton’s two books mentioned earlier (Barton, 1990, 1992; cf. Lewis, 2009; Mathews, 2009). The title itself has unclear origins; Stephen Flowers claims that it is the proper address for the highest degree in the Church, a Magus (a title now claimed by Gilmore without using the “doctor”, apparently) (Flowers, 1997, p. 183), while Barton herself writes that his “closest associates call him “Dr. LaVey”, “Doc”, or “Herr Doktor” as, he says, “a term of affection and respect—much as a circus calliapist or whorehouse pianist was once called ‘Professor.’” (Barton, 1990, p. 45) Be that as it may; the title itself has a powerful rhetorical effect, legitimizing the ideology through a very simple terminological loan. Together with the legitimizing narrative of the LaVey myth of carnival knowledge and application of science, the mythological “Doktor” subsumes rational appeals into the very life-story of the founder, in effect routinizing charisma (Davies, 2009; Lewis, 2009).

Secondly, Gilmore continues LaVey’s open-ended denial of super-naturalism, while retaining the mystery: “Anton LaVey NEVER advocated anything “spiritual,” so disabuse yourselves of this myth. He did advocate

²⁰ See Farren, 2006. A good example of media appearance is the interview on the Hour at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W4SraX4inJw>.

exploration of the supernormal—a very different enterprise” (P. Gilmore, 1999). This ambiguity is extended in the following crucial passage:

The Church of Satan has always looked for knowledge to science, both Western and Eastern. We call this “Undefined Wisdom,” and this is the ever-deepening understanding of the nature of the beast-called-Man and the Universe in which he exists. We don’t accept faith or mysticism. We demand bedrock knowledge—Understanding—which can come from outward research and observation as well as carnal intuition. (...) From its very beginning, the Church of Satan has been exploring this “undercurrent” wherever it can be traced in all human cultures from all nations and from all periods of history. That rich legacy, created by our kindred, belongs to us to use as we will, regardless of each individual’s particular ethnic, racial, or cultural origins. (ibid.)

As with LaVey above, a third position between positivist scientism and outright esotericism is advocated. Gilmore’s rationalist Satanism appeals to science as it transcends its boundaries; it is rather an esotericized secularism, harmonizing “carnal intuition” and “research and observation” into “bedrock knowledge” that is both an “undercurrent” reminiscent of *philosophia perennis* (it is even “created by our kindred”) and understanding “of the beast-called-Man and the Universe”, elsewhere defined in quite secular terms. The duplicity found in LaVey’s work is consequently reproduced and even reified in Gilmore’s negotiation, borrowing legitimacy from both religion and science as loose folk categories. He even uses the words “personal self-realization” and “proper Satanic nature at birth” alongside the “rich legacy”, paradoxically mirroring the very synchronization and distancing techniques used in the cultic milieu itself (Hammer, 2001).

These observations are confirmed when extending the analysis from rationalist Satanism to the satanic milieu as a whole, as some groups vigorously distance themselves from LaVey’s and Gilmore’s rejection of Manichaeism, Gnostic, mystical or even Christian Satanism and return to these identifiably ‘religious’ understandings, while others criticise LaVey and the modern Church of Satan’s naive and outdated understanding of what science actually is, thus betraying their own criticism of ‘bogus’ religion. The ambiguity of modern Satanism is thus amply illustrated by the widely divergent rhetorics and orientations of the splinter groups of the Church of Satan and the various new formulations in the satanic milieu. Some return to more traditional esoteric discourses, while others radicalize the demythologization process espoused by LaVey.

Ignoring the Doctor: Tani Jantsang, Phil Marsh and the Satanic Reds

$S = \int_{T=0}^{T=T} (C/T)dT(\dots)$ In nature we SEE one form of this S. The Dark Force “transcends nature” but IN Nature it IS Entropy. (...) So what is this Dark Force in Nature? We know. Now you know. Our ancient words for this? “SAT” is the DARK Itness Itself. Stretching forth after the Big Bang: “TAN” is—2nd and 3rd Laws of Entropy a/k/a Dark Force IN—repeat, IN all Nature, permeating it, motivating it, relentlessly—onto change. (Joe & Marsh, n.d.)

Tani Jantsang and Phil Marsh’s abundant writings both online and in self-published material serves as a good example of a markedly esoteric interpretation of Satanism and science. As with many modern diffuse communities within the cultic milieu of the west, their online faction called the Satanic Reds is driven by a few active individuals serving as spokespersons for a loose affiliation of like-minded individuals—a virtual audience cult (Bainbridge & Stark, 1985). Their website is primarily information-driven and presents scores of texts discussing ideology, practice, conflicts and history under a general umbrella of leftist ambitions and non-dualistic religious Satanism.²¹ Within these texts, we can find an interesting syncretization of religious material and modern scientific theories.

Although the group Satanic Reds was formed around 1997 and took off after the definitive break with the Church of Satan around 2000 (Jantsang & Marsh, n.d.; Mueller, n.d.), the material itself apparently has older roots; Jantsang herself claims association with the Kishites and the Starry Wisdom Sect, small local American assemblies from the 1960s and 1970s combining an assortment of traditions in eclectic *bricolage* (Jantsang & Marsh, n.d.; Mueller, n.d.), of which the Cthulhu Mythos of H. P. Lovecraft and later authors is central. Both this syncretic ambition and the postulated, vague genealogies are related to other Left-Hand Path groups such as the Esoteric Order of Dagon and Societas Selectus Satanas, as well as a complicated relationship with the Church of Satan, making it very difficult to pinpoint actual historical connections.

²¹ <http://www.satanicreds.org/satanicreds/>. I have previously discussed the group in Petersen, 2005, pp. 437–439, on which this analysis is based.

The Dark Doctrines themselves are used by a variety of groups and individuals, as they lend themselves to both poetic readings along rationalist lines and more esoteric interpretations supporting the secularized esotericism found in esoteric Satanism. The texts are frequently very obscure and written in an engaged, but also somewhat incomprehensible style. In addition, the material used spans from Advaita Vedanta and Pythagoreanism over dialectical materialism and Tantra to H. P. Lovecraft and modern physics, demanding a lot from the hapless reader. I have selected a few examples of the use of biology, physics and emanation doctrines that shows that the Satanic Reds strengthens the esoteric aspects through extensive syncretism; the Dark Doctrines are still secularized, but more in tune with other esoteric strands in the cultic milieu.

The basic core of the Dark Doctrines is monistic emanation of “the Flame” from the “Boundless Darkness”, connected to the name Satan through an analysis of the Vedanta terms Asat, Sat and Tan, or “being” and “becoming” as well as “one” and “many” (e.g. Jantsang, 2009; Jantsang, n.d.). This esoteric model is then associated with scientific knowledge through terminological parallels that facilitate a transfer of authority (Hammer, 2001, pp. 236–239):

The Cosmos shows design, mathematically precise design. Ergo, it was theorized that there must be an agent or ruler, or force, which creates and maintains all things, as if forming things into a mathematical mold, preserving it for awhile (*coagule*), and then dissolving it (*solve*). This is Brahma. (Jantsang, 2009, p. 250)

Two disciplines seem to have appeal, probably because of their ontological character: biology and physics. In turn, these scientific frameworks are related back to the religious doctrine through the carnal knowledge or mystical gnosis of the feeling Sat-tanist:

If you cannot understand this but at least have a feel for it and always did, then I’d simply say that you are creatively inclined or have “Gnosis” or Knowledge (...), or Dharma, the Tantrik word. Precise mathematical formulations of this process are not necessary for grasping Satanism! But then there are those that can not understand it or feel it in any way and if you are this type, then most of what I am saying here will mean nothing to you despite the fact that your OWN CARNAL BODY IS “LIGHT FORCES PERMEATED BY THE DARK FORCE” and despite the fact that the growth, change and Becoming your carnal body has been doing since you were a zygote was motivated by THE DARK FORCE! One only needs to FEEL! That is what it means to “KNOW the Mystery of Your Being.” (Marsh, n.d.)

Popular biological transfers are evolutionary metaphors, such as the “animating Will” and the chain of being (Jantsang, 2009, p. 252), and the appeal to carnality evident in the quote above. Regarding physics, the most common connections are drawn through the concepts of entropy (thermodynamics, quantum organic chemistry), energy (mass-energy equivalency, light forces and dark force) and symmetry (group theory, Big Bang).

In “SATAN—DARK FORCE IN NATURE, and ENTROPY—and an END to this argument”, Dr. Joe and Phil Marsh map equations from chemistry and thermodynamics on to the emanation doctrine in order to illustrate the parallels between the two (see an example at the beginning of this section). This incredibly dense text is significantly dubbed “an END to this argument”, ostensibly unifying science and metaphysics in an unassailable way that resonates with carnal knowledge:

We say the Dark Force TRANSCENDS nature, existed BEFORE the Cosmos (the Cosmos is the only “nature” we happen to know). But, IN Nature, corresponding to a very ancient doctrine, this is ENTROPY. This Dark Force in Nature or Entropy is universally obvious—it is everywhere, LIKE gravity or space or time which we contend with all the time. In SCOPE, entropy is equal to these things. Yet it has to be independently postulated. (Joe & Marsh, n.d.)

When manifested, the Dark Force is the directional motivation behind change and entropy—basically the driving force of evolution. This massive parallelism is supported by other texts, such as Philip Marsh’s “Light Forces (plural) and the Dark Force (singular), but not Dark Forces (plural)”. Again it is the “monistic” elements of modern physics which are selected and aligned in a huge pile-up of examples to drive home the esoteric point:

If the “dualists” could understand anything I have said, they’d be able to see (or at least infer logically) how the light force, and the other forces it became, does not “permeate” the cosmos (as does the Dark Force). The “Light Forces” ARE the cosmos: the light force which emerged in the “Big Bang”—through one symmetry-breaking after another—BECAME your body, the sun, and the forces which act to pull together or push apart particles and massive clumps of matter—all you see and can detect. It is these light forces which ARE the clump of matter which is your desk, the trees, the planet, the sun, yourself. People are correct to regard light as “energy,” but what they seem to have trouble with is that matter and energy are equivalent. So your table is also “light,”

composed of “Light Forces,” but supremely condensed according to the mass-energy equivalency principle ($E = mc^2$). The Light Forces do not “motivate” anything here: they ARE the very substance of the cosmos, but by “substance” you must include many of the non-tangibles of physical theory: space, time, gravity, etc. (Marsh, n.d.)

As should be evident, there are absolutely no reservations attached to the extensive use of mystical material. We are also far from LaVey’s rather vague use of science; actually, psychology seems to play a limited role in the Dark Doctrines, replaced by quantum physics and associational interpretive schemes more akin to philosophical reflection than practical application.

*Defrocking the Doctor: Ole Wolf, Amina Lap, and the Satanic Forum*²²

With regards to “types of Satanism”, I endorse LaVey’s stance: There are no “species” of Satanists anywhere. There are Satanists and there are nuts. Satanists reject the existence of divinity and similar superstition. (...) Pseudoscience and superstitions using scientific terms are not part of Satanism and do not affect Satanism any more than discussions about how many angels can be on a pin head. (Wolf, July 7 2006 from Various., 2006. Translated by the present author)

The Danish group Satanic Forum (Satanisk Forum), formed in 2001 around Amina Lap, Max Schmeling and Ole Wolf, among others, is a good example of rationalist Satanism in the vein of the later Church of Satan, but without the organizational baggage and with a clearer orientation towards “real” science in their scientific rhetoric; hence it can function as an example of radically esoterized secularism. It is conceived as an umbrella organization uniting all Satanists interested in clearing out misconceptions and prejudice, although the actual width of the umbrella has shortened considerably in the later years (Petersen, 2008). The ideological development closely matches the Church of Satan’s—the spokespersons have moved from a more ambiguous early position to a more clearly stated atheistic, sceptical and scientific position today. Similar parallels can be seen in their organizational development; early ambitious experiments with local chapters and a host of activities has given way to a more centralized

²² This section incorporates material from a forthcoming article on Satanism in Denmark to be published by Brill as well as information from Petersen, 2008.

structure around the website and discussion forum complemented with another, private blog. Today, most of the activities are managed by the administrators Wolf and Lap.²³

With regards to ideology and practice, four elements seem to dominate the intellectual territory of the group: LaVey's writings, here chiefly the philosophical and secularizing texts; Tani Jantsang et.al.'s *Dark Doctrines*, again particularly the scientific material on physics and biology; philosophical material covering Nietzsche, Rand and Schopenhauer (to name a few); and modern science, from sceptical writings and evolutionary biology to religious studies and sociology. In the case of LaVey and Jantsang, the material is viewed with no small ambivalence; on the one hand, they are both seen as ideologues refining Satanism from mere hedonism and anti-Christianity to coherent self-religious positions. In the early stages of the group, frequent references to ninjutsu, the Black Flame and other semi-esoteric topics are made (eg. wolf, 2001a, 2002):

There is much else to life than cold logic. There is an entire world in the subconsciousness the size of the consciously known world. I appreciate this world, which is confined to the darkness of our minds. If one wishes to understand human motivation in a world focused on thinking and sensing, it is in the forbidden realm of emotion and intuition that one must feel at home.²⁴

On the other hand, both LaVey and Jantsang are charged with mystagogical pretensions; LaVey because of his roots in the cultic milieu and his lack of decisive leadership, which results in the "fascist personality cult" of the modern day Church of Satan (O. Wolf, 2002), and Jantsang because of her idiosyncratic philosophy and volatile personality. An important factor is that while Ole Wolf is one of the founding members of the Satanic Red's online activities (A. O. Lap & wolf, 2003, p. 14), he increasingly underscores a Scandinavian interpretation of 'reds' in "Satanic Reds", which put Satanic Forum at odds with

²³ On the discussion forum <http://forum.sataniskforum.dk> as of March 16th 2010, 11775 posts have been logged; Wolf has made 1117 and Amina 2425 posts, that is 3542 posts combined or about 30 percent. The same lopsidedness can be seen in the *Satanic Bulletin* and SFo's media relations. As a curiosity: A measure of public self-reflection can be found in the thread "Where did we go?" ("Hvor blev vi af?") at <http://forum.sataniskforum.dk/viewtopic.php?f=14&t=2212> (in Danish, accessed Nov. 6th 2009).

²⁴ I quote from the English translation of (wolf, 2002) at <http://blog.blazingangles.net/whatsthis/2007/11/seven-eights-of-living.html>.

the mystical monistic conceptions and radical eclecticism of the Dark Doctrines as well as the social Darwinism of the Church of Satan (Søderlind & Dyrendal, 2009; wolf, 2003).

Aside from this *political* secularism, Jantsang and LaVey are criticized for their lack of knowledge of science proper and the remnants of faulty thinking found in their works. Thus both philosophy and the sciences are viewed with reverence. Matters such as education (including degrees) and insight into new and pertinent theories or discussions weighs more than personal experience, esoteric initiations and degrees or ritual competence. In the organizational newsletter “The Satanic Bulletin”, for example, articles on evolutionary biology, humanistic psychology and neuropsychology frame a satanic take on naturalism and materialism (e.g. de León, 2006; wolf, 2001b). This critique has developed gradually from the early 2000’s and has resulted in a very secular and scientific framework of the group through the gradual reification of boundaries to the cultic milieu, putting the ‘umbrella organization’ at odds with many unaffiliated Satanists whether rationalist, esoteric or reactive.

A good example of this upstaging of science can be found on the group message board, where postmodern and esoteric epistemological claims are repeatedly countered by naturalistic arguments and (post)-positivistic scientism, mainly by the two spokespersons Wolf and Lap, but also by newer members socialized into the rationalist Satanism of the group (Various, 2006). Here the degrees of both Wolf and Lap in Engineering and Religious Studies, respectively, are used as an authorizing discourse mirroring LaVey’s carnivalesque ‘school of life’ and Jantsang and Marsh’s carnal gnosis; when rational arguments fail, as they do as the discussion moves from ‘science’ to ‘pseudo-science’, other interventions take over. What is clear from the heated debate is that the realist ontology of the spokespersons is strongly at odds with the more esoteric interpretation of quantum physics and evolution promoted by the opposition. This actually short-circuits the discussion, a significant step away from the ambiguity of LaVey or Gilmore and the blatant syncretism of the Satanic Reds.

Another example of scientific legitimation, and one that differs from all the previous groups, are the consistent appeal to religious studies and sociology of religion; this relates to rituals, demographics, demarcation to the cultic milieu and so on, and are solely the province of Amina Lap (e.g. Lap, 2002, 2004, 2006; cf. Lap, 2008, used in the analysis of LaVey). With regards to rituals, for example, a stringent anthropological chain of arguments explain the necessity

of ritual in human society, and hence the use of rituals in an atheistic context, without the need for sacrality or essentialism (Lap, 2004, 2006). Thus Lap strengthens the privatization of rituals available in LaVey's rational rereading of Satanism, positioning a very light version of esotericized secularism as a specific Danish interpretation. In the same way, Lap's analysis of LaVey's early writings, while definitely scholarly sound, are *also* a promotion of her and by extension Satanic Forum's reading of LaVey as decidedly secular (Lap, 2008). In this case, parallels can be drawn to participating pagans or Christian theologians consciously reading tradition in a scholarly light, defusing emic explanations through a reflexive use of Anthropology or Religious Studies.

Today, the main thrust of the organization's ideology could be described as materialistic and rationalist, since their texts solely refer to modern physics, logic, and materialist arguments. Satan is a symbol referring to the act of rebellion as well as to subjective states, but the organization is aggressively atheistic and secular in its rhetoric (Petersen 2008). Now that the Satanic Forum, and especially Ole Wolf and Amina Lap, have produced valid movement texts, the need for LaVey or the Dark Doctrines is less acute:

Natural forces and laws combined have an immense effect that seems much larger than their sum total, and there is no well-described natural law that can express this combined effect. We can only state that the natural laws explain that things happen, and how physical and chemical processes are followed, but they cannot describe how life or our perception of life unfolds. It is this "superset of natural laws" that has no scientific law or description. In principle, I could do with the above explanation, but few people can relate well enough to the knowledge that science has gathered today to understand the combined force of the laws of the universe. A symbol is required instead that effectively communicates this greater whole, enabling people to intuitively grasp the immensity and general mechanisms. I prefer to use Satan as this symbol. (Wolf, 2008)

What in the early phase looked like an emergent synthesis of religious traditions and hard scientism, is now viewed through a strategy of metaphorization; useful, but fictional and poetic.

V. *Concluding Discussion*

[B]oth cultures and languages function largely as fuzzy sets. The same is true of most individuals' faiths; these are constituted by an unstable

repertory of elements—often of a contradictory nature and generally coexisting in a state of tension—subject to constant reinterpretation, negotiation and reformulation according to circumstances. (Benavides, 2001, p. 493)

In the early years, LaVey’s rationalist Satanism negotiates the signs of the times: A liberal sexual morality and sense of personal freedom, but also a pro-law enforcement and anti-drugs orientation best described as an anti-hippie sentiment (Alfred, 1976); a sense for the new humanistic psychology and more pragmatic sociology; an anti-Christian and anti-bourgeois need for transgression, often expressed in very bourgeois ways (Moody, 1974a); and a deep immersion in the ‘rejected knowledge’ of the cultic milieu and carnival culture combined with a strong dislike of the witch, the occultist and other airheads (Petersen, 2009b). From the late 1960s onwards, it is LaVey’s definitions and accentuations of Satan, Satanism and Satanic that take over from earlier mythological Christian and literary Romantic definitions as *the* hegemonic interpretation of modern Satanism with new relations to religion, science and ideology (Lewis, 2001, 2009; Petersen, 2009a). Through a selective and creative use of philosophy, biology, psychology and sociology, LaVey appropriates science and rational authority to distance Satanism from the supernaturalism of the cultic milieu while simultaneously appealing to the authority of both science and esotericism. I have called these dual tendencies motivating myths: an appeal to the satanic self, exemplified by LaVey himself as the master narrative, and an appeal to ‘man the beast’, expressed through appeals to biology and psychology. The myths are simultaneously inversely related to the specific materials; under the scientific reasoning lurks the self, and under the esoteric tradition lurks the carnal psyche.

In this way, LaVey’s tension-filled codification of Satanism becomes a cultural product which other satanic actors can pry apart. On the one hand, it provides a familiar secular slant on religion: the secularizing of the esoteric visible in rhetoric of self-realization, magic as applied psychology and experiential authority. On the other, the *actual* use of science in what I have dubbed esotericised secularism serves to differentiate Satanism from other offers in the satanic and cultic marketplace. This is especially true of the early LaVey and the general position of rationalist satanic groups today, and it has in effect split the satanic milieu along secular and esoteric lines. To understand the dynamics involved, we have to move beyond the satanic milieu and into the parent reservoir of the cultic milieu; here, we can relate

specific strategies of satanic esoterization and secularization to wider flows of syncretism.

In “The Politics of Syncretism and the Problem of Defining Gnosticism”, Karen L. King discuss the processes of syncretic amalgamation and appropriation as a subtype of “normal, every-day operations of living (...) referring to the processes of normal, every-day meaning-making in situations of cultures in contact” (King, 2001, p. 469). She continues:

Rather than “borrowing” the traditions of *others*, as it is often claimed, the Sethian Gnostic myth-makers shape their stories out of *their own* at-hand cultural materials, The rhetorical claim to legitimacy for their “way of seeing things”—in their own eyes and those of others—is based precisely on the degree to which they stand (or at least appear to stand) *within* the frame of tradition—not as outsiders or innovators. Their way of seeing things implicitly aims to be persuasive precisely by drawing upon materials that are acknowledged to possess intellectual and cultural authority. (ibid., p. 470. Notes deleted)

Through the metaphor of cooking, King develops this convolution of practice and legitimation into a serviceable methodology in the analysis of mixtures:

(...) the most important concern is not the elements that go in or which were “chosen”—the “selection” is in some sense already a given in terms of local availability. The important thing is the relationships that are creatively established among the ingredients, how they are made, for what occasion, and for whom. (ibid., p. 470)

King exemplifies the operative aspect of “how” through a catalogue of “modes of negotiation”, such as narrative incorporation into an overarching structure,²⁵ selective retelling, allegorical interpretation and identification (ibid., pp. 471–472). In turn, the legitimizing aspect of “why” is elucidated in various “foundational functions” related to the socio-cultural context in order to make a place to stand and to negotiate the hegemonic relations of power (ibid., pp. 474–477).

This understanding is based on Gustavo Benavides’ illuminating discussion of linguistic opportunism. The brute reality of conquest and colonialism highlights the fact that syncretism is connected to cultural and political legitimacy; it should therefore be conceptualized in rela-

²⁵ Reminiscent of Anita Leopold’s concept of “a paradigmatic motif” in a belief system serving as a third element in a religious blend (see Leopold, 2001, p. 417).

tion to circumstance and necessity (Benavides, 2001, 2004). Comparing the invention of tradition with pidgins and creoles that are crossing borders between languages and social networks, syncretism becomes a matter of creating and maintaining religious “dialects” (Benavides, 2004, p. 201), whether these are “imperial” or “subversive” (Benavides, 2001, p. 496). Adopting an almost geological perspective, Benavides sees changes and boundaries as “sedimented generation after generation” (ibid., p. 498), invoking a diachronic perspective on the processes we observe. Continuity and rupture as well as intelligibility become master tropes in the establishment of hierarchies, accommodation to circumstances and access to scarce resources.

Here, the analytical interest of King coincides with that of Benavides. Commenting on the *Apocryphon of John*’s mythic “logic of salvation”, where “spiritual enlightenment and social critique go hand-in-hand” (King, 2001, p. 473), she states that “[r]esistance is more likely to arise from those who have bought heavily into a society’s dominant ideology and feel betrayed than by those who reject the values of their society” (ibid., pp. 473–474). One of the ways this is expressed can be analyzed precisely through syncretism, seen as strategies of appropriation as well as legitimization; in situations of competition, myth-makers tend to think “with those materials that have prestige in the circles in which they move” (ibid., p. 474). This bears directly on the use of science, mythologized or not, in the cultic milieu today. On a broader scale, the following remark of Gustavo Benavides’ rings especially true:

In this sense, even the calls for diversity, so common in the United States, presuppose the existence of an umbrella-like American ideology that serves as a common language. In fact, given that the virtues of diversity are extolled within the context of consumption, this most American of passions provides the language into which all the ‘diverse’ languages can be translated and therefore guarantees the maintenance of intelligibility. (Benavides, 2001, p. 496)

Ideological underpinnings such as *pax Americana*, Protestant Christianity and consumption become part of the circumstances all religion has to negotiate with in the competition for prestigious materials today. Another important contextual element is science itself, especially when reified as *the* purveyor of rationality and secularity in the modern world. Seeking access to the scarce resource of legitimacy, science and secularization become key obstacles.

One possible avenue of analysis has been suggested by Egil Asprem, who proposes the evocative term “programmatically syncretism” in his

analysis of Aleister Crowley's mixture of esotericism and science (Asprem, 2007). This is defined as "a *deliberately syncretistic attitude*, relating cultural data regardless of time and space, but with a *programmatic* basis, always with the aim of improving the sum outcome" (ibid., p. 136). Programmatic syncretism is intimately connected to issues of modernity and the transformations within modern esotericism necessitated by secularization, science and emerging globalization:

Through the processes of modernization a vast corpus of religious and esoteric data from different localities became available to the occult currents. Influenced by the rising sciences, this body of data was also approached in a new way: clinging to modernity's grand narrative of progress through science, occultists consciously applied syncretistic methods in order to reveal the universal truths underlying particular cultural systems, and *improve* the esoteric system they themselves worked with. (ibid., p. 150)

Through disembedding and reembedding of "cultural data", traditional religious discourse is transformed into taxonomic matrices for arranging data in search for the universal behind the particular *as well as* practical systems of legitimization, or in Aleister Crowley's own words: "The method of science, the aim of religion" (ibid., p. 151), a very usable analytics when engaging in the syncretism of the cultic milieu today. It is the openness and scepticism implicit in the 'scientific endeavour' and the methodologies of 'mythological science' that serves to facilitate syncretism and keep the syntheses open, as closure is anathema in these milieus. Thus openness of form and function as well as ideology and practice is reflected in the material produced. We are confronted with a concrete material product encapsulating an ongoing project, to further and improve the magical practices and experiential methodologies of the promoted esoteric system in relation to the user (cf. Asprem, 2008).

Hence syncretism, programmatic or not, is promising when analyzing strategies of appropriation and strategies of legitimization in modern religious creativity, but in order to use the concept, it must be firmly re-embedded in a processual and contextualist framework. Consequently when analyzing the detraditionalized appropriations in the cultic milieu it should be clear that syncretism is an analytical statement based on theory rather than a descriptive or normative one based on empirical judgments. Instead of retaining the concept on the systemic level of culture and cognition in the abstract, I would suggest leaving grand aspects such as brain hardware, cultural exchange and

the meeting of two cultures to focus on everyday practices of syncretism and the resulting “remains” (Leopold, 2001, 2002; Leopold & Jensen, 2004; Martin & Leopold, 2004). In this analytical sense, the concept of syncretism is constructive as a methodological shorthand in the analysis of religious discourses and practices within one milieu as seekers search for workable truths.

Thus, I would use the concept to examine why and how *certain* manifestations of religion at *certain* times and in *certain* places exhibit markedly eclectic use of and appeals to religious and scientific discourse or perform interesting borderline crossings on the level of legitimation and negotiation of power. These should be related to “cross-fields”, “beachheads” or “trading zones” facilitating these practices (cf. Fox Keller, 1995, quoting Peter Galison), such as the cultic milieu, serving as both a reservoir of disparate ideas and as a network of communication structures, as well as general tensions and tendencies in the social networks of which they are a part, in our case late modern capitalist societies. This argument can easily coexist with the more general statement that *all* religion has a hybrid character (Shaw & Stewart, 1994), as the concept of syncretism is relegated from a general theoretical role as a master concept (a substance or essence of some religions or religion) to a more analytical role as a descriptor of certain explicit strategic processes.²⁶

In this light, Egil Asprem’s paradigmatic example of programmatic syncretism, Aleister Crowley’s complicated amalgamation of kabbalah, astrology and other elements of western esotericism with an experimental and classificatory methodology from modernist science, should be considered a rather extreme case on one end of a scale of syncretization in the cultic milieu in general (or the sub-milieu of western esotericism). On the other end of the scale are more impressionistic combinations of science and religion in belief or practice, whether as rhetorical gloss or heuristic techniques. Somewhere in the middle is the eclectic *bricolage* of both practitioners and participants in the cultic milieu today.

In a scientific study of religion concerned with power and the interrelation of systems and actors in time and space it is important to

²⁶ This is comparable to the fate of other master concepts such as secularization, esotericism, ritual, culture and indeed religion: All are made dynamic and adjectival. They are thus still scholarly concepts, but hopefully more able to capture a fluid reality (cf. Appadurai, 1996; Jensen, 2003).

remember that strategies of appropriation and strategies of legitimization, although frequently co-existent, should be analytically separated. In other words the concrete act of religious creativity (Hammer, 2001, p. 43ff), associating this with that or taking something out of one context and reinserting it in another, is different from actually deriving authority *from* this creative product or indeed trying *to* legitimize the creative act itself. The two levels of strategy should not be conflated, even though they rest on a dialectical relationship.

In fact, legitimization has a tendency to lag behind the creative production of the combinations themselves, a fact illustrated by ethnographic accounts, where the reifying ‘dogmatization’ of legitimating discourses producing bounded objects frequently collides with the paradoxes of everyday life and the inconsistencies of practical lived religion on the ground—in short, the fuzziness of human thought and action (Benavides, 2001, 2004). Ideologies and religions are practiced and *activated* rather than lived as totally transparent ‘belief systems’ (Lincoln, 2006).

Structurally speaking, then, a variety of positions are available in the satanic milieu, mirroring the cultic milieu itself. When seen as syncretic processes, we can analyze these positions diachronically and see the different phases of combination and appropriation, or we can observe the conflicts of hegemony in a synchronic analysis, temporarily reifying or ‘dumping’ the processes as ideological sites within the milieu. The use of science as legitimizing tool in claims of authoritative formulations of Satanism, as well as the secular context that is invoked along with it, can thus be integrated in our categorization of rationalist and esoteric Satanism. Both use science in subtly different ways, and both strategies are double-edged swords. One the one hand, the esoterized secularism of the later LaVey and groups such as the Church of Satan and the Satanic Forum relates magic and other “supernormal” occurrences to materialism, secularism and atheism. Magic is applied psychology and sociology with trappings. Life is carnal indulgence. But too much esoterized secularism and you blend into the atheistic, humanistic and general philosophical critique of religion and modernity itself, loosing both the self-religious identity, but also the specific ‘edge’ provided by the term Satanism itself along the way (a fate the Satanic Forum struggles with).

On the other hand, the esotericizing tendencies visible in the early Church of Satan and fully espoused by the Satanic Reds have a much more recognizable use of magic and a more esoteric take on episte-

mology and ontology. Magic is part psychology and sociology, but it is tapping into something broader than that e.g., Flowers. Life is mystical carnality, so to speak. But too much secularized esotericism and you blend back into the cultic milieu from whence you came, loosing the ‘satanic identity’ along the way. As with magical practice, striking a balance plays an important part in the fine-tuning of secularized esotericism and esotericized secularism to retain the full effect of both Satan and science.

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ARTICLE III: MAGIC AND ARTIFICE

“The Seeds of Satan: Conceptions of Magic in Contemporary Satanism” is accepted for publication in *ARIES: Journal for the Study of Western Esotericism*, 12:1 (2012), a special issue on ‘sinister’ esotericism edited by Henrik Bogdan. Aries is published by Brill, with a review board consisting of Peter Forshaw, Antoine Faivre, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, and Wouter Hanegraaff. The article was written in the summer and fall of 2010. It was originally commissioned by Nevill Drury and Henrik Bogdan for another Brill Handbook, *The Handbook of Modern Western Magic*, but the anthology was rejected upon general review as too broad and unfocused. Subsequently, Bogdan salvaged the seven chapters that were deemed worthy of immediate publication by the review board for the Aries special issue. The article itself was accepted with minor revisions and a German abstract, all of which are included here.

The Seeds of Satan: Conceptions of Magic in Contemporary Satanism

Jesper Aagaard Petersen

1. Introduction

One of the strengths of Satanic philosophy is to take that in yourself which would be considered by most to be a liability, and invert it. Make it work for you rather than against you. Perhaps this is where the image of Satanic inversion holds true. An accomplished Satanist takes what is considered “evil” by mainstream Judeo-Christian society, turns it upside down in unexpected ways and gives it back in spades.¹

In the imagination of the west, the subject of Satanism has always been associated with black magic, demonology and dark occultism. Or perhaps it is the other way around; magic and esoteric arts have a curious way of being coupled with the Prince of Darkness and his multitude of cohorts. Historically, Satan and Satanists work as umbrella terms and almost metonymical figures when classifying the bewildering variety of secrecies, grimoires and cabals found in the parallel world of esotericism and the occult, a strategy firmly linked to biblical and medieval conceptions of witchcraft, sorcery and dubious practices outside the purview of monotheistic faith.²

On the other hand Satanism as something others do is very different from Satanism as a self-designation.³ What others do, or *discourse on the Satanic*, is a rhetorical construction making claims about monsters out there as well as the virtuous in here.⁴ In this sense, what *we* are is what they are *not* – virtuous, chosen, just and so on. What they are is the inversion of us: Evil incarnate, eating babies, doing (black) magic, cavorting with demons. Telling stories about “them” reinforce our own sense of purpose and builds our identity and community. As such, Satan and associated practices are absolutely evil whether understood in a Christian or secular framework. And Satanism can be anything “not us”.

Satanism as a self-designation is also about identity, but in a different way. In *Satanic discourse* the scrapheap of meaning-making of others is appropriated and used as a positive descriptor alongside other material in an eclectic fashion. Thus the self-designation is ambiguous, lying somewhere between the horrors of “the others” and the radically different; what is described as negative in discourses on the Satanic is indeed inverted into “good”, but

¹ Anton S. LaVey in Barton, *The Secret Life of a Satanist*, 136.

² See eg. Frankfurter, *Evil Incarnate*; Medway, *Lure of the Sinister*.

³ See Petersen, ‘Smite Him Hip and Thigh’; Petersen & Dyrendal, ‘Fuelled by Satan’.

⁴ These constructions are examined convincingly by D. Frankfurter in *Evil Incarnate*.

it is also sanitized and made usable in constructing positive identities.⁵ This work can be more or less sophisticated and more or less self-contained, but it is seldom nihilistic and never dismissible, even when an obvious joke or rhetorical gloss. In any case, the Satanic discourses of modern Satanism are *perspectives* on evil, making Satanism “what I (or we) do”.

And what they do is, among other things, black magic, demonology and dark occultism. It is also highly context dependent, almost down to each individual Satanist. There is a tendency, though, for worldviews based on a mix of creative expression, self-“centrism” and measured antinomianism to be more or less unequivocally Satanic. The Prince of Darkness is the Lord of matter, and he is a rebellious individualist. In addition, the use of magic and ritual, however understood, is frequently embraced or at least acknowledged, as Satanism has its contemporary roots in the occult revival of the 1960s.

Nevertheless, the use of Satan and esoteric material is heavily detraditionalized and influenced by secular concerns of disenchantment and psychologization as well as an active re-enchantment of psyche and self through the recycling of texts, practices and imagery.⁶ Broadly speaking, there is thus a wide variety of interpretations of what Satanism and being a Satanist entails, although all can be placed within the orbit of the “cultic milieu” or “occulture” of the west.⁷ As such, modern Satanism is a species of what Wouter Hanegraaff has dubbed “secularized esotericism”, found in Human Potential groups, ceremonial magic(k) circles, Left-Hand Path associations and the various neo-pagan revivals.⁸

The following is a description of the multifaceted interface between aesthetics, esotericism and self-realization in modern Satanic magic. First, I will examine the dual nature of magical practices: In parallel with the wider esoteric milieu and alternative religiosity of late modernity, magic is understood both as a utilitarian tool and an expression of self, which again is seen through both esoteric and secular frames. Secondly, I offer a survey of various representative how-to manuals, magical scripts and practices within the “Satanic milieu” based on this framework. Embodied and enacted as creative practices bridging the ritual chamber, artistic expression and everyday life, Satanic magic could be seen as a “conscious life design” of “authentic artificiality” in debt to romanticism and western esotericism, but also refracted through the lens of secular modernity.

⁵ See Petersen, ‘Smite Him’; cf. Evans, *The History of British Magick*, 83-177.

⁶ Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’; cf. Heelas, Lash, & Morris, *Detraditionalization*; Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 1.

⁷ Petersen, ‘Introduction: Embracing Satan’, 4-6.

⁸ Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*; cf. Urban, *Magia Sexualis*.

2. Ars Magica: From esotericism to psychology – and back

We cannot honestly say that we “live” in the objective universe, but rather in a crazy-quilt of subjective overlays on the objective universe. The first thing the magician must do is realize this; the second thing he must do is attempt to see and understand the actual objective universe through all the camouflage. The third thing he must do is attempt to change parts of it carefully and precisely through his own magical workings (...).⁹

In James R. Lewis’ ‘Satanism surveys’, conducted two times in 2001 and 2010 (with a third still underway), magic and ritual practice is one of several issues discussed.¹⁰ In the first survey, reported in *Who Serves Satan? A Demographic and Ideological Profile*, almost eighty percent of the total sample of 140 respondents stated that they ‘believed in the efficacy of magic’.¹¹ A similar amount ‘rarely or never meet[s] with co-religionists for religious/ritual purposes’, while sixty-three percent communicate frequently on the internet (page 5). Regarding introduction and background, almost fifty percent stated that reading was the primary gateway into Satanism, with the internet accountable for an additional twelve percent (table 7). Finally, ‘neo-paganism’, ‘Wicca’ or various ‘left-hand path’-groups was mentioned by fifty percent as prior religious involvement (table 8).

The second survey confirms these findings with a larger sample of 260 respondents.¹² They rarely meet, even for religious purposes, and prefer to communicate electronically; significantly, in response to introduction into Satanism, websites and books now account for three-fourths of the total sample, 199 respondents (page 10-12). Although these statistical findings can be criticized for the small sample, the lack of clear definitions, and the dependence on internet survey methods and thus questions of accessibility, maturity and geography,¹³ they nevertheless substantiate the impressionistic conclusion that most Satanists *do* believe in magic, and *when* they practice it, it is by themselves inspired by books, material found online or the groups they have prior (or parallel) engagement in. The critical point is what they believe “magic” to be.

At this junction it would be useful to introduce two ideal types, namely rationalist and esoteric Satanism, based on the view of Satan, legitimizing strategies and magical theory.

⁹ Aquino, *Black Magic*, 89.

¹⁰ Lewis, ‘Who Serves Satan?’; Lewis, ‘Fit for the Devil’.

¹¹ Lewis, ‘Who Serves Satan?’, 5.

¹² Lewis, ‘Fit for the Devil’, 3.

¹³ Cf. Lewis, ‘Who Serves Satan?’, 2-3.

These ideological positions have their roots in the highly mediatized atmosphere of the “occult explosion” from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, exemplified by Anton S. LaVey’s Church of Satan and Michael Aquino’s Temple of Set, both stable organizations within the Satanic milieu since the 1970s.¹⁴ Although we should always be careful when moving from territory to map, fixing a fluid reality in reified categories, the types do illustrate a major discursive fault line in the Satanic milieu between those who emphasize Satan as a symbol of a naturalized self and those who maintain a more idealist framework, with Satan being a force or entity outside the purely natural (as in carnal and material).

In a previous analysis of *The Satanic Bible* and other writings, I proposed the dual strategies of “esoterization” and “secularization” in order to understand the scope and nature of LaVey’s appropriation of Satanism. For example, by making magic congruent to psychology, he ‘secularizes’ magic; conversely, by calling psychology magic, he ‘esotericizes’ science.¹⁵ Hence Satanism not only re-orientes traditional Devil worship, but also re-negotiates two influential contemporary alternatives of occult counterculture and self-help psychology, filling the ‘grey void between religion and psychiatry’ by offering ‘the fundamentals of psychology *and* good, honest emotionalizing, or dogma. It provides man with his much needed fantasy’.¹⁶

This is fully in tune with LaVey’s definition of magic as ‘the change in situations or events in accordance with one’s will, which would, using normally acceptable methods, be unchangeable’,¹⁷ a view with a strong focus on application that sidesteps the traditional boundaries between psychology, art, science and magic. Discarding the traditional difference between white and black magic, LaVey instead proposes a distinction between the rituals and ceremonies of “Greater Magic”, considered formal performances of an emotional nature, done alone or in groups in a specific time and place, and the more down-to-earth instructions on influence, grooming, and seduction called “Lesser Magic”.¹⁸

What LaVey does can be described as a sanitization through secularizing the esoteric and “esoterizing” the secular.¹⁹ Regarding the first, he effectively sanitizes Satanism and the darker aspects of the occult by transferring the connotations from the Christian Devil to a biological and psychological self. In *The Satanic Witch* (first published as *The Compleat Witch*:

¹⁴ See Petersen, ‘Satanists and Nuts’.

¹⁵ See Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’.

¹⁶ LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 110-113, 119. On white and black magic, see LaVey, *The Satanic Bible*, 21, 50-51, 87, 110; LaVey, *The Satanic Rituals*, 23.

¹⁹ Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’, 73, 77.

or *What to do When Virtue Fails* in 1971), for example, LaVey offers scientific-sounding applications such as the ‘LaVey Personality Synthesizer’, ‘The Law of the Forbidden’ and ‘Erotic Crystallization Inertia’ to explain what he himself freely admits are ‘potent tricks’ and ‘Rules of the Chase’.²⁰ These theories focus on the fact of knowing both oneself and the men the witch is out to manipulate: Opposites attract, you *can* judge a book by its cover, nothing is as fascinating as the forbidden, all men are fetishists and so on. As Lesser Magic, they are both practical and “magical” in nature – a “naturalization” of magic.²¹

The inverse process of “esotericizing” the secular is no less important, as it places Satanism outside the orbit of “ordinary” ideology or philosophy, in effect bringing the occult back in, but as sanitized resources for the Satanic magician. In his books, there is a wide use of recognizable occult virtuosi, demons, correspondences, ceremonial phrases and objects from the history of the “black arts”.²² However, they too are connected to the program of naturalization. This is evident in the almost cavalier way LaVey treats *the* staple Satanic ritual, the Black Mass. As with similar ‘psychodramas’ of Greater Magic found in *The Satanic Rituals*, such as L’Air Epais (‘the Stifling Air’), we are not in the realm of mere blasphemy; rather than simply reveling in inversion and perversion, psychodramas are actively *transforming* guilt, stigma and repression into benefits through emotional catharsis.²³ What seems most important is the ‘intellectual decompression chamber’ itself:

The formalized beginning and end of the ceremony acts as a dogmatic, anti-intellectual device, the purpose of which is to disassociate the activities and the frame of reference of the outside world from that of the ritual chamber, where the whole will must be employed.²⁴

Hence it is not the content itself that is magical, but the process, whether it is modeled on a Catholic Mass or a Masonic initiation rite of death and rebirth. The use of urine and vaginal consecration in the Black Mass, or flagellation and symbolic burial in L’Air Epais illustrates

²⁰ LaVey, *The Satanic Witch*, 175, 266.

²¹ Cf. Asprem, ‘Magic Naturalized?’ Such a “naturalization” is also illustrated by the chapter ‘Ceremonial magic’, where various secularized magical rituals are presented as psychological means of empowerment; for example, sex magic is an exhibitionistic internalization of the male gaze in masturbatory fantasy, and the witch’s familiar is a externalization of the internal personality (LaVey, *Satanic Witch*, 235-256; cf. Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, ch. 7). He concludes: ‘(...) there is far more magic to witchery than that which takes place during a ceremony’ (LaVey, *Satanic Witch*, 252).

²² See Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’, 85-91.

²³ The Black Mass is described in LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 99-105 and *ibid.*, *Satanic Rituals*, 31-53; for L’Air Epais, see *id.*, *Satanic Rituals*, 54-75.

²⁴ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 120.

how controlled transgression elicits an emotional response, exorcising whatever “demons” are holding the Satanist back.²⁵

In both cases, he replaces the ‘esoteric gibberish’ of traditional esotericism with a naturalistic agenda, underscoring ‘bio-electric’ or ‘adrenal energy’ and ‘emotional intensity’ as underlying causes in Greater magic, and misdirection, ‘glamour’ and ‘fascination’ the active principles in Lesser magic.²⁶ Nevertheless, LaVey agrees with the esoterically inclined on the *efficacy* of magic; it is an exercise in creation and emotional transformation. Indeed, his definition of magic is clearly in debt to Aleister Crowley’s ‘the Science and Art of causing Change to occur in conformity with Will’, as is the perception of magic(k) as part imagination, part emotion, and part science, with a strong focus on application and an instrumental view of both esotericism and scientific theories to fulfill the magician’s goals.²⁷ This makes LaVey’s caustic critique of esotericism past and present, including Crowley, somewhat paradoxical.²⁸

LaVey’s ambiguous undertaking has a galvanizing effect on the many heterodox groups inhabiting the darker corners of the cultic milieu of the late 1960s; a “dominant” group and “dominant” discourse on Satanism suddenly ascend to national fame, which in turn creates an autonomous *Satanic* milieu and a *de facto* Satanic tradition which selectively appropriates and reinterprets Christian and esoteric discourse and practices, and even has a visible spokesperson and a bible.²⁹ Nevertheless, LaVey and the Church of Satan are only esoteric to a degree, and gradually reorient Satanism to the clearly atheistic and materialistic stance seen today, revolving around two major “motivating myths”: a naturalistic and Darwinist notion of “man the beast”, ‘the most vicious animal of all’,³⁰ and a more essentialized conception of a “Satanic self” in those that are ‘born, not made’, an elite of truly ‘productive aliens’.³¹

In this sense LaVey follows Crowley’s naturalizing lead, but he also simplifies it – the Will is a biological concept, tied to LaVey’s carnal ideal of “indulgence” and Nietzsche’s

²⁵ On the issue of catharsis and emotional control, see also E. Moody’s somewhat pathologizing analysis in ‘Magical Therapy’.

²⁶ On esotericism, see e.g. LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 21, 103; *ibid.*, ‘On Occultism of the Past’; *id.*, *Satanic Rituals*, 22-23; *id.*, *The Devil’s Notebook*, 28-32, 43-44; on bio-electricity, adrenal energy and emotion, see e.g. LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 53, 87, 111, 121, 135, 143; *ibid.*, *Satanic Rituals*, 17, 25, 34, 57.

²⁷ LaVey, *Satanic Rituals*, 21-22. On Crowley’s definition, see Crowley, *Magick*, 126; cf. Flowers, *Lords of the Left Hand Path*, 144. See Dyrendal, ‘Satan and the Beast’ and Sass, ‘Two Questions on Magic’ for discussions on Crowley’s influence on modern Satanism.

²⁸ E.g. LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 103; *ibid.*, ‘On Occultism’.

²⁹ I have analyzed these developments in Petersen, ‘Satanists and Nuts’.

³⁰ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 25.

³¹ Barton, *The Church of Satan*, 26, 29-30; *ibid.*, *Secret Life*, 15. On “motivating myths”, see Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’.

“Will to Power”.³² In other words, both Greater and Lesser Magic are related to material practices of an emotional or ‘supernormal’ nature. Rather than an esoteric conception of (higher) Self, LaVey proposes an “esotericized”, but thoroughly secular work based on the emotional and expressive nature of the self. LaVey’s rational Satanism thus balances between ‘respectability and outrage’, sanitizing it enough to appeal to law-abiding and materialist Satanists, but retaining the evocative demons, infernal trappings and sexual transgressions for emotional and aesthetic reasons.³³

After the famous schism in 1975, where Michael Aquino and other top brass of the Church of Satan splits and founds the Temple of Set, the seeming homogeneity of the Satanic milieu starts to unravel.³⁴ This is actually presaged by LaVey’s lack of control even in the formative period (1966-1975), and is in effect a *return* to the state of occultism and witchcraft before the Church itself. Thus rationalist Satanism is countered by a much more polyvocal, but still somewhat cohesive family of esoteric Satanism-s reactivating the gnostic discourse of self-deification present in but hollowed out by LaVey; the ‘esoteric gibberish’ of Aleister Crowley, Tantric traditions, Qliphotic Kabbalah and so on proliferate in a return to Left-Hand Path esotericism.

For example, the Temple of Set’s founding document, Michael Aquino’s *The Book of Coming Forth By Night* is a result of a Working of Greater Black Magic, a direct ‘communication from the Prince of Darkness in his original semblance as the Egyptian god Set’ and thus a ‘noetic apprehension of an intelligence “beyond myself”’.³⁵ This is important, as it is with direct “diabolical” legitimacy that Aquino assumes the position previously upheld by Anton LaVey. We cannot understand the Temple of Set without understanding what went wrong with LaVey’s Church and before him Aleister Crowley’s magical orders, as the Temple is the true realization of the potentials within these previous manifestations of the will of the Prince of Darkness. Basically, both precursors twisted their original purpose, either through a confused text and antinomian lifestyle, as with Crowley,³⁶ or succumbing to pecuniary decisions ‘inconsistent with the previous standards’ in the Church of Satan.³⁷ In one swift stroke, Horus and Satan are discarded for Set along with their ‘prophets’, organizations and texts.³⁸

³² Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’, 77-78, 80.

³³ On this selective sanitization, see also Petersen, ‘Smite Him Hip and Thigh’.

³⁴ See Petersen, ‘Satanists and Nuts’.

³⁵ Aquino, *Black Magic*, 7.

³⁶ Ibid., *The Book of Coming Forth By Night*, 17.

³⁷ Ibid., 13.

³⁸ Ibid., 21. See also Aquino, *Black Magic*, 6-7, and the critical documentation in Aquino, *The Church of Satan*.

Fundamentally, the worldview and practices of the Temple of Set are built upon the principle of *Xeper* (“becoming”, “to come into being”), an Egyptian hieroglyphic term and the Word of the Aeon of Set, as stated in *The Book of Coming Forth By Night*.³⁹ As explained in subsequent commentaries, the Temple of Set consists of ‘the Elect’, individuals who through their separateness are realizing the Black Flame of Set and gradually becoming what they inherently are through magical Workings, studies and other springboards to self-awareness.⁴⁰ Consequently, the Temple considers itself an initiatic association of magicians on the Left-Hand Path, which is defined as a ‘conscious attempt to preserve and strengthen one’s isolate, psychocentric existence’ in relation to the objective universe and subjective universes. In contrast, the Right-Hand Path is the ‘conscious attempt to dissolve or merge the self with the objective universe’.⁴¹

In what could be described as an “esotericizing” countermove, Aquino reinstates the distinction between ‘White’ and ‘Black’ Magic besides continuing LaVey’s differentiation between Greater and Lesser Magic. In his commentary on Set’s proclamation, Aquino writes:

White Magic is a highly-concentrated form of conventional religious ritual. The practitioner seeks a focus of his awareness and powers of concentration via an extreme degree of autohypnosis. (...) To accomplish this, the magician envisions a god or daemon with the power to achieve this objective, then concentrates his will into an appeal. The god or daemon then carries out that appeal (...). Black Magic requires no autohypnosis or conditioning of the mind to make it receptive to subconscious imagery. Rather it is a deliberate and conscious effort to force the mind outward – to impact upon and alter the “laws” of the mechanical Universe.⁴²

After this instructive piece of theory, he calls White Magic ‘more versatile’, ‘less difficult’, and ‘less dangerous’ before downgrading all the ritual practice found in LaVey’s *Satanic Bible* and *Satanic Rituals* to the category of conventional religious practice.⁴³

Black Magic, in contrast, ‘may not be standardized or even described as a consistent routine’.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, he provides a theoretical description in the treatise entitled *Black*

³⁹ Aquino, *The Book*, 20-21, 26.

⁴⁰ Aquino, *Black Magic*, 21, 51, 55.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴² Aquino, *The Book*, 23-24.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* Actually, while proficiency in White Magic is a prerequisite for the second degree in the Temple, proficiency in Black Magic is ‘the identifying characteristic of the Priesthood of Set’, third degree and above.

Magic, based on the natural and non-natural approaches to the objective and subjective universe.⁴⁵ This is essentially Right-Hand Path and Left-Hand Path approaches to the physical universe (of time, space, matter and forces) and the imaginative universes (perspectives of the mind), respectively. In other words, the harmonial and merging ‘natural’ approach consists of White Magic and entertainment, while the external and ‘non-natural’ perspective is the realm of Lesser and Greater Black Magic. Similar to LaVey, Lesser Black Magic is ‘impelling’, the ‘influencing of beings, processes or objects in the objective universe by application of obscure physical or behavioral laws’,⁴⁶ although Aquino actually describes the psychodramas of the early Church of Satan as Lesser Black Magic.⁴⁷ Hence stage magic, psychodramas, politics and propaganda are all Lesser Black Magic, based on ‘careful study’ and application from the ‘self-realized external perspective’ to the *physical* world.⁴⁸

Greater Black Magic is about change in the *subjective* universe of the magician, realizing the self in concordance with the principle of *Xeper*.⁴⁹ Any result in the objective universe is secondary, involving a ‘Magical Link’ – nevertheless, the basis for Greater Black Magic is change in the ‘subjectively-imposed “overlay”’, the ‘real’, isolate world of the psyche.⁵⁰ The magic of The Temple’s Elect are thus tied into the Crowleyan notion of magic in concordance with the ‘True Will’ as techniques for heightening self-awareness. Greater Black Magic is aligning the subjective world with the Self; any material consequences follow from this and are not central to the Working. These are Lesser Black Magic or White Magic.⁵¹

Viewed in this light, the Satanism of Anton LaVey is a distinctly *rationalist* Satanism based upon what I have dubbed ‘esotericized secularism’, foregrounding the natural and pragmatic elements, in contrast to Michael Aquino’s reintroduction of the Left-Hand Path as a ‘secularized esotericism’ underscoring the *esoteric* content.⁵² Popularly speaking, these are different takes on the amount and nature of rhetorical justification enveloping the practices of Satanic magic, which by extension affects the Satanic milieu today through reification in texts and images as well as exegetical efforts of successors and interpreters.

⁴⁵ Aquino, *Black Magic*, chapter 4, esp. 64-71.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 66, 72-85.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 88; cf. Flowers, *Lords*, 238.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 68, 88-89.

⁵¹ For more information, see Aquino’s own documentation in *ibid.*, *The Temple of Set*, and the comprehensive treatment in Flowers, *Lords*, 215-242. See also Dyrendal, *Darkness Within*; *ibid.*, *Satan and The Beast*.

⁵² Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’, 76.

3. Magic as conscious life design: The riddle of authentic artificiality

“The world is my idea,” he said. “The world is my idea; as such I present it to you. I have my own set of weights and measures and my own table for computing values. You are privileged to have yours”.⁵³

Going back to the Satanism surveys referred to above, we saw that a majority ‘believed in the efficacy of magic’.⁵⁴ As I hinted to in the previous discussion, statistical caricatures such as these raise the question of “spokespersons” (or “virtuosi”) versus “participants” (or “regulars”). Here we touch upon the delicate contrast between the relatively stable material provided by vocal adherents, often as texts, and the more fluid realities of individual “seekers” in a “milieu”. It is important to at least acknowledge the fact that ‘individual agency’ in practice as well as belief seriously challenges the established ‘cultural orientation’ of texts and groups visible from above.⁵⁵ For example, that eighty percent *believe* in the efficacy of magic does not automatically establish that they *practice* it; by extension, that dominant, visible texts discuss magic do not confirm that it is popular, or practiced in the prescribed way.⁵⁶

In an open-ended follow-up questionnaire to the survey, the nature of Satan, magic and tradition are addressed in more detail. Lewis notices a general tendency for combining psychological and ‘supernormal’ explanations, mirroring the ambiguous view of Satan as a *symbol* representing inexplicable forces of a natural, but non-scientific kind.⁵⁷ Of course, this combines a semantic view of Satan as a representation of *natural* fundamentals with a physical view of impersonal forces operating *outside* our standard epistemological frameworks which could be called “Satan”. Thus “Satan” can be shorthand for both materialism and idealism; and the connotations can even be combined.

⁵³ Finney, *The Circus of Dr. Lao*, 126.

⁵⁴ Lewis, ‘Who Serves Satan?’, 5.

⁵⁵ See Ezzy & Berger, ‘Becoming a Witch’ for a convincing discussion of agency and orientation related to neopaganism. On a wider note, see e.g. Campbell, *The Cult, The Cultic Milieu, and Secularization*; Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*; Possamai, ‘Producing and Consuming New Age Spirituality’; Sutcliffe, ‘The Dynamics of Alternative Spirituality’.

⁵⁶ This is one of several reasons why I prefer to speak of a Satanic milieu rather than Satanism; to capture the interfaces between individual Satanists, groups, free-floating material and currents, we need to situate texts, even if we continue to rely on them. For example, LaVey’s literature in particular serves as a model of Satanic discourse and practice far beyond the Church of Satan (cf. Lewis, ‘Infernal Legitimacy’). On the one hand they should thus be handled as guidebooks actualized today in various contexts inside and outside the organization, appropriated for various purposes just as they appropriated and standardized older material, which apparently eludes many members of the Church (eg. Gilmore, *The Satanic Scriptures*, 170-194). On the other hand, they should be viewed as historical archives of a specific way of doing things in the early Church of Satan, not necessarily the contemporary Church or the Satanic milieu as a whole, a fact that eludes some critics of LaVey or modern Satanism (eg. Mathews, *Modern Satanism*).

⁵⁷ Lewis, ‘Who Serves Satan?’, 8.

For example, Satan as a representation of the self, symbolizing the carnal Satanist or the dual nature of man, can co-exist with a view of Satan as the driving force behind evolution, an untapped reservoir of nature or the proud force of individuality.⁵⁸ Both views can be conceived of as material, in contrast to theistic conceptions of Satan as an entity; at the same time, subtle forces “behind” the empirical, transcending scientific explanations, are outside materialism as traditionally defined. This ambiguity is very relevant in the magical theories used to explain why and how magic works. In the survey, one respondent had this to say, paraphrasing LaVey, Aquino and Crowley:

Magick is causing change in conformity to Will, therefore everyone practices magick, whether they call it magick or not. If we want something, we perform the work to get it. (...) Chanting over a candle may help the magician to focus, or even believe a higher power is helping him/her through school, but in itself it does nothing.⁵⁹

Here, a psychological reality allied to physical reality is dominant. In other words, it is the mind and Will of the magician – what I earlier referred to as the process – and not the content itself that is efficacious. Nevertheless, the respondent is *using* the term “magick” and *not* scientific terms to describe what ‘everyone’ does. Something “everyday” and “scientific” is going on, which even so cannot be explained through everyday or scientific language.

As noticed by Lewis, many respondents go further and discuss the congruence between objective and subjective reality, psychology and nature. This undertaking can be examined by returning to the ambiguity of Anton LaVey and viewing it in a different light. In the essay ‘Pentagonal Revisionism: A Five-Point Program’, LaVey points towards a future with a sulphur lining, so to speak.⁶⁰ He proposes a five-year plan of social development that should be understood as both a “party line” in the now and a vision for a Satanic future: Stratification, strict taxation of all churches, responsibility to the responsible (or *Lex Talionis*), development of artificial human companions and creation of total environments.⁶¹ Although the pentagonal program as a whole is interesting as a political document outlining the ideology and ethics of the Church, the two final points are of special interest as they encapsulate a

⁵⁸ For example, compare the Nine Satanic Statements (LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 25) with more “deistic” passages (ibid., 40, 62, 94).

⁵⁹ Lewis, ‘Who Serves Satan?’, 8.

⁶⁰ First published in *Cloven Hoof* (124), XXI: 2 (1988), 1-4. Reprinted in Barton, *Secret Life*, 259-60; LaVey, *The Devil’s Notebook*, 93-97. See also the expanded discussion in Barton, *The Church*, 79-91.

⁶¹ LaVey, *The Devil’s Notebook*, 93-94.

rather surprising take on magical practice. In essence, they mark the Satanic life as creative design – articulating a ‘third’ and ‘uncomfortable’ alternative between reality and utopia.⁶²

At face value, ‘artificial human companions’ and ‘total environments’ sounds like something out of science fiction, a theme park extended to the nth degree. On the one hand, LaVey means this quite literally. Artificial human companions are robots or humanoids produced to suit individual desires without bothering anyone: It is ‘technologically feasible slavery (...) which will allow everyone “power” over someone else’. A total environment, in turn, is a real place that gives one the ‘opportunity to feel, see and hear that which is most aesthetically pleasing (...)’ and points to the ‘freedom to insularize oneself in a social milieu of personal well-being’.⁶³ Before his “Black House” was torn down, both were manifested in LaVey’s infamous “Den of Iniquity” where his personal fantasies were evoked through a sleazy 1940s roadside bar filled with mannequins.⁶⁴

The interest in the very life-like sex-toy *RealDoll* from several high-ranking members, as well as LaVey’s abiding interest in super- and hyperrealist artists such as John De Andrea, George Segal and Duane Hanson, indicates that the literal interpretation is not merely an idiosyncratic quirk, but a truly Satanic obsession.⁶⁵ By providing detailed guidelines for creating humanoids and suggestions for suitable surroundings, LaVey indicates they have a real social dimension or practical side.⁶⁶

But companions and environments have a figurative and ideological side as well. Behind the somewhat misanthropic outlook, they encapsulate the ontology of artificiality in LaVey’s Satanism, as they bridge the boundaries between real and imagined as subjective acts of will on objective reality. As stated in the essay ‘The Merits of Artificiality’:

Only when one can fully accept artificiality as a natural and often superior development of intelligent life can one have and hold a powerful magical ability. (...) imagina-

⁶² On the third alternative, see LaVey, *Satan Speaks!*, 30. On the pentagonal program as a political tract, see Flowers, *Lords*, 189-196.

⁶³ LaVey, *The Devil’s Notebook*, 94. For more information on companions and environments, see e.g. Barton, *The Church*, 79-91; Barton, *Secret Life*, 131-141, 185-194; Gilmore, *The Satanic Scriptures*, 152-157; LaVey, *The Devil’s Notebook*, 130-132, 139-40; LaVey *Satan Speaks!*, 106-112; Paradise, *Bearing the Devil’s Mark*, 49-52, 58.

⁶⁴ See e.g. Baddeley, *Lucifer Rising*, 158-159; Barton, *Secret Life*, 191-192; Flowers, *Lords*, 207 for descriptions.

⁶⁵ On *RealDolls*, see e.g. Gilmore *The Satanic Scriptures*, 153; Paradise, *Bearing the Devil’s Mark*, 49. On hyperrealist artists, see Barton, *Secret Life*, 192; LaVey, *The Devil’s Notebook*, 131.

⁶⁶ On LaVey’s guidelines for humanoids, see LaVey, *The Devil’s Notebook*, 133-138; on environments, see LaVey, *Satan Speaks!*, 108-111, 152-154. Extending on the science fiction theme, LaVey’s ‘space ghettos’ for the herd of human ‘locusts’ are a different kind of total environment for the mass, created to keep them docile. Thus ‘islands of individuality’ for the elite coexists with ghettos for the rest (LaVey, *The Devil’s Notebook*, 95-96).

tion is taken into the realm of creativity when you infuse the unreal with a reality which will be satisfying.⁶⁷

Further, companions and environments are not only magical “objects” in themselves; they are also a “natural” extension of the exclusivity and control necessary for magical agency, alongside a healthy interest in the marginal, the forgotten and the uncanny:

(...) it’s only in this Borderland of all times and no times, with spatial and chronological reference points suspended, that magic is initiated, and the magician’s will can be projected outward to superimpose his desires on the Is To Be.⁶⁸

By advocating Satanists to ‘live in a world of their own choosing, their own making’,⁶⁹ he is discussing the very essence of magic. Esoteric terms such as ‘Is To Be’, ‘imagination’ and ‘magic’ are, to use LaVey’s formulation, *superimposed* on psychological terms of ‘creativity’, ‘will’ and ‘desire’, which are in themselves secularized idioms of an esoteric theory of the psyche. Traditional magical practices, artistic expression and the creation of companions and environments are all *magical artifice*. They are ‘setting the stage’ – and by looking the part, even approximations evoke strong feelings.⁷⁰

Perhaps there is no more apt example of this highly individual project than LaVey himself; his fascinating back-story, told in three biographies and frequently retold as a legitimization of the Church, the Satanic Bible or LaVey himself, is in fact a construction of a magical persona or a sustained performance of magic. Just as with older paragons of magical ability such as Count Cagliostro and Aleister Crowley, magic *is* image(ry) and fantasy, making “Anton S. LaVey” the supreme artificial companion and the “Church of Satan” the total environment of choice for the “alien elite”.⁷¹

The “appeal” to artifice is also found in the ritual manuals. The Call to Cthulhu, for example, a reverence of H. P. Lovecraft’s weird tales, is to be performed in a secluded location, at night and near a turbulent body of water. A celebrant, acting as Cthulhu himself, appears before the summoning crowd placed around a bonfire. They then exchange lines in both

⁶⁷ LaVey, *The Devil’s Notebook*, 130.

⁶⁸ Barton, *Secret Life*, 131.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁷⁰ Vale & Juno, *Modern Primitives*, 95.

⁷¹ Cf. Barton, *Secret Life*, 72. For further analyses of the “LaVey myth”, see e.g. Dyrendal, ‘Et Satans mannfolk’; Flowers, *Lords*, 175, 204; Lewis, ‘Infernal Legitimacy’, 45-48; Mathews, *Modern Satanism*, 41-48.

Lovecraftian English and the language of the Old Ones to sustain a symbolic pact.⁷² While this sounds impressive with the right atmosphere, it is more of a pageant than a summoning in the old style; it ‘reflects the dimness of an almost forgotten past’ rather than bringing it about.⁷³

In contrast, *Die Elektrischen Vorspiele* (‘the Electrical Prelude’), with its complicated directions, expressionistic ritual chamber, strobe lights, harmonics and electrical generator actively uses the trappings to *act* through magical means:

[T]hese are the ingredients required for the creation of the is-to-be, as defined in the ritual (...). The procedure is to “charge” the chamber in a manner that allows the celebrant to “draw” energy from it while at the same time he adds his own strength of will. (...) Upon “peaking”, the celebrant enters the reflective planes that will multiply and send forth his will.⁷⁴

The procedure itself describes how, after appropriate segments of the standard ritual of *The Satanic Bible* has been performed, the celebrant and assistants builds the sonic, visual and electric charges in the room.⁷⁵ The celebrant then delivers an invocation and partakes in the charging of ‘reflective planes’, after which he/she lowers him/herself into a pentagon, assumes a prostrate *hakenkreuz* position and creates the ‘is-to-be’. Finally the celebrant rises, utters a Proclamation and closes the rites ‘in the usual manner’. This should ‘alter an existing social climate and establish far-reaching change’, although the guidelines are only a ‘useful key to those who can extract the most viable principles and apply them to their own ends’.⁷⁶ As noted by Randall Alfred, LaVey has a feel for theatrical showmanship, patterning the aesthetic integration of the ritual practices on Richard Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* as well as circus performances.⁷⁷

As we can see, several vectors intersect in LaVey’s modern magic, not least the (apparently) intentional ambiguities between what is real and what is not, what is magic and what is art, and what is Satanism and what is life. LaVey’s sustained advocacy for the carnivalesque, funhouse aesthetics and the side-show attraction infuses the religious dimension of LaVey’s Satanism with an acknowledgment of showmanship as well as craftsmanship; in this

⁷² LaVey, *Satanic Rituals*, 197-201.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁷⁴ LaVey, *Satanic Rituals*, 107. The ritual text is found on pp. 115-130.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 115-116.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 108, 111.

⁷⁷ Alfred, ‘The Church of Satan’, 188, 196-197.

sense, alleged mentor Cecil Nixon's zither-playing automaton Isis, allegedly with a repertoire of 3000 songs, can serve as a bridge between the literal artistry of *creating* a companion – the Magic of mastering a skill or trade and doing it well – and the ideological artifice of *making magic*:

That's magical meditation, trances, out-of-body experiences, the magician standing in the middle of the Circle and pronouncing the words he alone knows, the use of magician's tools – all the metaphors are there. "This is applicable to music or magic," says LaVey. "When it becomes a form of expression, that's when the auto-pilot takes over and the medium becomes incidental – I loose consciousness of the method or tools[?]." ⁷⁸

Here Satanic magic lies between artistic expression and real influences as a "true fiction" that transforms reality, a fact powerfully imaged in artificial companions and total environments that blurs the line between 'fantasist' and 'sorcerer', 'Disneyworld' and 'Abbeys of Thelema'.⁷⁹ Consequently a pragmatic "whatever works"-attitude is imbued with strong sense of subjective expression, a position with venerable esoteric roots.⁸⁰

To explain a similar conclusion in *The New Age Movement*, Paul Heelas applies the categories of "expressive" and "utilitarian" to the proposed 'self-ethics' of the modern autonomous 'detraditionalized' individual.⁸¹ Quoting liberally from sociological studies of post-WW2 society such as R. Bellah's *Habits of the Heart* and S. Tipton's *Getting Saved from the Sixties*, Heelas establishes 'expressivism' or 'expressive individualism' as an inner-directed self-ethic, 'intent on discovering and cultivating their 'true' nature', but understood exactly as a freedom of *expression*, of feeling and agency, that is, as something flowing from the inside out.⁸² The 'utilitarian self', in contrast, is about 'exercising one's capabilities (...) in

⁷⁸ Barton, *Secret Life*, 137.

⁷⁹ Baddeley, *Lucifer*, 158. The contemporary Church of Satan continues this rhetoric of creative 'mastery'; see eg. Gilmore, *Satanic Scriptures*, 178-79, 183, 195-96; Paradise, *Bearing the Devil's Mark*, 21-24.

⁸⁰ For example, compare the following quote from LaVey: 'The Satanist can easily invent fairy tales to match anything contained in holy writ, for his background is the very childhood of fiction – the myths immemorial of all peoples and all nations. And he admits they are fairy tales' (LaVey, *Satanic Rituals*, 27) – with this famous quote from Aleister Crowley's introductory text *Liber O*: 'In this book it is spoken of the Sephiroth and the Paths; of Spirits and Conjurations; of Gods, Spheres, Planes, and many other things which may or may not exist. (...) It is immaterial whether these exist or not. By doing certain things certain results will follow; students are most earnestly warned against attributing objective reality or philosophic validity to any of them' (Crowley, *Magick*, 613). As noted by Dave Evans, this is also a basic position in modern Chaos Magick (Evans, *The History of British Magick*, 374-75).

⁸¹ Heelas, *The New Age Movement*, 115-17, 155-57, 160-168.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 156, 160.

order to maximize what the externals of life have to offer'.⁸³ This is a more *instrumental* view of the power within used to actualize one's self-interest; thus a 'deeper' view related to idealist romanticism is contrasted by an economic and biological view of basic human nature, satisfying needs and wants by obtaining them on the outside. In his study of disenchanting magic, Wouter Hanegraaff has outlined these historical correlations as unequal pressures:

In modern western culture *as a whole*, in all its dimensions, the ideology of instrumental causality exerts pressure on individuals to deny or suppress their spontaneous tendencies towards participation; and one reaction against such pressure is the establishment of a Romantic counter-ideology. It is only within the more limited context of e.g. a New Age cultic milieu *specifically*, that a Romantic ideology of participation may likewise exert pressure on individuals to deny or suppress their spontaneous tendency towards instrumental causality. In other words, while it is impossible for any participant in modern Western society to escape the social pressure of the first kind of ideological narratives, being exposed to pressure by the second type is by no means inevitable. I would argue, furthermore, that *both* types of narrative compete on an equal basis even within milieus of strongly committed New Agers (...).⁸⁴

The ideologies of 'instrumental causality' and 'participation' fit quite well onto the utilitarian and expressive self-ethics, especially when translated into *discursive* strategies of "magical logic" on the border between authenticity and artifice, instead of reified blocks. As with Hanegraaff, it is Paul Heelas' argument that both ethics are inherently modern and can be found in western society today in various combinations. Nevertheless, it is the former that contains deeper "spiritual" values – utilitarian individualism might be 'sacralizing' the self and the notion of progress, but it is never inner-directed.⁸⁵

That said, both are active within the cultic milieu which by extension affect modern Satanism; indeed, I would argue that the categories of expressive and utilitarian self-ethics can be combined with the secularizing and "esotericizing" strategies discussed in the previous section as an interpretational matrix for Satanism as a whole. Much of LaVey's Satanism belongs squarely in the utilitarian camp; nevertheless, magic is both a way to actualize the self and transgress the limits of internal and external norms. This in turn can be secularized as

⁸³ Ibid, 166.

⁸⁴ Hanegraaff, 'How magic survived the disenchantment of the world', 376, note 36.

⁸⁵ Heelas, *The New Age*, 166.

psychological catharsis, serving utilitarian needs, retain its esoteric provenance, serving expressive and transformative needs or any combination in between, such as artistic expression and mastery as is fitting for the particular Satanist. With this in mind, let us put the matrix into action.

4. Malefic(k) magic(k)s: A catalogue of ritual practice

(...) the standards, philosophy and practices set forth on these pages are those employed by the most self-realized and powerful humans on earth. In the secret thoughts of each man and woman, still motivated by sound and unclouded minds, resides the potential of the Satanist, as always has been. The sign of the horns shall appear to many, now, rather than the few; and the magician will stand forth that he may be recognized.⁸⁶

Any search engine will supply almost unlimited links to Satanic individuals, groups and projects in various stages of complexity and cohesion. Established sites compete with new personal expressions and attempts at online community, usually short-lived and based on local associations off-line. The internet also provides an assortment of sources on magic, shading into the wider milieu of “dark spirituality” or “occulture” that exists as a parallel world to the one most of us know through everyday life and media consumption. Here, I will look at some salient examples, focusing on the contemporary variety of ritual practices in the amorphous milieu.⁸⁷

A. Enacted demonologies

On the website *Satanic Spells*, the modern-day sorcerer-for-hire Dominic offers black magic spell casting for a variety of outcomes: dispelling bad luck, creating lust, bringing in money, or compelling the forces of darkness to do your bidding. The price varies from a few hundred British pounds for a simple love spell to several thousand pounds for ‘Devil’s Plantation number 2’, an unbreakable and absolute binding of a person through an invasion of the aura. With an evocative picture of Dominic himself, to-the-point marketing rhetoric and layout, including payment through PayPal, and titles like ‘The Greatest, Most Powerful and Supreme Spell Col-

⁸⁶ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 104-105.

⁸⁷ I will not distinguish sharply between theistic and atheistic Satanism, Black Witchcraft, Luciferianism, various Left-Hand Path ‘post-Satanisms’ and Devil worship here (see e.g. Granholm, ‘Embracing Others than Satan’; Vera, ‘The varieties of theistic (“traditional”) Satanism; *ibid.*, ‘Other theistic or theistic-friendly Satanism/”LHP” websites’). Although these distinctions are highly important from an emic standpoint and in “thick” description, they tend to occlude rather than illuminate what is already a heterogeneous field.

lection' (for love problems, 1150 pounds), 'The Rite of Lucifuge' (for permanent change, 500 pounds), and 'The Black Pullet – Cream Of Occult Sciences' (creating a talisman, 1000 pounds), there is no excuse for not recruiting the forces of darkness in your hour of need.⁸⁸

While we get scant information on the specifics of Dominic's spellcraft, he is referring to quantum mechanics, energy, Satan, God and spirits to explain how they work.⁸⁹ But in one instance, he briefly describes *what* he does:

When I cast this spell for a client, I carry a special stone called an 'Ematille' for 24 hours as the spirits raised during this spell do everything they can to scare and fill the magician with terror and prevent this spell from being cast. Once I have past [sic] their test, I am free to cast The Rite of Lucifuge, this spell will compel, bind and overwhelm any situation you wish to change, permanently (...)⁹⁰

This account brings us squarely into traditional demonology and Goetic magic as described in the *Grand Grimoire* (early 18th century); it is very possible that Dominic's source is this book, most likely lifted from A. E. Waite's *Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* (1898), available as a mass market paperback.⁹¹ Waite quote copious sections of the grimoire, including the purchase and use of bloodstone, or Ematille, and the entire summoning ritual of and negotiation with Lucifuge Rofocale.⁹² He also has extensive coverage of *The Black Pullet*, a French magical romance from early- to mid 18th century describing a young officer's adventures in Egypt, and more importantly, offering information on 22 talismanic seals as well as the manufacture of 'la poule noire', a black gold-finding hen.⁹³

References such as these indicate the nature of Dominic's magical practice, namely paradigmatic black magic in the tradition of (Christian) Cabalists, magicians and sorcerers.⁹⁴ While it is impossible to know if he actually sacrifices goats to the Devil or chants strange names within protective circles, we can at least infer his heavy investment in the aesthetics and practices of demonology as described by Waite. But there is no traditional Devil worship here; no pacts, no Black Mass, and no sacrifices. Instead we have the solitary, even individualistic worldview of the post-modern diabolist modernized and sanitized into a client relation.

⁸⁸ Dominic, 'Spell Index'.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 'Home'; 'Satan'.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 'The Rite of Lucifuge'.

⁹¹ *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts* was later revised as *The Book of Ceremonial Magic* (1912), which can be found on <http://www.sacred-texts.com/grim/bcm/index.htm>. For more information, see Davies, *Grimoires*.

⁹² Waite, *The Book of Black Magic and of Pacts*, 92-95, 239-251.

⁹³ Ibid., 104-129.

⁹⁴ Cf. Schmidt, *Satanismus*, 11.

As a customer, you do not sell your soul to the Devil (although Dominic might have), the spells will not backfire, and Satan, Asmodeus, Lucifer and God are all energies to be manipulated by the magician: ‘Satan represents the dark, God the light, by having access to both good and evil (black and white magic), the magician makes himself a god or a devil, a magician must have mastery of everything if he is to succeed’.⁹⁵

Having said that, Dominic’s Satanic spells are also very much dependent upon Goetic lore and the frameworks of esotericism and Christianity as authenticating elements, ambiguously sanitizing the unlawfulness *and* retaining the darkness. In his discussion of Satan quoted above, he continues, somewhat paradoxically, ‘Satanic Spells are in fact honest spells that work, using potent forces capable of manifesting the changes you seek. God or ‘the source’ created these forces’.⁹⁶ As efficient consumer products sold by an enterprising manufacturer, Dominic’s *Satanic Spells* is an example of a purely utilitarian practice based upon secularized esotericism and inverted Christianity.

Moving away from the peddling of products, similar magical ceremonies and rituals are offered for personal use free of charge (or at a significantly lower cost) on a host of websites, in books and other material. A representative example is the German *Satansheaven* [sic], a resource list for those ‘seriously interested in black magic’, although I presume most of the suggestions would disappoint the would-be magician as they are of a descriptive and not practical nature.⁹⁷ As with Dominic, Satanic magic seemingly implies a paradigmatic demonological frame with strong Christian elements. It is also exclusively about power, needs and wants, treating demons and techniques as tools. This restricted view of Satanism as diabolism, involving control of spirits within a rather traditional metaphysics, is countered by other individuals and groups focusing on pre- or non-Christian and even non-Western approaches and broadening the scope of magical practice into devotion, self-actualization and imagination.

B. Devotion to the Dark Lord

One noteworthy example cluster is the ‘standard’ devotional rituals found on websites such as the *Joy of Satan* ‘ministries’ and Diane Vera’s *Theistic Satanism*. While still operating in the paradigmatic context of demonology, the orientation shifts from control to attachment and

⁹⁵ Dominic, ‘Satan’.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ See e.g. ‘The Black Mass’ and ‘Witchcraft Initiation Rituals’ on the site www.satansheaven.com (accessed July 24, 2010).

self-development. Rituals are thus not intended to forcibly summon demons, but rather enable mystical experiences and diabolical empowerment more in tune with expressive concerns.

In the ‘Standard Ritual to Satan’ provided by the group *Joy of Satan*, the central part of the ritual consists in reading prayers to and even having a chat with ‘Father Satan one to one’, a somewhat surprising break with the more traditional ceremonial activities described.⁹⁸ The structure of the ritual is indeed fairly standard: After suitable preparations (bathing, lighting candles and so on), the ritual begins with ringing the bell and invoking the Four Princes of Hell. In the main part, the Invocation to Satan is recited, establishing a link suitable for prayer and communication. The ritual is then closed.

Nevertheless, we are not dealing with negotiation or simple ‘exercise of evil’, but ‘telepathic communication’ with anthropomorphic beings.⁹⁹ Throughout, there is an almost jovial tone, even when discussing evocation and invocation of demonic entities. For example, some demons ‘like to play’.¹⁰⁰ Satan also recognizes, it is said, a lack of funds: ‘Unlike the xian [Christian] churches and all of their vast wealth, pomp, and ceremonial show, Satan does not expect his people to have expensive items for ritual. If all you have is yourself, this is fine with Satan. He understands’.¹⁰¹

As should be obvious, the *Joy of Satan* is strongly anti-Christian and very eclectic, even if the Middle and Far East and a strongly anthropomorphic flavor seem popular.¹⁰² Established online around 2002,¹⁰³ they offer e-groups, a detailed list of Satanic Witchcraft and other material, including guidelines for making pacts. This ‘formal commitment’ is signed in blood and burned in order to participate fully in ‘Satan’s work upon humanity’, which implies a growth in spiritual knowledge and personal power.¹⁰⁴ This takes us to the quite impressive list of ‘Satanic Magick’; combined with the equally impressive array of ‘Satanic Meditation’ techniques, every trick of the trade is provided in easy-to use format, categorized as beginner,

⁹⁸ JOY, ‘Standard Ritual to Satan’.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ See JOY, ‘Magickal Evocation and Invocation’.

¹⁰¹ JOY, ‘Standard Ritual’. A similar formulation is used when discussing the scarcity of black candles: ‘This is just an attempt by xtians [Christians] to try to stop us from practicing our religion, and is especially targeted towards teenagers and young people. Satan understands this and alternatives are alright with him’ (ibid.).

¹⁰² JOY, ‘Index Page’. They are also anti-Semitic (JOY, ‘The Roots and Origins of True Satanism’), believe Satan to be an extra-terrestrial (JOY, ‘The Origins of Satanism’) and are charged with Nazi sympathies (Vera, ‘Other theistic’). I will not cover these aspects here; suffice to say not many Satanists outside *Joy of Satan* want the term Satanism associated with them.

¹⁰³ Vera, ‘Other theistic’.

¹⁰⁴ JOY, ‘Making a Commitment to Satan’.

intermediate and advanced. From ‘Azazel’s Astrology for Satanists’ to ‘Secreting Ectoplasm’, the Satanist of the *Joy of Satan* can go in any direction for inspiration and growth.¹⁰⁵

Diane Vera’s *Theistic Satanism* is definitely more low-key in the approach to devotional Satanism, although Vera is working along the same track (and indeed appears around the same time) as the *Joy of Satan*.¹⁰⁶ She too offers a standard ritual, intended for her Church of Azazel, with the ceremonial trappings and activities in place: Black candles, altar, calls to gods, and invocation to Satan.¹⁰⁷ The structure of the ritual is similar to the one discussed above, with many facultative elements and a prevalent anthropomorphism. Generally, an eclectic atmosphere centered on individual experimentation prevails. More indicative of Vera’s orientation is her discussion of formal pacts, where she is much more reserved, and suggests replacing the irreversible pact with a ‘self-initiation ritual’ that should be performed on three nights in a row, with daily prayers and meditations ‘for a few months’ after the rite.¹⁰⁸

This ritual is performed in the nude and is basically a standard rite built around the declaration of the ‘Prayer of acknowledgement of Satan’s rulership’ followed by silent contemplation: ‘As you say it, contemplate the presence of Satan pervading every part of “this world” and every part of yourself. Your attitude should be one of surrender to your own innermost self, which is assumed to be ruled by Satan’.¹⁰⁹ Here it is obvious that Satan, while external, is *also* internal; nevertheless, Satan *is* a separate entity accessible through ‘spiritual experiences’.¹¹⁰ He is instrumental in the Satanist’s development, manifest in the primacy given to devotion rather than magic for its own sake. Although self-empowerment stands strong and a belief in the Devil paints these activities in a darker hue, we are indeed more in line with the deeper spiritual concerns of the New Age as described by Paul Heelas and Wouter Hanegraaff.

C. Intellectual decompressions

As can be expected, such devotional and demonological activities are relegated to the “looney” bin by rationalist Satanists today. It seems the current leadership of the Church of Satan upholds a *laissez faire*-approach with little extant orthopraxy; nevertheless, LaVey’s

¹⁰⁵ JOY, ‘Satanic Magic’; *ibid.*, ‘Satanic Meditation’.

¹⁰⁶ Vera, ‘Theistic Satanism’.

¹⁰⁷ Vera, ‘Outline of my recommended standard ritual format’.

¹⁰⁸ Vera, ‘A preliminary self-initiation rite’.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Vera, ‘Prayer of acknowledgement of Satan’s rulership’; *ibid.*, FAQ about theistic (“traditional”) Satanism’. See also Venus Satanus’ website *Spiritual Satanist*, where Satan is ‘the guiding force’, an ‘inspiration’ and the provider of self-realization and help (www.spiritualsatanist.com, accessed July 31, 2010).

seminal books serve the role of cornerstones within the Church, only recently complemented with *The Satanic Scriptures* by the current High Priest Peter Gilmore.¹¹¹ Thus all discussion of magical practice within the Church of Satan and in the closer orbit of affiliated Satanists begins and ends with Anton LaVey, subtly framing the significant freedom to experiment in the privacy of your own ritual chamber and to apply the principles to your life as you see fit.¹¹² As we saw in the discussion on LaVey, neither Satan nor esotericism is discarded completely; they are rather re-interpreted as “esotericizing” elements in a secular worldview.

Interestingly, Peter Gilmore has published a handful of new rituals in *The Satanic Scriptures*, one of which can be seen in the documentary *Inside the Church of Satan*, namely ‘The Rite of Ragnarök’.¹¹³ As an appropriation of Norse mythology ‘(...) to expedite the shattering of a social order that has become moribund, seeing it cleared away to prepare for a new society (...)’, it can be performed both as catharsis and as ‘societal Is-To-Be’.¹¹⁴ The ritual itself fits nicely with the examples presented by LaVey in *The Satanic Rituals*, as it follows the general guidelines of LaVey in both structure and aesthetics. Thus standard elements of purification, invocation and summoning, modified to the Norse style, precede particular components, such as recognizing kinship and toasting from a drinking horn. The mythical narrative of winter, conflagration and victory is then performed, loosening the ‘primal powers’ to begin ‘the age of Feral Man’.¹¹⁵ Described by Gilmore as an ‘exercise in exoticism’,¹¹⁶ ritual efficacy hinges on the same ambiguous magical artifice as we saw in the section on authenticity above. Less than ‘traditional’ magic, it is more than ‘mere’ stage antics, actively ‘exploring the Darkness from a distinct cultural milieu’;¹¹⁷ in addition, being the brainchild of the High Priest, the ritual itself is an artifact of Satanic creativity.

While there is no doubt that such rituals are indeed performed by Satanists alone and in groups, the public face of the Church of Satan has had little ceremonial activity since the early 1970s.¹¹⁸ A recent exception was the Los Angeles performance of a Satanic ‘High

¹¹¹ They are also supported by a cottage industry of authorized writings such as personal and institutional biographies (Barton, *The Church*; *ibid.*, *Secret Life*), collections of essays (Gausten, *Words from the Third Side*; Nemo, *The Fire from Within*; Paradise, *Bearing the Devil’s Mark*; Sass, *Essays in Satanism*) and Church-affiliated websites.

¹¹² E.g. Gilmore, *Satanic Scriptures*, 38, 222.

¹¹³ Gilmore, *Satanic Scriptures*, 275-291. The 2008 documentary *Inside the Church of Satan* is directed by Joshua P. Warren and can be purchased online from Shadowbox Entertainment.

¹¹⁴ Gilmore, *Satanic Scriptures*, 276, 277.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 278-291.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 275.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 276.

¹¹⁸ Barton, *The Church*, 29-30; Barton, *Secret Life*, 125-127. A vivid experience of the actual performance of these rituals in the early Church of Satan is best obtained through listening to the 1968 recording of a ‘Satanic Mass’ on the CD of the same name (*The Satanic Mass*, Recorded LIVE at the Church of Satan, San Francisco,

Mass' celebrating the Church of Satan's 40th anniversary, appropriately pushed to the significant date of June 6th, 2006.¹¹⁹ Loosely based on The Satanic Ritual of *The Satanic Bible*, it was understood as both a theatrical event and a ritual complete with three invocations: Lust, Compassion and Destruction. As described in LaVey's book, the ritual itself is fairly standardized and non-descript; the text establishes appropriate dress and atmosphere before describing the initial acts: ringing the bell and uttering appropriate invocations. The priest uses chalice, sword and phallus to create the ritual space, after which application-specific invocations and activities are performed, such as masturbation and unrestrained crying. There is then opportunity for verbal or written appeals before reading an Enochian Call and closing the process.¹²⁰ These 13 steps are done in a designated space with nude altar, a banner showing the Sigil of Baphomet and so on, confirming the stereotypical "Satanic" ambience of the proceedings.¹²¹

Such current examples clearly illustrates the dual push of sanitizing and privatizing the rituals on the one hand, while still kindling the flame of blasphemy and public outrage on the other. All the same, Greater Magic becomes 'honest emotionalizing' applied to different types of change.¹²² Hence, the eclecticism and exoticism on the level of content is offset by the naturalizing tendencies of interpretation. The focus is squarely put on the Satanist and not Satan, personal process and not ritual, matter and not metaphysics, reiterating the motivating myths set out by LaVey: "Man the beast" and the "Satanic self".

In a more general sense, though, the ideals of artifice and marginality still play a powerful role in the Church of Satan; while Satanism as a world view and life style doesn't necessarily control the *particularities* of life choices, they certainly inform the *virtuosity* of your life style. This is the 'third side' in action, infusing the utilitarian naturalism with a marked appeal to create and express.¹²³ A good example is Joel Gausten's brief essay 'What is Satanic Ritual?', contrasting 'Satanic Hall Monitors' who 'constantly *talk* about Satanism' with 'those who *actually live* it'.¹²⁴ Gausten acknowledges the 'inherent power' of LaVey's rituals,

Adversary Recordings/Amarillo, 1995), or watching the 1970 documentary *Satanis: The Devil's Mass* (directed by R. Laurent, reissued by Something Weird Video/Sherpix in 2003).

¹¹⁹ Farren, 'The Devil's Advocate'; cf. Paradise, *Bearing the Devil's Mark*, 1-2. The Church has also made a movie available on their website (see www.churchofsatan.com/Pages/666SHighMass.html, accessed March 7, 2011).

¹²⁰ LaVey, *Satanic Bible*, 131-134.

¹²¹ Ibid., 134-40. For a brief analysis of LaVey and the Goetic tradition, see Bill Ellis' discussion on the parallels between the *Sixth and Seventh Book of Moses* and *The Satanic Bible* (Ellis, *Lucifer Ascending*, 86-90) and the critical reappraisal in Davies, *Grimoires*, 272-77.

¹²² E.g. Gilmore, *Satanic Scriptures*, 221-22.

¹²³ E.g. *ibid.*, 187.

¹²⁴ Gausten, *Words*, 30.

but understands the ritual chamber as his workplace with ‘stacks of works-in –progress and countless ideas that perpetually manifest themselves as tangible, fulfilling realities’ – the altar is his old desktop computer.¹²⁵

Building on this understanding of change in the ‘real world’, he continues with a story of experiencing a moment of total musical ecstasy while playing with his band Pigface, dubbing it a ‘true Satanic ritual’.¹²⁶ This is echoed by James D. Sass in the essay ‘On Greater Magic’: ‘(...) the ultimate “intellectual decompression chamber” is and always will be YOUR OWN SKULL’.¹²⁷ Creativity and personal expression thus becomes the mainstay of Satanic practice, as ‘almost any act can be converted into a “ritual” generation and direction of your energy’.¹²⁸ As such, the romantic ideal of the artist on the margins of society are given a Satanic twist, linking the “genius” of productivity and inspiration with the very nature of the Satanist. In the words of Matt Paradise, Magister of the Church:

Unlike consumers, producers in Satanism are the real deal, be it through art, music, literature, business, or some gratifying endeavor of worth. We are the innovators, creators, and doers, and such is a product of our actual abilities and insights.¹²⁹

Thus we are introduced to Satanic plumbers, police officers or nurses who aspire to be the best in their fields, satisfying themselves to the full in their chosen area of life – this is what Peter Gilmore calls the Magic of Mastery.¹³⁰ On the other hand, they are seldom the exemplars chosen to embody the Satanic self at its fullest. The powerful symbols of Satanism: Satan, self, black flame – and especially Satan as the Adversary, rebel, and individualist – are opposed to Christian values of herd morality, popular culture, and bourgeois aesthetics, which could explain the widespread appeal to *marginal* aesthetics and creative vocations, such as design, visual art and music.¹³¹ Again the influence from Anton LaVey, frequently presented as a proficient painter, musician, lion tamer and so on, molds the contemporary outlook of the Church.

Besides Marilyn Manson, transgressive rock star and iconoclast, Peter Gilmore’s accomplishments as a painter and composer (both classical and modern as with the band Ach-

¹²⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹²⁷ Sass, *Essays*, 143.

¹²⁸ Ibid.; cf. pp. 142-47.

¹²⁹ Paradise, *Bearing*, 23.

¹³⁰ Gilmore, *Satanic Scriptures*, 179, 196.

¹³¹ cf. Dyrendal, ‘Devilish Consumption’.

eron), the pentagram artworks of Diabolus Rex, and the industrial music of Boyd Rice and Genesis P-Orridge, to name a few, are all displayed as prototypical of the productive alien.¹³² Apparently, aesthetics do function as a bridge between the utilitarian exercise of one's capabilities and the expressive cultivation of a 'true' Satanic nature, even if the self is understood in psychological and biological terms.

D. Self-deification with a "k"

A similar expressive orientation that is completely *reversing* the secularizing trend of the modern Church of Satan can be found among the groups and individuals engaged in the esoteric techniques of the Left-Hand Path, or what Kennet Granholm has labeled 'post-Satanism'.¹³³ While many ceremonial practices overlap with both the demonological, devotional and emotional magic previously discussed, the use of terms such as 'Left-Hand Path', 'Progressive Satanism', 'Transcendent Satanism' and 'The Sinister Current' (and a multitude of numbers, sigils and abbreviations) indicate that these groups are actively avoiding or radically reframing the term Satanism, and should therefore be considered a distinct milieu only partially overlapping with the Satanic milieu proper.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, many spokespersons either trace their development explicitly or implicitly to Anton LaVey's Church and literature, or have their roots in eclectic magical practice associated with "black" magic and demonology, dictating a brief examination of relevant practices to understand the Satanic milieu in the widest sense.

The first group, with ties to LaVey, can be exemplified by the work of aforementioned Michael A. Aquino and his successor in the Temple of Set, Don Webb.¹³⁵ True to the individual, non-standardized nature of Black Magic, Aquino provides little specifics on ritual practice. A model Greater Working is provided in the book *Black Magic*, after a discussion of

¹³² See Baddeley, *Lucifer*; Petros, *Art That Kills* for typical examples, although these are definitely not church approved lists of exemplars. Curiously, both Boyd Rice and Diabolus Rex have recently disaffiliated from the Church (September 2010 and January 2011, respectively), and neither Marilyn Manson nor Genesis P-Orridge seems close to the organization after LaVey's death.

¹³³ Granholm, 'Embracing'.

¹³⁴ As discussed by George Sieg, there is even the tendency among contemporary 'Sinister' groups of viewing 'Traditional' Left-Hand Path groups as hopelessly dualistic, just as Left-Hand Path groups rejects Satanism as Judeo-Christian (Sieg, 'Angular Momentum'). On the Left-Hand Path milieu in general, see also Drury, *Rosaleen Norton's Contribution to the Western Esoteric Tradition*; Evans, *The History of British Magick*; Senholt, *The Sinister Tradition*; Sutcliffe, 'Left-Hand Path Ritual Magick'.

¹³⁵ Other examples are Zeena and Nikolas Schreck, who moved from the Church of Satan through the Temple of Set to their own distinctive place based on modern sex magic, outlined in *Demons of the Flesh* (Schreck & Schreck, *Demons*), and Stephen E. Flowers, active in both Church of Satan and Temple of Set before launching the Norse-inspired Rune Guild (Granholm, 'Embracing') and other projects.

eclectic use of mythological and fictional material, and a description of the ritual chamber.¹³⁶ Notably, the chamber is understood as an ‘artificial environment in the objective universe’ and includes the room and the body of the magician, catering to all senses;¹³⁷ this is reminiscent of LaVey’s ‘total environment’. The ritual itself resembles the standard rituals examined earlier in many outer aspects: the chamber is meticulously prepared, a bell is rung, the light symbolizing the Black Flame is lit, an Invocation to Set is uttered and so on. What differs completely is the actual magical Working.

Here Aquino goes back to methods of ‘Astral projection’ resembling the practices found in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, for example, when transferring consciousness to the ‘Body of Light’.¹³⁸ After summoning the elements needed, a magical double particular to the working is constructed in the subjective universe; the magician then wills his soul into the construct and executes the wished change. Finally, the double is disintegrated and the elements charged with the working are released to influence objective reality. In line with the Temple’s esoteric approach, this is explained in Egyptian terms with reference to Crowley. It is also a sublime act of creation, far removed from the utilitarian ambitions of Lesser Black Magic and White Magic, and deeply enmeshed in the central project of ‘becoming’.¹³⁹

True to the academic style, Don Webb has described this project in simple form as ‘rulership’ and ‘royal power’ of the outer and inner worlds.¹⁴⁰ This concept of Sovereignty is the central goal of the Left Hand Path and goes far beyond empowerment, self-interest and material indulgence. Actually, when perusing the stages of the path and the practices one can undertake, the expressive values which are consistently advocated, such as tolerance, openness, trust, growth and artistry, constantly align the basic utility of magical practice with the core values of the cultic milieu as a whole.¹⁴¹ Consequently, there seems to be less fear of “spiritual” values in the Temple compared to the partisan views of the Church of Satan.

Regarding the second group with roots in “black” magic, a fascinating creativity is exhibited by several Swedish-based groups found online, such as Dragon Rouge and the linked groups Misanthropic Luciferian Order and the Temple of the Black Light.¹⁴² Dragon

¹³⁶ Aquino, *Black Magic*, 90-98.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹³⁸ Cf. Asprem, ‘Magic Naturalized?’, 158-161; Drury, *Rosaleen Norton’s Contribution*, 190-198.

¹³⁹ Aquino, *Black Magic*, 97, 68.

¹⁴⁰ Webb, *Uncle Setnakt’s Guide to the Left Hand Path*; cf. Dyrendal, ‘Darkness Within’.

¹⁴¹ Webb, *Uncle Setnakt’s Guide*, 17-18, 44-46.

¹⁴² Other examples in this category are Tani Jantsang and Phil Marsh’s *Satanic Reds* (Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’, 96-99), with a distinctive Advaita Vedanta-bend to Satanism; the ‘Sinister Current’ of the

Rouge, established in 1989/1990, takes its name from a French edition of the *Grand Grimoire* discussed above, but extends the draconian implications of the name into a complex system of modern magic with explicit links to Aleister Crowley, Kenneth Grant and other luminaries of western esotericism.¹⁴³ Highly eclectic, the practices seems to be centered around initiatory magic based on the 1+9+1 'qliphothic spheres' of the dark side, first as a correspondence course, and later as individualized work. Again, the goal is 'self-deification':

(...) a step by step process in which the magician is developing and ennobling him/herself and becomes a "god". To become a god means that one has transformed life from being predetermined and predestinated by outer conditions, to the stage where one reaches a truly free will. Man becomes a god when he ceases to be a creation and instead becomes a creator.¹⁴⁴

In this work, Satan and Lucifer play a minor role alongside other beings, including Lilith, Odin and the Dragon, who are drawn from the main traditions of 'the Goetic Qabalah, the Odinic Runosophy, Tantra and Alkhemy'.¹⁴⁵ Regular ritual practice, such as 'The Dragon Ceremony' and 'The Lilith Invocation' thus comprises one element of a spiritual quest involving a plurality of esoteric philosophies and techniques, built on vision seeking, activation of inner and outer forces and communication with the night side.¹⁴⁶

Another Swedish-based organization, the Temple of the Black Light, which developed out of the now defunct Misanthropic Luciferian Order exhibits similar levels of eclectic syncretism around parallel themes: 'Kliffotic (Qliphothic) ceremonial magic', 'grimoire based demonology', 'the Babylonian Cult of Tiamat, Draconic forms of Typhonian Setianism, Nephilimic forms of Traditional Witchcraft, Necrosophic systems of sorcery, certain extreme forms of Left-Hand Path Tantrism' and so on (TOTBL, 2010a).¹⁴⁷ As with the Dragon Rouge, there is a strong focus on the demonic feminine and the Nightside or antithetical mirror image of the Tree of Life. Their philosophy of 'Chaos-Gnosticism' or 'Anti-Cosmic (...) Luciferian-

Order of the Nine Angles (Senholt, *The Sinister Tradition*; Sieg, 'Angular Momentum'); and Michael W. Ford's *Luciferian Witchcraft* (Ford, *Luciferian*). Again, eclecticism and detraditionalization is central.

¹⁴³ See Granholm, *Embracing the Dark* and their website DR, 'Dragon Rouge General Page'. On the book *Le Dragon Rouge*, see Davies, *Grimoires*, 104-106; Waite, *The Book*, 101.

¹⁴⁴ DR, 'Dragon Rouge General Page'.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ For more on specific rituals and magical workings, see the extensive ethnographic coverage in Granholm, *Embracing*, 123-144, 191-243 and Thomas Karlsson's modern grimoire (Karlsson, *Qabalah, Qliphoth and Goetic Magic*).

¹⁴⁷ TOTBL, 'Main Page'. See also Boman, 'The Wrathful Chaos'.

ism/Satanism' is built around a complicated emanationist doctrine of the Black Light, the Demiurge and several universes, all of which will eventually fall back into the primal Chaos. Lucifer and Satan are two words describing different aspects of this black light with central importance in the initiate's work towards liberation and transcendent insight, alongside other dark gods and goddesses: Prometheus, Tiamat, Hekate, Apep, Surt – the list goes on.

Regarding rituals, information is scarce. Some practices are discussed in published, but hard-to-find literature;¹⁴⁸ in addition, the Temple provides a handful of invocations and rituals of an elemental nature on the website, to 'help the sincere seeker initiate actual work in the 218 current'.¹⁴⁹ One example is 'The Black Rite of Hekate', a collective evocation of the goddess to 'channel her most sinister energies towards the manifestation of inner and outer changes, in conformity with the collective will and desire of her blessed assembly'.¹⁵⁰ Held on Halloween night in a location fit for the 'darker powers', the ritual supposedly takes place around a bonfire lit by the participants, with 11 rock crystals acting as focal points. The priestess first consecrates the space with a bell, 11 times over the crystals, then 9 times, after which she invokes the wrathful darkness, traces an opening pentagram, vibrates the name of the goddess and pours a libation on the fire.

The subsequent exchange between the priestess and the congregation ends in the sacrifice of a black dog, whose blood is poured on the crystals. This combined with the chanting of twenty goddess names transforms the fire into a channel to 'the acausal streams within the earth', out of which a vortex of energy or 'black Hekterion Pillar' is raised. The power thus raised is then directed 'according to tradition and through the use of visualization, talismans, sigils, sympathetic magic, sonic magic, sexual magic (...)'.¹⁵¹ Finally the ritual is closed, the dead dog burned and the crystals collected. Although this ritual is different from the private rituals provided, first and foremost in the animal sacrifice, but also in its collective nature, it nevertheless provides a good feel for the ritual imagination of this nebulous group, combining the traditional ceremonial magic techniques of vibration, tracing sigils and visualization with the now topical ringing of the bell and invocations.

Compared to both the adoration of Satan in devotional practices, and the more naturalized ceremonial catharsis directed towards change in the case of the Church of Satan, these practices put both magical content and process center stage, as there is no division between the self-deification of the magician and the techniques to attain this gnosis. Thus, with or

¹⁴⁸ N.A.-A. 218, *Liber Falxifer*; MLO, *Liber Azerate*.

¹⁴⁹ TOTBL, 'Ritual Index'.

¹⁵⁰ TOTBL, 'The Black Rite of Hekate'.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

without the “k”, these groups overlap with the highly individualized practitioners of Chaos Magick and the post-Golden Dawn traditions of ceremonial Magick tied to Aleister Crowley and the Ordo Templi Orientis, Austin Osman Spare’s Zos-Kia tradition and the Typhonian or Ophidian synthesis of Kenneth Grant, for example.¹⁵² Although it is very difficult to ascertain whether the rituals are actually translated from textual fantasy into ritual practice, they do look beyond Anton LaVey in an attempt to reintroduce the Left-Hand Path as an esoteric pursuit with inherent power, reversing LaVey’s naturalization of the process and sanitization of content. By reintroducing Tantrism, animal sacrifice and other transgressive practices alongside an erudite recounting of demonic sigils, the dark side of Kabbalah, Egyptian gods, Sumerian demons and so on, both the danger to and the demands of the practitioner are back.

As we saw with the Church of Satan, additional ritual practice can be found outside the traditional arenas, as many esoteric (post)-Satanists on the Left Hand Path utilize music, literature and art as channels for and expressions of their esoteric pursuits. For example, both the Misanthropic Luciferian Order and the Temple of the Black Light had ties to the metal band Dissection on a personal and ideological level.¹⁵³ More loosely, the Chaos-Gnostic and Anti-Cosmic Current 218, with roots in the Swedish groups, is actively informing the lyrics and world view of various metal bands: Shaarimoth, Arckanum, Kaosritual and Watain, for example.¹⁵⁴ This affects not only the discursive message of the songs, but also the performances in relation to musicians and audience; Kaosritual ‘work[s] to channel the dark unbalanced forces of the Chaos within the Self’, a project described in Crowleyan terms.¹⁵⁵

A less partisan, but nevertheless staunch supporter of the infernal empire, Carl Abrahamsson, can work as a final example of the ideals of creativity and expressivity aligning esotericism with the romantic ideal of the artist. As a long-time member of The Church of Satan as well as the Ordo Templi Orientis and the Temple of Psychic Youth, Abrahamsson is behind publishing ventures (Looking Glass Press, Übertext), music (White Stains, Cotton Ferox, Tan Trick) and journals (Bult, Fenris Wolf). He is also an accomplished photographer, promoter of contemporary art (recently with the DVD *Back to Human Nature*) and a member of the Institute of Comparative Magico-Anthropology.¹⁵⁶ In an interview for the magazine *Black*, he lucidly outlines the connection between magic and art:

¹⁵² See Drury, *Rosaleen Norton’s Contribution*; Evans, *The History*; Sutcliffe, ‘Left-Hand Path Ritual Magick’.

¹⁵³ Boman, ‘The Wrathful Chaos’.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.; Forsberg, *Satanisk symbolbruk i norsk Black Metal-kultur*.

¹⁵⁵ Forsberg, *Satanisk symbolbruk*, 63-64.

¹⁵⁶ Tischleder, ‘Cotton Ferox Interview’.

On an intellectual level, I hope that the material presented will (...) be seeds of their own magical development. On an emotional level, I hope that the music can conjure atmospheres that are conducive to altered states of mind. Not as escapism, but as interesting and inspiring vibrations to higher explorations within.¹⁵⁷

In both cases, art is an enzyme, ‘a great non-rational way to leave seeds of change in various places and dimensions’. In his combination of Laveyan ideas of emotional resonance and productive alienation with what he calls a ‘taoist’ perspective integrating the affirmation and annihilation of the self, Abrahamsson promotes a view of Satanism which is as non-confrontational as they come:

I have absolutely no interest in confusing or provoking people. I just do what I feel I have to do. It’s strange how certain phenomena and terms are charged with such potent glamour. I will never deny the inspiration from LaVey. I will never not [sic] call myself a Satanist. But I’m not on a path where I feel I have to introduce myself with the term or shove it down people’s throats. The best thing you can do is, I think, to inspire other people to think and act for themselves.¹⁵⁸

Compared to the products sold by the black magician Dominic, we have moved a long way. Gone are the customer relation and the singular focus on getting what you want – it is replaced by a participatory ambition filling art with magical efficacy. The move from ritual to art and from the Devil to the self is complete.

5. Final remarks

The most important thing is always to integrate any wisdoms or insights into daily life. (...) what it all comes down to, at least according to me, is that you have a life and you have a will. If those aren’t united, bad things come. If they are united, on the other hand, miracles will happen. I work hard with trying to stay on the united path.¹⁵⁹

Magical practice, whether “esotericized”, secularized or artificial, can be considered an image of the Satanic culture of the Satanic milieu as a whole. It is the prototypical technology of

¹⁵⁷ Abrahamsson in Tischleder, ‘Cotton Ferox Interview’.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Carl Abrahamsson in Tischleder, ‘Cotton Ferox Interview’.

agency, a third alternative between expressive and utilitarian selves. Creation of self and manipulation of reality is combined with a detraditionalized religious mandate or grounding in human nature as either carnal or separate, in both cases producing the distinct take on life as a conscious design. Magic thus highlights the playful attitude to tradition fit for the 21st century individualist, as Hugh Urban has recently pointed out. In other words, the sinister ambiguity should be seen in the light of a distinctly *late modern* interpretation of self and agency, disembedded from the paradigmatic metaphysics of demonology and in some cases even the biological self of LaVey. This ‘magical logic of late capitalism’ is ‘endow[ing] the seemingly “profane” aspects of postmodern consumer society (...) with seemingly magical attributes (...)’.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, as Urban convincingly argues through his analysis of sexual magic, this project is based on a modern conception of the self: an emphasis on individuality and the inner core, seen through the authority of science and aiming for total liberation.¹⁶¹

As we have seen, most exemplars and spokespersons covered have one or more creative outlets. In fact, their distinct take on Satanism is mainly *practiced*, an expression of a unique vision transcending the merely utilitarian, something not entirely graspable in theoretical discourse. Whether they are transforming “subjective” or “objective” reality, they are creating environments for self-realization: magical personas, magical rituals, new surroundings and aesthetic performances and artworks sowing the germ of Satanic individuality and expressivity in those resonating with the worldview and lifestyle.

Basically, Satanic self-realization is on the one hand a natural endeavor, part of the “make-up” of the Satanist, so to speak; on the other hand, most groups turn to esoteric language and extra-scientific models such as adrenal energy or depth psychology to actually explain what is going on. In the same vein, the rituals themselves are framed in esoteric and magical terms, but also in terms of emotion, practice and embodiment. Various suggestions for reconciliation or transcendence of these opposites, real or not, are thus at the core of modern Satanism-s.

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¹⁶⁰ Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 251.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

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Die Saat des Satans: Vorstellungen von Magie im zeitgenössischen Satanismus

Aufbauend auf einer Unterscheidung zwischen „Esoterisierung“ und Säkularisierung, behandelt der Artikel Theorien und Praktiken der Magie im modernen religiösen Satanismus. Was wir heute unter selbsternannten Satanisten finden, ist nicht das absolute Böse, sondern Weltanschauungen, die auf eklektischen Aneignungen einer breiten Palette kulturellen Materials gründen, und auf dieser Basis durch Inversion, Säuberung und Kombination positive Identitäten zu errichten und zu verstärken suchen. Diese Identitäten und Weltanschauungen werden wiederum vor allem praktiziert: Durch Magie, schaffen Satanisten Umgebungen zur Selbstverwirklichung, in Form von magischen Rollen, magischen Ritualen, neuen Umwelten, ästhetischen Darbietungen und Kunstwerken. Ich beginne mit einer Untersuchung der dualen Natur magischer Praktiken: Magie wird sowohl als utilitaristisches Werkzeug und als ein Ausdruck des Selbst verstanden, und aus dem Blickwinkel von „Esoterisierung“ und Säkularisierung analysiert. Im Anschluss daran gebe ich in diesem Rahmen einen Überblick über typische anleitende Handbücher, Skripte und magische Praktiken innerhalb des „Satanischen Milieus“. Es soll gezeigt werden, wie die Versöhnung, das Zelebrieren oder Transzendieren der Gegensätze zwischen „wissenschaftlich“ und „esoterisch“, authentisch und künstlich, sowie zwischen Selbst und Umwelt, Kernpunkte des gegenwärtigen satanischen Diskurses sind.

ARTICLE IV: ART AND TRANSGRESSION

“‘Smite Him Hip and Thigh’: Satanism, Violence, and Transgression” is published in the anthology *Violence in New Religious Movements*, edited by James R. Lewis for Oxford University Press, 2011. It is based on a conference paper on transgression presented at the NTNU conference *Satanism in the Modern World*, arranged by Per Faxneld and myself, November 19-20, 2009, in Trondheim, Norway. The chapter was written in the winter and spring of 2010 as a commissioned project on Satanism and violence. It was accepted with minor revisions. The book is a thematic account of violence divided into five sections. My chapter is found in Part IV, “Rhetorics of Violence and Peaceful Denouements”, dealing with groups “that articulate discourses about militancy and violence without actually becoming violent”.

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“Smite Him Hip and Thigh”: Satanism, Violence, and Transgression

Jesper Aagaard Petersen

1. Introduction

Judging by the conversations I have had in the past, two questions always seem to lurk in the back of people’s minds whenever I mention that I study modern Satanism: “Why him?” and “Why that?” As an instance of guilt by association, I must be a Satanist or at least a pervert even though I usually wear cheerful Hawaiian shirts, not black from head to toe; I must be one of those *subversive* Satanists. In addition, depending on the person the subject matter is often deemed too trite, vulgar, or dangerous for academic study. To quote the conclusion to Chris Mathews’s recent study, Satanism is “an immature, intolerant, and hateful ideology” with “odious and repugnant” doctrines, “founded on bluster and insecurity” and appealing “to inchoate minds.” If that were not enough, it is “often little more than a soft entry point for the doctrines of neo-Nazism and neo-fascism” that should be declared “intellectually, scientifically, and morally bankrupt” (Mathews 2009, 204–205). In the same vein, David Frankfurter lumps “[m]ost forms of self-defined Satanism” together as “a self-conscious (if usually quite inarticulate) critique of social fears and their mythical representations in satanic terms” and concludes: “This social criticism, of course, is no more subtle than appropriating and parodying symbols” (Frankfurter 2006, 201).

To be fair, the connection between Satanism, Satanists and violent subversion is not grasped out of thin air. Contemporary Satanism is a complicated hodgepodge of discourses, relations, and practices relating to the appropriation of the name. First of all, there is a *mythological link*

between Satan and evil in the Christian tradition that is transmitted into the secularized Western reinterpretations of that tradition (cf. Kelly 2006; Medway 2001; Murchembled 2003; Russell 1977, 1981, 1984, 1986). Although the role of the devil is often ambiguous in mainstream society, it is not surprising that people have knee-jerk reactions to the name Satan, especially if it is connected to subcultural subversions of naturalized values not easily grasped by outsiders. Second, many *moral entrepreneurs* outside modern Satanism itself actively promote claims and scenarios connecting Satanism, crime, and violence. The discourse of “satanic panic” is recurrent, although it seldom reaches the heights of the Satanism scare and satanic ritual abuse cases of the 1980s that spiraled from a fringe existence in evangelical milieus to a mainstream presence across many sectors until discredited by a wave of popular and academic research in the 1990s (cf. Ellis 2000; Lewis and Petersen 2008; Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991; Victor 1993). Both of these discourses on Satanism play on a narrative of evil and violence related to society’s normative compass and could be termed a mythical use of Satan and Satanists.

Third and most important for the present study, antinomianism is actively cultivated by *a range of actors* calling themselves Satanists or describing their project as satanic; serial killers like Richard Ramirez, rock stars like Marilyn Manson, and subcultural celebrities like Anton LaVey all play with society’s association of Satan with evil, transgression, and violence, as do their respective fans (cf. Baddeley 2000; Mathews 2009; Moynihan and Søderlind 1998; Partridge 2005, chapter 6). While they have very different ideologies (not to mention practices), it is no wonder that Satanism and violence are conflated into one, as the typical uninformed onlooker often rolls them all into one homogenous group and takes their actions as connected and the most radical as representative. Even if taking a less naïve look at popular culture, I can understand some people’s unease when confronted with Marilyn Manson’s cultural critique and sonic assault or their stumbling over interviews with declared Satanists Boyd Rice and Nikolas Schreck on Tom Metzger’s right-wing TV show *Race and Reason* on YouTube.¹

In other words, a large gray area exists between the demonological mythologies prevalent in society and the satanic discourse of actual Satanists. Sometimes this gray area is exploited explicitly, sometimes implicitly; sometimes strategies of exclusion and inclusion solidify the boundaries between blasphemous and violent acts on one side and sanitized satanic rituals and self-development on the other. But not always. Spokespersons such as LaVey himself and “disciples” such as Manson, Schreck, and Rice are notoriously ambivalent in their play with gray, often formulated as the “third side” or “satanic alternative” to established social dichotomies. It can be very difficult to discern when it is serious and when it is irony, play, stupidity, or plain provocation, especially when moving to the fringes of the margins, so to speak, among one-man groups and nebulous networks.

Nevertheless, this chapter is a critique of easy connotations such as Mathews’s through an elaboration of my classification of modern Satanism as rationalist,

esoteric, and reactive in a “satanic milieu” (Petersen 2005, 2009a, 2009b), conceptualized along the same lines as the cultic milieu of Colin Campbell (Campbell 1972). Hence it is a sociological entity of actors in intermediate social spaces that are anchored in discursive networks and driven by a common “ideology of seekership” rather than a sense of belonging to one particular group. By analyzing a choice of discourses on Satanism and violence, I expand on the trait of antinomianism or nonconformity through the concept of transgression, an expansion with theoretical consequences for the first and most general feature, self-religion. Transgression is in fact a common denominator of the three Satanisms of my typology, but it is strategically dissimilar *in practice*; it is articulated and deployed differently, a point that should be related to Olav Hammer’s understanding of structurally conservative and structurally radical disembedding processes (Hammer 2001a, 2001b; Petersen 2009a) and the related conception of sanitization of practices (Urban 1995). For example, Anton LaVey’s understanding of magical transgression in the ritual chamber is a sanitized and secularized version of more radical practices of transgression that are prevalent in the esoteric milieu, in various reactive subcultures such as Black Metal masculinity culture and indeed in segments of the Church of Satan’s “constituency” itself.

Things are thus seldom what they seem in this milieu, and any blanket reduction, while strengthening polemics, makes for bad sociology. On the one hand it is important to *discern* the actual violence of serial killers, neofascists, and marginalized teens using Satanism as an alibi (a demonological use of violence and transgression that in essence is confirming social mores) from the “symbolic violence,” “aesthetic terrorism,” or “transformational psychodrama” that satanic groups and individuals use to challenge the self-evident and decondition the self. On the other hand, it is significant to *acknowledge* the similarities and analyze the specific inclusion and exclusion processes in the territory of the satanic milieu. These relate to pathways to and from popular culture and complicated socialization processes that are as determined by esoteric practices as by broader religious and societal trends such as conspiracy theories, radical politics, and avant-garde art (cf. Dyrendal 2008; Dyrendal 2008). How different formulations of Satanism articulate transgression, self, and society can say a lot about the practices actually used—popularly speaking, where they place themselves on LaVey’s scale of “nine parts social respectability to one part outrage” (Barton 1990, 16; cf. Alfred 1976, 187; Mathews 2009, 145, 166–67).

2. Historical Violence and Mythical Realities

*We are fuelled by Satan/Yes we’re schooled by Satan/Fuelled by Satan!
Writin’ those tasty riffs/just as fast as we can./Schooled by Satan!
(Tenacious D, “Explosivo”)*

Before tackling the intricacies of transgression within the satanic milieu, I find it prudent to step back and systematically examine the extant depictions of “satanic” violence available in cultural narratives. Broadly speaking, Satanism, transgression, and violence are linked through three interfaces today: the alleged violence of mythical Satanism, the actual violence of ostensive acts, and the symbolic violence of religious Satanism.

A. Mythical Violence and “Satanists”: The Christian or Demonological Model

An entire library can be filled with sources to and studies of moral panics, folk devils, and social imaginations of deviant violence.² The violent transgressions associated with Satanists in contemporary Satanism scares are many and quite colorful; we might call them “atrocious catalogues” in line with the “atrocious tales” of David Bromley and Anson Shupe (e.g., Bromley and Shupe 1981). Ritually, blood, excrement, and other substances abound; sacrifices, cannibalism, and various perverse (often sexually charged) acts are practiced, frequently involving children as victims; and a *mélange* of religious and “occult” trappings are reported:

I was carried to the toolbench where gibberish was spoken by the four robed adults around me. Rather than water sprinkled, a small, black, wriggling cocker spaniel was held over me and disemboweled with a dagger-like instrument . . . the long white taper was lit and ceremoniously held over me, wax dripping carefully onto each of my nipples. It was then inserted, still lit, into my vagina. In this way I was welcomed into the faith. (Anne Hart, “A Survivor’s Account,” quoted in Frankfurter 2001, 357–58).

Socially, satanic crime networks of the rich and influential wield political, legal, and media power in vast conspiracies; the unsuspecting are lured through fronts such as legal satanic churches, daycare centers, and popular culture into prostitution, drug abuse, pornography, or “cultism”; mass sacrifices are covered up with mobile crematoria; commercials, corporate logos, children’s television, and rock music are infused with satanic messages, and so on:

I have been told it is a common occurrence for these groups to kidnap their victims (usually infants and young children) from hospitals, orphanages, shopping centers and off the streets. I have been informed that Satanists have been successful in their attempts to influence the Boy Scouts. I can say that there is a network of these people across the country who are very active, they have their own rest and relaxation farm, they are in contact with each other, it ties in loosely to the drug

operation, it ties into motorcycle gangs and it goes on and on. (Ted Gunderson, quoted in Jenkins 2004, 222).

These atrocity catalogues are most explicit in evangelical material such as Bob Larson’s *Satanism: The Seduction of America’s Youth* (1989), but narratives of evil do not have to be embedded in religious contexts; the complex can be readily secularized from an evangelical to a psychiatric or legal framework without losing the quality of totality, as with Michelle Smith and Laurence Pazder’s *Michelle Remembers* (1980) and Lauren Stratford’s *Satan’s Underground* (1988). In addition, they are distributed in and strengthened by popular culture: Television talk shows and “documentaries,” most notably Geraldo Rivera’s “Devil Worship: Exposing Satan’s Underground” (1988); Dennis Wheatley’s novels and the Hammer film adaptations; the unholy trinity of *Rosemary’s Baby* (1968), *The Exorcist* (1973), and *The Omen* (1976), with scores of sequels; Alan Parker’s *Angel Heart* (1987), which highlights the connection to exotic voodoo stretching back to colonial times through W. Seabrook’s *Magic Island* (1929) and H. P. Lovecraft’s backwater swamp cultists (with their “tom-tom poundings”); *Evilspeak* (1981), which incorporates computers and flesh-eating pigs into the time-proven mold, and so on.³ Not all of these products portray Satanists explicitly, but all of them partake in the telling of atrocities of a “satanic” nature (Frankfurter 2006, 65, 84; Jenkins 2004, 228–32; Partridge 2005, chapter 6).

From a social scientific standpoint, these demonological narratives stem from political, social, and religious articulations of a perceived “problem” in periods of heightened anxiety (Richardson, Best, and Bromley 1991) and seem to reinforce boundaries between neighbors or actualize latent fissures in a collective as a solution (cf. Appadurai 1996; Lincoln 1989). Jews, Christians, Catholics, Communists, Masons, Witches, white slavery rings, pedophiles, and other “others,” whether these groups actually exist or not, have been used to make manifest moral threats and mobilize to the cause of defeating the danger. While the cognitive, narrative, and social mechanisms seem to be universal in time and space (e.g., Frankfurter 2006; Stevens 1991; cf. Lewis and Petersen 2008, part 2), the discourse of a secret conspiracy of Satanists that grows in Christian regions seems to be particularly paradigmatic as they are allied with the supreme source of evil and are thus monstrous practitioners of absolute transgression (Frankfurter 2006; Harvey 2009; Smoczynski 2009).

Secret satanic conspiracies do not exist, and atrocities are usually committed in the name of cleansing evil rather than doing it. However, as David Frankfurter has convincingly argued, these “Satanists” are mythical elements in “performances of evil” that reflects society through inversion and subversion. So, the perversions and violence reported in satanic ritual abuse cases and broader “occult panics” have a mythical existence; that is, they exist as culturally framed scripts that have formative power. Groups can act as if they exist, making them discursively real (Frankfurter 2006, 169, 205; cf. Jenkins 2004). While not Satanism as such, Frankfurter calls these social acts mimetic and divides them into direct and indirect

mimesis, highlighting the difference between people actually claiming to be witches, Satanists or demons (an enacting) and the experts on and victims of these conspiracies telling us about them or the hunters eradicating them (an acting as if). Both types are framed by performances that ritualize purification, consequently reasserting social values through the negotiation of evil (Frankfurter 2006, chapter 5). This takes us into the realm of ostensive violence.

B. Ostensive Violence and Reactive Satanists: Appropriating “Dark Occulture”

Contrary to the mythological violence of indirect mimetic performance, ostensive violence does exist outside cultural narratives, as both adolescents and marginalized, confused individuals play with the atrocity catalogues and enact the image of Satanists in popular culture and dark “occulture” (Partridge 2004, 2005). These self-declared Satanists are thus necessarily *reactive*. Ostension refers to “legends as behavior,” here reflexive performance of Christian mythology as direct mimesis, which in turn becomes enrolled in social negotiations of Satanism through pseudo- and quasi ostension or impersonation and mistaken attribution (Ellis 1991, 281ff; cf. Frankfurter 2006, 176–77). Nonetheless, a line must be drawn between the criminal violence “legitimized” through references to Satan and the relatively benign oppositional violence of legend tripping and metal subcultures, for example.

Regarding criminal violence, many examples spring to mind. Charles Manson’s Family, for one, obviously integrated hard crime and what seems like a very idiosyncratic and flexible ideology appropriated from popular culture (such as the Beatles), the cultic milieu (the Process Church, LaVey’s Church of Satan, Hubbard’s Scientology), hippy culture (freak-outs and drug use), and apocalyptic conspiracy culture (race war, war on the system) (Lachman 2001; Lyons 1988). Ostension of Christian and occult discourse on evil certainly played a part, but to create a category of “acid-culture eclectic Satanists” or the like to describe the acts of Manson and his followers seems to me to stretch Satanism too far (Truzzi 1974). The Tate–La Bianca murders are not satanic; if anything, they are a radicalized expression of hippy counterculture and the ever-present war on the “fascist” establishment. As Philip Jenkins succinctly states:

[W]e should be very cautious about accepting such claims. By definition, multiple killers are not normal people, and they might have odd motivations for their acts. . . . These [murders attributed to divine command] were the work of disturbed individuals whose psychiatric conditions chanced to be expressed in the language and rhetoric of a belief system widespread in their social background. (Jenkins 2004, 237)

The same can be said of teenage murderers such as Sean Sellers, adult killers such as Richard Ramirez, or the small, hardened core of Norwegian black metal vandals

such as Varg Vikernes (the famous “Count Grishnackh”) and Bård Eithun (Baddeley 2000, 137–39; Moynihan and Söderlind 1998, chapter 7). Although an ostension of cultural scripts, killing friends, family, or complete strangers, dabbling in Nazism, or setting medieval churches on fire have very little resonance even within their own social background, and the personal Satanism adopted is an expression rather than a cause of their sociopathic tendencies.

A wide gulf separates violent crime and the transgressions of reactive young Satanists to proper behavior, assessments of cult cops notwithstanding. David Frankfurter denotes this specific modern variant of direct mimesis as parodic (Frankfurter 2006 198–203), a youthful rebellion “plucking” symbols from “a more grotesque cultural reservoir” (199). Their use of the monstrous, morbid, violent, and satanic is necessarily reactive to society, dependent on group dynamics, and motivated by “psychological impotence and social deviance,” but it is also playful, both as a mocking of social expectations and as “experiments with evil” (201). As I said earlier, their acts are usually benign, although provocative: Through aesthetic choices they signal a distance from mainstream style (Lowney 1995); sometimes they stray into vandalism of cemeteries or public buildings, sometimes they smoke pot, drink alcohol, and have sex, and sometimes they play on social conceptions of danger in legend tripping, playing with the “occult,” or enacting “Satanism” (Ellis 1991, 2000, 2004).⁴ Most often this is “satanic tourism” as “identity work” (Fine and Victor 1994).

Sometimes they gain a level of social coherence, as with the black metal scene and its combination of inverted Christianity, nature worship, and violent masculinity (Dyrendal 2008; Moynihan and Söderlind 1998; Mørk 2009); aside from the crimes committed by a small minority, violence usually takes a sonic form, with blast beats on grotesquely distorted guitars, growling or shrieking vocals, and fast-paced drums. Both the performances and lyrics support the satanic style, with pyrotechnics, inverted crucifixes, and animal carcasses on stage to underscore the violent message (at least in the old days). Gry Mørk has described black metal’s “worship of darkness” as an example of “creative violence,” parallel to similar projects such as David Fincher’s movie *Fight Club* (1999), where existential issues of gender identity, alienation, and self-fulfillment interact with cultural critique. Accordingly violence assumes “formative, healing, structuring . . . and/or balancing functions . . . for the individual”—it is progressive (Mørk 2009, 172–73; cf. Kolnar 2003).

Keith Kahn-Harris’s study of extreme metal (Kahn-Harris 2007) provides another useful analytical framework for understanding the use of violence and Satanism through transgression, both as a negotiation of “transgressive” and “mundane subcultural capital” and as “reflexive anti-reflexivity” or “knowing better but deciding not to know” (145). Regarding capital, the use of ostensive violence through enacting cultural scripts must be understood as an interaction between members of the scene and the wider public; transgression thus becomes a way of gaining status by asserting individuality (Kahn-Harris 2007, chapter 6). “Reflexive

anti-reflexivity,” while primarily used to understand the ironic play with radical politics, can then be said to be constitutive of the *ambiguous* use of cultural others to express the values of the scene (Kahn-Harris 2007, chapter 7).

This combination of dark occulture and creative violence as direct mimesis is actually quite established as cultural practice, as Evelyn Lord’s historical study of hellfire clubs can demonstrate (Lord 2008). The earliest clubs were direct and indirect mimetic performances of violence—directly, as when young aristocrats such as John Wilmot, second Earl of Rochester and his Ballers (or Bawlers) got into fights, threw bottles of urine on passersby, imported Dutch leather dildoes, or performed other transgressions as “an extension and inversion of [official] street theatre . . . creating violence instead of spectacle” (Lord 2008, 5; cf. 8, 11, 33), and indirectly, as when moral panic gripped early eighteenth-century London because of the mythical Mohocks “that play the Devil about town every night, slit people’s noses and beat them” (Jonathan Swift, quoted in Lord 2008, 30). Again, what is a cultural script (here the fear of primitive violence and savages) can be enacted, which then again provides the scripts with further elaboration. The same can be said of the later blasphemous clubs, such as the Duke of Wharton’s Hellfire Club (1721–1722) and the more classicist-paganist sexuality clubs epitomized by Francis Dashwood’s Medmenham Friars (1751).

What is true of aristocrats in Enlightenment Britain might not be so for adolescents today. Much of the essentializing “history of antimorality” found in studies of Satanism (e.g., Ashe 2003; Lachman 2001) makes the mistake of seeing multiple expressions of antinomianism as one reified tradition (imitating emic Christian or satanic historiographies). Nevertheless, the various stages of clubs in Lord’s study do give us a historical foundation of understanding the uses of violence, blasphemy, and sexuality in expressions of gender and identity if we are attentive to the historical and social differences in context. In this sense, libertine self-dramatizations, whether public or private, point back to the transgressions of carnival grotesques and forward to reactive “satanic” violence of middle-class teenage “scenes.”

Reactive Satanism rarely distances itself from inverse Christianity and popular conceptions of Satan and Satanists but is actually an appropriation of these stereotypes in the construction of individual and collective identity (Schmidt 2003). Nevertheless, we should acknowledge some complexity here: It is always an appropriation; it is not a passive reception devoid of any possibility of or interest in interpretation and combination. Indeed, it can be deeply meaningful, whether a phase or a longer engagement, and is not *necessarily* criminal or shallow (Lowney 1995; Mørk 2009). Although ostensive violence such as that found in reactive expressions of Satanism can be explained by psychological or social factors (as with David Frankfurter earlier), it is useful to understand the inner workings of the different uses to which these practices are put. Whereas they sometimes spring from “impotence” or “deviance,” they just as often enact cultural scripts in an ironic or playful manner. When combined with a systematic discourse on Satanism and transgression, the ostensive acts of young adults shade into the next category of “symbolic” or “aesthetic” violence.

*C. Symbolic Violence and Modern Religious Satanists:
Self-Religion and the Third Alternative*

In opposition to both mythical and reactive Satanism, modern religious Satanism is a distinctive phenomenon in the satanic milieu fueled by self-religion (Heelas 1982, 1996), as well as the practice of antinomianism, a positive appropriation of a cluster of Satan-related words and a formulated ideological genealogy (Petersen 2009a, 7–10). Satan is understood as a symbol of oneself, a model of practice, or a principle or force not to be worshipped but to be emulated and understood. This is a structurally radical use of a disembedded figure of Satan in identity construction, only superficially resembling the Christian devil and more in line with Romantic reappraisals (Petersen 2009a, 10–14). The locus of authority is the self, and the project is one of liberation or empowerment even though the conflict between self and society and the “authentic human” is articulated in a variety of ways (Dyrendal 2009).

In my typology I outline two discrete interpretations (Petersen 2009a, 7). *Rationalist Satanism* is an atheistic and philosophical Satanism often associated with Anton LaVey and the Church of Satan, although it has developed beyond the specific formulations found there (barring names such as “LaVeyan Satanism”). Nevertheless, all acknowledge their roots in LaVey’s work and the practice of explicitly using Satan as a symbol for the human condition as a carnal, emotional, and rational being. Hence, Satan is an ideal figure of adversarial practice, the practice of the accuser, and a name for the self that expresses oneself rather than something or someone else (e.g., LaVey 1969). This materialistic outlook is expressed in the goals of “rational self-interest” and “indulgence,” and support is found in rationalist, secular, and individualist arguments based on science, philosophy, and the arts (cf. Petersen 2009b, 226–34).

Conversely, *esoteric Satanism* is a more mystical and initiatory formulation of Satanism as antinomian self-deification (e.g., Flowers 1997). Thus, Satan is associated with traditional left-hand path conceptions of magical practices and mystical experiences, whether considered a literal entity or a symbolic being (Granhölm 2009; Sutcliffe 1996). The gnostic or esoteric outlook is supported by ritual experience, widespread syncretism, and scientism; appeals to and appropriations of exotic magical systems such as tantric practices, Aleister Crowley’s Thelema, and chaos magick give this type of Satanism a more prototypical esoteric character (cf. Petersen 2009b, 234–39).

How do these religious Satanists articulate and perform violence? At least two trajectories are possible: on the one hand the pragmatic analysis of violence as a *natural necessity* and on the other the symbolic and aesthetic interpretation of violence and blasphemy as *performative transgression*. In both senses, violence must be seen through the emic scripts of modern Satanism itself. In the following I focus on rationalist Satanism, but there is significant subcultural overlap as the practices and arguments are frequently the same, although they are legitimized differently.

In the online text “Satanism and Violence,” Vexen Crabtree, a prolific Internet Satanist of rationalist persuasion, describes violence as a natural given that a Satanist must understand and accept (Crabtree, “violence”). The human species is confronted with violence in both natural and cultural senses and should therefore be willing and able to give back; hence the Satanist is ideally trained in martial arts or “combat science” to be “emotionally and physically capable of dealing with antagonizers” and is willing to support wars to protect “the developed world.” This is tied to concepts of self-preservation and “responsibility to the responsible” that ultimately rest on Anton LaVey’s analysis of social Darwinism and retributive justice—“man is just another animal” (LaVey 1969, 25; 1992, 93–94). Crabtree’s rationalist Satanism seems to posit the Satanist not only as an agent of necessary violence but also as an intelligent analyst of the state of affairs that reserves violence to proper situations: “The Satanist may never engage in violence . . . [but a]s a religion of the Earth, Satanism in the name of intelligence and responsibility requires us to make ourselves capable of physically defending both ourselves and what we consider to be good” (Crabtree, “violence”).

From an impressionistic view of the satanic milieu (such as message board discussions and informal conversations), this seems to be a standard ethical view of most religious Satanists (as well as common sense). Satanism is about life, self-expression, and balance in alignment with nature:

Satanism has been thought of as being synonymous with cruelty and brutality. This is so only because people are afraid to face the truth—and the truth is that human beings are not all benign or all loving. Just because the Satanist admits he is capable of both love and hate, he is considered hateful. On the contrary, because he is able to give vent to his hatred through ritualized expression, he is far more capable of love—the deepest kind of love. (LaVey 1969, 65)

Balance is indeed a core concept. In a rationalized reorientation of the unification of opposites in Western esotericism and dialectical thought, LaVey offers a satanic *third* perspective and solution to all aspects of life—ontology, epistemology, anthropology, aesthetics, ethics, and religion. As presented in an analysis of the material (or “inverted”) pentagram in “The Third Side: The Uncomfortable Alternative” (LaVey 1998, 29–33), “the essence of Satanism is in the answers and solutions evoked by the THIRD side—the lower point representing the sword plunged into the earth, the beard of wisdom seen on the goat of the inverted star” (LaVey 1998, 30). He continues: “This central lowest point represents a rational resolution to the established but often extraneous opposing premises symbolized by the lateral two points” (LaVey 1998, 32). As a third alternative to love and hate, LaVey mentions venting hatred through “ritualized expression,” pointing to the second trajectory of symbolic violence, which is tied up with ritual practice. As we will see, all material can be appropriated in and reframed by this project, from

Nazi occultism and fascist aesthetics to dark occulture and popular stereotypes of anti-Christianity.

In what is dubbed “phase-one Satanism” (Barton 1990, 15–16, 29, 68, 119, 123) of the early Church of Satan (roughly 1966–1972), marked anti-Christianity was enacted in public and private blasphemies without slipping into reactive Satanism as such (although ostension and mimesis were definitely present) (Alfred 1976; Barton 1990; Moody 1974). The performances balanced between positive empowering ceremonies such as a wedding, a baptism, and a burial and more “cathartic” rituals such as Black Masses. After 1972, rituals were privatized as the church reoriented itself to be a forum or cabal for “productive aliens” who “use their alienation” to practice what they preach (Barton 1990, 30), effectively strengthening the elitist aspect of rationalist antinomianism. However, “phase-one Satanism” remains in the ritual practices found in the literature, ready to be reactivated in new contexts.

For example, “The Book of Satan” in *The Satanic Bible* is a performance “clearing the air”; the violent rhetoric of the text is a “diatribe” of “diabolical indignation” praising the strong, the doubting of certainties, the law of the jungle, and the material world, ending with a blessing of the antithesis to Christian morality (LaVey 1969, 27–35). The rest of *The Satanic Bible* is a practical “implementation” of these statements in considerably less violent terms, first in intellectual prose (“The Book of Lucifer”) and second in magical practice (“The Book of Belial” and “Leviathan”). In rituals such as the “Black Mass” (LaVey 1969, 99–105; 1972, 31–60) and the “Invocation Employed towards the Conjunction of Destruction” (LaVey 1969, 114–18, 149–50), violence is definitely present, but it is framed through the ritual space as an “intellectual decompression chamber”: “The formalized beginning and end of the ceremony acts as a dogmatic, anti-intellectual device, the purpose of which is to disassociate the activities and frame of reference of the outside world from that of the ritual chamber, where the whole will must be employed” (LaVey 1969, 120). Similarly, the “Shibboleth” ritual (Moody 1974, 378–79; cf. Aquino 2009, 458, quoting from LaVey’s original “Satanic Monograph”) is a symbolic “psychodrama” to rid the participants of perplexing persons or types through a symbolic role playing and the subsequent ritual “killing” of them (by selling their soul to the devil [Aquino 2009, 458]).

As such, blasphemy (of all conventions) and human “sacrifice” (through curses and role playing [LaVey 1969, 87–90]) are appropriated as symbolic acts. Inspired by Hugh Urban’s analysis of the Kapalikas, we could call this a sanitization of practices; the bloody violence of Vedic ritual is “sanitized” in the brahminical tradition, a process explaining the complicated myths surrounding early tantric mythology (Urban 1995, 70). As such, rationalist Satanism can be understood as a *sanitized* reframing of mythological and reactive scripts, as well as a secularized version of esoteric Satanism, sharing an appeal to antinomianism “that has more to do with the overcoming of one’s own inhibitions and limitations, which are seen as bound up with socialisation, than with any ill-conceived anarchism” (Sutcliffe 1996, 111).

This sanitization of blasphemy and violence is very influential in the satanic milieu. Violence and transgression become tools for identity work, but they do so in a sense that twists the ostensive performances described earlier. Understood along the lines of Michel Foucault's "hermeneutics" or "technologies of the self" (Carrette 2000; Foucault 1999; Martin, Gutman, and Hutton 1988), Satanism becomes the *practice* of Satan as an adversarial project in an emic sense, a positive affirmation of self through negative deconditioning rather than the *belief* in or *impersonation* of Satan. To understand this point, we have to understand transgression.

3. Satanism and Transgression: A Provisional Analytics

*Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil. (Ephesians 4: 26–27)*⁵

Transgression can be found in many different contexts: political, ethical/normative, anthropological, and philosophical. As outlined in various introductions to the subject, the concept has shifted from the binaries of a legal and moral context over an anthropological systemic approach to a poststructural disruption (Jenks 2003; Jervis 1999; Julius 2002; Taussig 1998). Generally, poststructural models question the normativity of the moral framework of good and evil, the philosophical framework of high and low transgression, and the rigidities of structural coding. As described by George Bataille and later Michel Foucault, what is important is not the act itself but the play around the limit. In the words of Hugh Urban:

[I]ts power lies in the dialectic or play (*le jeu*) between taboo and transgression, sanctity and sacrilege, through which on[e] systematically constructs and then oversteps all laws. . . . "The prohibition is there to be violated"; for it is the experience of overstepping limits that brings the blissful sense of continuity and communion with the other. (Urban 2003, 301, quoting from Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 1986)

Unfortunately, these models do not transcend the ethnocentric core of philosophy. Transgression is the play of norm and other that simultaneously shows and supersedes the limit; there is thus ambivalence in Bataille's work, as well as in the reception by Foucault as to whether transgression ultimately *transcends* or *confirms* what is transgressed (Bataille 1985; Foucault 1977). It is one thing that the limit or norm is needed *in order* to transgress—that is a logical proposition; it is something entirely different whether the goal lies in mystical, ineffable, and apophatic experiences, as with Bataille, or in normative interrogation, as at least some of Foucault's arguments indicate (cf. Jenks 2003).

The consequence of this ambivalence is that inheritors of this model, similar to established anthropological models such as M. Gluckman’s “rites of reversal,” V. Turner’s “liminality”, and even M. Bakhtin’s “temporary liberation” (Bakhtin 1984; cf. Stallybrass and White 1986; Taussig 1998) axiomatically assume that transgressor, transgressed, and outside observer all belong to the same normative and epistemic framework or ideological formation. An example could be the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001, which Chris Jenks sees as the *ultimate* transgression, one that actually confirms the norm by totally transcending it. A concrete expression of that confirmation is the coming together of world leaders and peoples of the free world in combating the threat of terrorism (Jenks 2003, 1–3). He concludes:

To transgress is to go beyond the bounds or limits set by a commandment or law of convention, it is to violate or infringe. But to transgress is also more than this, it is to announce and even laudate the commandment, the law or the convention. Transgression is a deeply reflexive act of denial and affirmation. (Jenks 2003, 2; cf. 7–9)

What Jenks obviously neglects is the hermeneutic framework of the terrorists themselves; they see these acts as a holy duty inasmuch as our moral order is patently false (Lincoln 2006). Murder might be wrong, but not if the cause is right—and it is not transgression at all if the end is justifiable. What Jenks does is to provide an unnecessarily monological understanding of something that is inherently polyvocal.

Thus, all transgression is either ultimately impossible or necessarily part of the system itself as a simultaneous surpassing and confirmation of the norm, as it is evaluated from within the system and from the categories of the system itself. Translated into the categories of the present discussion, all Satanism is necessarily anti-Christian because Satanism is a denial of Christianity. When stated this way, it is clear that this understanding of transgression is too simple. We need an etic level of explanation, an anthropological reflexivity to correct this “emic” theorizing. From the viewpoint of historical-critical analysis there is good sense in assuming either that what the system, the norm, or indeed society judges as transgressive not *necessarily* seems that way from the viewpoint of the transgressor or that this judgment call seems like an irrelevant after-effect (as with September 11). Transgression must be understood along polyvocal lines with multiple discursive positions. I propose a simple heuristic dichotomy of transgression *from* and transgression *to*.

Transgression *from*, or reactive transgression, should be understood as the systemic transgression outlined earlier, a simultaneous confirmation-in-transgression. Violent black metal antics, excesses of various hellfire clubs, ostension of Christian scripts, and other reactive Satanisms actually confirm Christianity as a normative system with their practices. Transgression *to*, on the other hand, must be understood through its own premises of transgression—it is a transgression of

something, of course, but with a goal entirely outside the normative system so transgressed. Most elaborated rationalist and esoteric Satanisms and indeed modern left-hand path practices as a whole are not framed by Christianity as much as by an external ideology of practice that demands transgression for the sake of the self (Flowers 1997; Granholm 2009). These types of Satanism cannot be understood as a structural transgression-as-confirmation of Christianity's normative framework that is just another normative Christianity;⁶ they must be analyzed as practices of deconditioning to attain something else, something more, whether defined as liberation, gnosis, empowerment, or realization, to name a few goals. This could be seen in light of Hugh Urban's astute description of classical Tantra as built upon an elitist double norm (Urban 2003, 278f, 303–304). He quotes Douglas Brooks:

Tantrism . . . does not intend to be revolutionary in the sense of establishing a new structure of social egalitarianism . . . it opens its doors only to a few who . . . seek to distinguish and empower themselves.
(Brooks in Urban 2003, 278n23)

Transgression is a necessary means of attaining worldly power while simultaneously attaining liberation, something only a few can do because of the countersystemic character of this project. The rest of us are limited to (anti)systemic acts (Urban 2003, 304). Transgression *from* plays with the norm as both means and end, while transgression *to* constructs a new affirmative space where the norm is but a means to a new end. Satanic transgression is thus context dependent.

When it comes to the construction of tradition, that is, the genealogical discourses prevalent in the satanic milieu, it is both an ideological context and a practical act. Hence, the individual biography and the collective ethos are related to “historical metaphors and mythical realities” (Sahlins 1981) that facilitate a satanic practice. This returns us to the point of sanitization of violence discussed earlier, as it is obvious that the mutual exclusion of, for example, black metal from a rationalist discourse and Anton LaVey from a radically reactive genealogy points to different traditions of excess; where reactive Satanism is directly related to the negotiation of masculinity and subversive spectacle found in theater metaphor, there is no explicit *ideology* of transgression, only an agreement on opposition. On the other hand, this ostensive practice is more of an ambiguous “other” in the traditions constructed by rationalist and esoteric Satanists as it is not the opposition in itself but the non-symbolic direction it takes that is judged wrong.

It is evident that there is a definite congruence of my Satanism typology and the categories of transgression from and to. Although both can be found in rationalist and esoteric groups, reactive Satanism necessarily involves transgression from; when it is not, it is one of the other two types. This is as much due to mutual exclusion processes as a process of sanitization not in time but in space; one of the conditions set when moving from reactive to religious Satanism is indeed the distancing

of explicit violence and transgression *from* something. This is easier said than done, however, as we will see.

4. Art from Marginality, Art as Marginality?

Q: “*God Hates Us All*,” How does that fit in? A: *God doesn’t hate. But it’s a great fucking title* (Tom Araya (Slayer) in S. Dunn’s documentary *Metal: A Headbanger’s Journey*, 2005)

Art That Kills: A Panoramic Portrait of Aesthetic Terrorism 1984–2001 by George Petros (2007) is an example of the “play with gray” seen in the combination of second-generation rationalist Satanism and more expressive violent forms of post-punk, which can be contrasted with the sanitization strategies previously discussed. This book constructs both an *ideological* transgressive tradition with a noteworthy element of Satanism in it (the content: images, text, interviews, manifestos, etc.) and an actual *articulation* of transgressive practice (the book itself and the individual projects described). In it, significant links between popular art, art theory, esotericism, and Satanism are proposed that illuminate the fine lines between symbolic and ostensive violence.

“Aesthetic terrorism” is the guiding metaphor for this project and is defined as “[u]sing the element of surprise through the usage of past clichés, knowledge and ‘home truths’ being flung out of joint, and therefore used as a weapon or subversive force” (J. G. Thidwell 1984, quoted in Petros 2007, 7). It is associated with John Aes-Nihil’s “aesthetic nihilism,” an “art that is so extreme it verges on destruction. It’s a way of reacting to society. It is a reaction against mass culture by doing a vicious satire of it. It’s extreme devotion to the creation of extremely intense art” (John Aes-Nihil, quoted in Petros 2007, 132–33). We can learn a lot from the self-presentation of the book:

“Art That Kills” examines the point where art meets crime. The book documents a *diabolical* era, 1984–2001. It chronicles the evolution of a *new aesthetic movement*, a terrifying fringe of Underground Art where enlightenment and depravity combined. Murder, rape, torture, pedophilia, cannibalism, drugs, sedition, racism and blasphemy mixed with literature, history, politics, news, movies, TV, punk rock, philosophy and science. The book profiles a *pantheon* of dissidents and deviants, presents excerpts from their work, re-lives their crimes, and attempts to analyze an elusive era. The scene described herein is essentially the “*second generation*” of American Underground Art (the “*first generation*” ran from ’66 through the ’70s). All varieties of taboos and criminal advocacy found confluence, beyond “confrontation” or

“shock.” Pure sadism drove it. Sexual psychosis flavored it. Frustration with politics, big business and mass entertainment fueled it. . . . (from the Amazon promo; my emphases)⁷

Basically, it looks like a huge collection of fanzine material loosely structured in the categories of “precursors,” “soundtrack to 1984,” “soundtrack to 1994,” “mags and ’zines” and “gallery of transgression”; between these categories are assorted biographies of luminaries in the “movement.” Self-declared Satanists included in this genealogy of aesthetic terrorism include Nick Bougas, Shane Bugbee, Peter H. Gilmore, Anton S. LaVey, Marilyn Manson, Michael Moynihan, Adam Parfrey, Boyd Rice, Nikolas and Zeena Schreck, Stanton LaVey, and Szadora. Esoteric luminaries include Kenneth Anger and Genesis P-Orridge, both of which have distinct cross-over presences between avant-garde art scenes and the left-hand path and satanic milieus.

And that is exactly my point. Through the double move of constructing a tradition, indeed a “new aesthetic movement” in a generational and geographical perspective (Petros 2007, 9) while simultaneously articulating a transgressive program, a link is forged between the ideology of rationalist Satanism and the expressivism of postpunk. They are effectively lending authority to each other and supplying the necessary legitimacy in the two fields. Although I can find little in common between, for example, Anton LaVey and G. G. Allin, they are both recruited into the genealogy of aesthetic terrorism in a move similar to Anton LaVey and Peter Gilmore’s identification of “de facto Satanists” (e.g., LaVey 1969, 104). They are both in opposition; it matters less to what. Further, but in contrast to that, it is no coincidence that Anton LaVey appears right at the start as the second precursor (alongside W. Burroughs, K. Anger, and C. Manson), while grandson Stanton LaVey and Szadora are the very last entries in the book (just after M. Manson) (Petros 2007, 14–20, 312–17, respectively). A fruitful alliance is forged between two vanguards—an “alien elite” of productive Satanists on one hand and the ultimate “misfits,” the transgressors of the American punk scene, on the other. The salient factor is not the specific transgressions but the general nonconformist lifestyle and bohemianism exemplified by both.⁸

This linkage not without problems, of course. I believe LaVey would raise an eyebrow or two at the amount of drugs taken (overdose seems like a typical way to go), and the law-and-order mentality of the Church of Satan has a hard time sanitizing “murder, rape, torture, pedophilia, cannibalism, drugs, sedition, racism, and blasphemy.” Indeed, the book is an individual project and not a total statement of the satanic milieu, rationalist Satanism, or even the second-generation Satanists within the Church of Satan, which seem to be core constituents of the book (such as Peter Gilmore, Boyd Rice, Zeena Schreck, and Nikolas Schreck).

Rather than seeing this book as a transparent source of Satanism or postpunk, I suggest looking at it as an artifact or a monument exemplifying the link between aesthetics and religion. Content-wise, the violence and perversion often mimics the

reactive transgressions of ostensive Satanism, but they are now discursively integrated in an avant-garde *aesthetics*. Indeed, the very existence of the book is an analysis, one step away from the raw performance of postpunk. It is an intellectualization or sanitization after the fact. That doesn't necessarily take away its shock value, but it may lead us to broaden the scope to the links between art and transgression on a more general level.

First of all, it might be useful to compare the notion of aesthetic terrorism with similar tactics in the neo-avant-garde, especially the Situationist International. Founded in 1957 to reawaken the radical potential of dada and surrealism, its influence has been wide. In many ways, the critique of *récupération*, or co-optation by the capitalist mainstream, and the resultant tactic of *détournement*, or subversive appropriation of artistic and mass cultural commodities, are parallel to both the general stance of rationalist Satanism and the punk movement. In fact, some critics see punk rock as an experiment in practical situationism later recuperated by the mainstream (Solvang 1995; cf. Duguid 1995).⁹ Although allied to Marxism and later the radical Left, their project is almost prototypical to the general stance of the avant-garde in conflict with both mass culture and high culture. It would be safe to say that this very persistent myth of “counterculture” is one link between Satanism, punk, and the avant-garde (cf. Heath and Potter 2005).

The use of postpunk and violent iconography and discourse gives the aesthetic and satanic milieus a common discursive ground that activates conformity as the common enemy. At the same time, the use of the floating signifier “Satan” is in itself a transgressive practice used to distinguish Satanists and “poseurs” and a strategy to reveal tacit assumptions in others. This is in turn related to the shift in the use of Satan as an emblem of the self, a shift that shows a structurally radical use of Satan today (Hammer 2001b, 33; Petersen 2009a, 10–14). Satan and Satanism are no longer primarily associated with the structurally conservative Christian context (as an evil entity) except when transgressing this very context as a practical intervention. In the ideological sense, a new romantic and self-religious hermeneutics of “purely personal drama of salvation and redemption to be acted out within the confines of the self” (a “biodicy”) has replaced the Christian “theodicy” (Campbell 1987, 182). Today this drama can be acted out through a variety of means—aesthetics, consumption, and self-religion among them.¹⁰

Second, following that angle we might ask ourselves whether Foucault and Bataille indeed have a point with regard to Satanism as transgression; the problem lies in the traditional equation of Satanism and anti-Christianity, however. Both Christianity and Satanism exist as parts of a different system, namely a sociological and cultural one: late modernity with its specific cultural logic of capitalism. If we understand all religion as, differentiated yet dedifferentiating fields of practice, Satanism could indeed be described as a transgression *from* late modern society (cf. Dyrendal 2009, 72). Hence, all Satanism in the satanic milieu is potentially a transgression-as-confirmation of the conditions of late modernity, a role it shares with Christianity and indeed all modern religion even if the more “developed” Satanisms

within the milieu are transgressions *to* something outside the nexus of Christianity. In this sense, all religion in modernity express the aims of “identity politics” broadly understood as detraditionalized political projects (Zaretsky 1994, 1995). Satanism in all forms can thus be conceptualized as “cultural avant-gardes” (Dunn 1991), “concerned less with aesthetic innovation than with contestation of meaning and innovative systems of cultural representation” (Dunn 1991, 130).

This brings us to an entirely different aspect of symbolic violence and sanitization. In *Modern Satanism: Anatomy of a Radical Subculture*, Chris Mathews presents a critique of modern Satanism (practically identical to LaVey’s rationalist Satanism and offshoots) based on the premise that one vector in LaVey’s writings, which draws on social Darwinism, misanthropy, and political extremism, is in fact *the core* of Satanism. The “play with gray” found in modern religious Satanism is not ambiguous at all; it is pseudooccult neo-fascism, “a discriminatory ideology of bigotry and intolerance that legitimates and glorifies violence” (Mathews 2009, 79). There is no doubt that this vector is there, as can be seen in “The Book of Satan” in *The Satanic Bible* (LaVey 1969, 27–35), Blanche Barton’s biography, *The Secret Life of a Satanist* (Barton 1992), and essays such as “Pentagonal Revisionism: A Five-point Program” (LaVey 1992, 93–96); there is also little doubt that it can be activated by Satanists interested in the interface of Darwinism, cultural critique, and right-wing politics (Baddeley 2000, 148–66, 212–45; Mathews 2009, 139–59, 177–95; cf. Parfrey 1990, 2000; Petros 2007). However, his textual bias and curious neglect of everyday lived religion miss some very important points.

First of all, the movement texts of modern Satanism are not all philosophical tracts aiming at consistency. They must be seen in relation to genre and context, whether they are critical essays, ritual texts, or rhetorical interventions. Even when they postulate to be coherent philosophy, actual Satanists appropriate them according to need (Lewis 2002). For example, Vexen Crabtree, discussed earlier and mentioned by Mathews, clearly distances himself from LaVey on the issue of social Darwinism: “I do not agree with LaVey that such a police state or entire master race culture is possible. I do believe in forbidding the most pathetic people from breeding, but I know that there is no valid way to measure who *is* unworthy . . .” (Crabtree, “Elitism”). Hence, it is very problematic to move from text to milieu without tracing the use to which they are put; LaVey’s assertions are not unequivocally “accepted as fact by Satanists” (Mathews 2009, 79), just as rationalist Satanism is not the totality of modern Satanism.

Second, the elaboration of one dimension of LaVey’s work, the social Darwinist, ignores other strands or downplays them as confusion or hazy ad hoc statements (Mathews 2009, 76, 78). Just as Al-Qaeda is not Islam or even fundamentalist Islam, Darwinism, neo-Nazism, and fascism are not Satanism. The logical fallacy of the undistributed middle, which Mathews accuses LaVey of committing, is precisely what he himself commits: “That the two groups can be described with a middle term—in this case, ‘outsider’—does not make them equivalent” (Mathews 2009, 227n33).¹¹

Third, his righteous (and sometimes appropriate) indignation of the explicit use of fascist and Nazi aesthetics misses the fact pointed out by Keith Kahn-Harris: More often than not, “reflexive antireflexivity” informs ideological commitment. In other words, selective appropriation can utilize these elements to provoke, to rile up, or to transgress, and there is no slippery slope from aesthetic to ideological Satanism (at least not in the sense of political radicalism) (Mathews 2009, 169–72, 174, 192, 204). In fact, LaVey’s own appropriation of Ragnar Redbeard’s *Might Is Right* in the “Book of Satan,” which is a key aspect of Mathews’s thesis, is selective, editing out the anti-Semitism and toning it as a “satanic” work (Mathews 2009, 64–66; cf. Gallagher 2009; Lewis 2009).

Nevertheless, Mathews might have a valid, if undeveloped point. The ritual transgressions of “phase one Satanism” described earlier, which were powerful modes of transgression in the late 1960s, primarily targeted Christian morality and middle class complacency through sinister (but often amusing) antics and symbolic inversions. Twenty years later, the activities of the second-generation “Abraxas clique,” namely Adam Parfrey, Boyd Rice, and the Schrecks, seems much more brutal and uncompromising (Baddeley 2000, 148–53; Mathews 2009, chapter 8; Petros 2007, 198–200). The “8-8-88 rally”, for example, although nominally a concert with Boyd Rice’s NON and a screening of a Charlie Manson movie called *The Other Side of Madness*, was a cross between a political rally and performance art that celebrated the death of the 1960s in full fascist style (August 8 was the date of the LaBianca murders, as well as a reference to “Heil Hitler”) (Baddeley 2000, 148). While there was a significant amount of ambiguity in the actual ideological investment (from the interviews it seems like much was chosen to “mak[e] people anxious” [Petros 2007, 199]), there is no doubt that the Church of Satan had a harder time sanitizing the elements of fascist aesthetics and hard-core transgression; in addition, it seems like the second generation just didn’t care to sanitize anything, making the division between reactive ostension and rationalist Satanism rather slim.

It is evident that Charles Manson and Adolf Hitler represent greater transgression than the Prince of Darkness himself today, a fact that underscores the obvious potential for transgression in these emblematic figures (and which is obvious if one leafs through *Art That Kills* and counts swastikas, Nazi salutes, and paraphernalia). Although the content changed, the aesthetic terrorism of the Art That Kills group was thus a return to very public and very blasphemous practices gone from the Church of Satan for twenty years; perhaps it could even be called a deprivatization and desanitization of transgression in contrast to LaVey’s sanitization of blasphemy and violence in private ritual spaces as he moved on from “phase one”. In this sense, while distasteful, they are still transgressions *to*, if we look beyond the surface aesthetics and into the contestation of meaning indicated by the public taboo-breaking of cultural avant-gardes.

In any case, the apocalypse culture of the second generation was not the end-point of ideological development or transgressive practice, as a contemporary

example might demonstrate. The “6-6-2006” High Mass of the Church of Satan, held on the most diabolical day of the millennium at the Steve Allen Theater in Los Angeles, was a publicized private gathering of satanic luminaries celebrating the 40th anniversary of LaVey’s creation (Farren 2006). Reporter Mick Farren describes the Mass (which included the invocation of compassion, destruction, and lust in a Black Mass) as distinctly lacking, “turning depressingly middle-class, a self-realization seminar with occult trappings” (4). Apparently the powerful politico-aesthetic charge of the “8-8-88 rally” and the fascist current of the Church of Satan have been sanitized once again, after LaVey’s death and the consolidation of Peter Gilmore as high priest. This is very much in tune with other media appearances where the Church of Satan is presented as approachable, even benign. Nevertheless, straight-arm horned salutes and “Hail, Satan!” concluded the ceremony, making the reporter somewhat ill at ease (Farren 2006, 4–6), indicating that an element of symbolic violence indeed has remained, whether couched in satanic or other trappings.

6. Conclusion

In contrast to the conflation of David Frankfurter and the dismissal of Chris Mathews, I suggest we analyze the permutations of self-declared Satanism as a variety of satanic discourses in a satanic milieu. Within this milieu are discrete groups with websites and local chapters, spokespersons with movement texts (in whatever form), and seekers with various interests, all participating in a community of sentiment around darker aspects of the cultic milieu. Nevertheless, the actual coherence of doctrine, adherence to practices, and seriousness of organization differ widely. Hence I work with a categorization of modern Satanism into rationalist, esoteric, and reactive Satanism that should be understood as narratives of self-image and as dynamic categories, not as absolutes or reified roles.

Reactive Satanism is in fact expressing similar goals of “street theater,” masculinity, public violence, and blasphemy as other gang cultures then and now. Paradoxically, though, the very public practices of ostension are in fact playing with the limit and so confirm the norms with which they play. In rationalist and esoteric Satanism, on the other hand, actions ideally transcend social boundaries to redress the balance and express the self. Their identity work is ideally building another norm—it is a transgression *to* something rather than a transgression *from*. In practice, though, these categories should rather be seen as discursive positions in a milieu that stretches from the narrowly religious to the broadly transgressive, highlighting Anton LaVey’s scale of “nine parts social respectability to one part outrage.” Although logically incongruent, religious and reactive Satanism are often closer than either might acknowledge, as we saw in the apocalypse culture of aesthetic terrorism.

The mythical realities of esotericism, hellfire clubs, devil worship, and fascist aesthetics are a necessary backdrop to rationalist practices of lesser and greater

magic, artistic transgression, and personal empowerment. In the same vein but much more ambivalently, the symbolic violence and aesthetic terrorism so popular both as an intellectual strategy and as a performative assertion are sanitized versions of the dialectic private-public transgression and violence found in medieval Bengal, seventeenth-century London, British football casualties, and the 1990s’ Norwegian music scene. One reason that LaVey and almost all rationalist and esoteric Satanists vehemently reject black metal church burnings and the advocacy of sacrificial “culling” of the herd (besides the senselessness of these acts from a self-preservation perspective and their lack of subtlety) is that their detraditionalized acts have the same roots; even Satanists “other” what is close. Let us not make the same mistake.

NOTES

This chapter is based on a paper with the same name presented at the conference “Satanism in the Modern World,” Nov. 19–20, 2009, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway. I want to thank Asbjørn Dyrendal for valuable comments.

1. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wsKbbIybtVM&feature=related> (Rice) and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IC8QJ4o8Kg&feature=related> (Schreck), both from the blog <http://raumfahrer.wordpress.com/manson/>, which discusses Marilyn Manson and the nexus of Satanism and Nazi chic. Much of this goes back to the fascination with Charles Manson of second-generation Satanists in the Church of Satan in the late 1980s and early 1990s, of which more later.

2. Regarding Satanic panic, recent studies include Frankfurter (2006); Jenkins (2004); and Medway (2001); classics include Ellis (2000); La Fontaine (1998, 1999); Lewis and Petersen (2008); Richardson, Best, and Bromley (1991); and Victor (1993), all with links to general literature such as Stanley Cohen, Norman Cohn, and Nachman Ben-Yehuda.

3. I could include role-playing games such as *Nephilim*, *Call of Cthulhu*, and the *World of Darkness* series, supplements to Dungeons & Dragons such as the *Book of Vile Darkness*, the *Tome of Corruption* for Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay, computer games like the *Diablo* series, as well as music and television. It is actually somewhat odd that evangelicals have targeted the Smurfs and Pokemon with that much *explicitly* violent material (Best 1991; Martin and Fine 1991).

4. Sometimes they even cut themselves or commit suicide. However, again, this is an expression of deeper problems where Satanism actually can be of some help (Lowney 1995; Moody 1974; Moriarty 1992).

5. King James version. Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library.

6. Comparable to Randall Alfred’s proposition of LaVeyan Satanism as the ultimate Protestant sect, as it sanitizes hedonism into hard work but also legitimizes worldly enjoyment (Alfred 1976, 199–200).

7. See http://www.amazon.co.uk/Art-That-Kills-Panoramic-Aesthetic/dp/1840681403/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1258383612&sr=8-1.

8. The same basic strategy can be found in Adam Parfrey’s collections of “apocalypse culture” (Parfrey 1990, 2000) blending social critique, necrophilia, pedophilia, and other

entertainment with an undercurrent of Satanism, or, in Matt Paradise's blog "Diabologue" found online (a part of Paradise's media company Purging Talon), where Satanism is quite explicit, while the aesthetic terrorism is limited to horror movies and freak culture in general.

9. We could compare this with the explicit use of situationism by the punk icon Frank Discussion and his band the Feederz, as well as the prankster movement, with roots in Ken Kesey's Kool-Aid acid tests which pioneered the use of sampling in their total experiences.

10. Cf. Randall Alfred's proposition of LaVeyan Satanism as the ultimate consumer capitalism (Alfred 1976, 200), secularizing the private responsibility for salvation into a modern autonomous, imaginative hedonism found in self-religions, romanticism, advertising, and consumer culture (Campbell 1987).

11. The same can be said about his charge of confirmation bias—one tends to notice and to look for whatever confirms one's beliefs (Mathews 2009, 168). For example, even though he is presented with counterevidence, Mathews can dismiss two presentations of modern Satanists as politically plural by asserting that "Satanists are typically politically conservative, tending towards the extremes of conservatism. Its natural political affinities are with the far right" (Mathews 2009, 141; cf. 171), citing no evidence outside textual material.

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ARTICLE V: INTERNET AND COMMUNITY

“From Book to Bit: Enacting Satanism Online” is accepted for publication in the anthology *Contemporary Esotericism*, edited by Kennet Granholm and Egil Asprem for Equinox Publishing, expected summer 2012. The book is planned as a general survey of the state of contemporary esotericism in the West by both established and young researchers. It will have four thematic parts, part two of which is dealing with “Esotericism and the New Public Sphere”. The chapter will be included here.

Although the chapter is commissioned especially for the anthology, it is partly based on the conference paper “Enacted Satanism: Religion in Hybrid Texts” presented at the EASR/DVRW conference *Plurality and Representation: Religion in Education, Culture and Society*, September 23-27, 2007, University of Brehmen, Germany. It was written in the fall and winter of 2010 and was accepted on condition of a major size reduction. I have included the last available version with all edits, but it might not be the final printed version. In particular, the book version will include “model 1” in the text. For the thesis version, I have put the model and caption in an appendix after the conclusion.

From Book to Bit: Enacting Satanism Online¹

Jesper Aagaard Petersen

Introduction

More than anything else the cultic world is kept alive by the magazines, periodicals, books, pamphlets, lectures, demonstrations and informal meetings through which its beliefs and practices are discussed and disseminated.²

Although overshadowed by pornography and file sharing, religion is a popular topic online, and increasingly so.³ As a consequence, the previously hard-to-get and difficult-to-see has blossomed as the virtual environment supports the easy transmission, archiving, and recontextualization of texts and imagery. Even if the embracing of new technologies has not been even, all kinds of esotericism, occultism, and alternative religiosity previously relegated to the margins as fringe pursuits are now exhibited and easily found alongside established offline religions through hyperlinks and search engines. Parallel to porn and piracy, anything can be found, but the provenance and veracity of the information is increasingly blurred. In effect, ‘deviance’ and ‘normality’ are a lot less clear-cut as defining traits when it comes to sexuality, popular culture, and religion.

But even if we lose a sense of relative comprehension, we gain something else. In her research, Annette Markham has proposed two important ways in which the Internet and related computer-mediated communication technologies are viewed and used: As a tool for communication and as a virtual social space.⁴ Extending on that notion and drawing on examples from contemporary religious Satanism, this chapter provides a discussion of new *contexts* for source material as well as new *types* of material on the Internet, both of which are highly relevant in the study of modern esotericism.

As a context, the new virtual space magnifies something that has been very difficult to see, let alone study, namely the fluid relations between free-floating material and the

¹ This chapter is based on the paper ‘Enacted Satanism: Religion in Hybrid Texts’ presented at the EASR/DVRW conference *Plurality and Representation: Religion in Education, Culture and Society*, University of Bremen, September 23-27, 2007. I would like to thank Asbjørn Dyrendal, Olav Hammer and the editors for valuable comments on earlier versions of the chapter.

² Campbell, ‘The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization’, 123.

³ See Højsgaard & Warburg, ‘Introduction: Waves of Research’, 2-3.

⁴ Cf. Markham, ‘The Internet as a research context’, 360-63. Markham includes a third view, Internet as a ‘way of being’ which extends on the second category of Internet as ‘place’ through internalization.

audiences and practitioners using it. The cacophony of online meaning-making actually supports established sociological models of occult affiliations and ‘rejected knowledge’ as transmitted through a *cultic milieu* between *seekers*, originally formulated by Colin Campbell in the early 1970s.⁵ Traditionally, this milieu was ‘located’ in informal networks and flows which were in place long before the Internet, especially via books and periodicals, including both texts with smaller print run and popular primers like Pauwels and Bergier’s *The Morning of the Magicians* (1961) or Wilson’s *The Occult and Mysteries* (1971, 1978). More broadly, communication also flowed through suggested reading lists of occult groups; word-of-mouth and bulletin boards in occult shops; seminars, concerts and fairs; and classified ads in magazines and newspapers. So in a sense, the cultic milieu has always been mediatized and thus ‘de-territorialized’.⁶ What the Internet offers is a new access point. Thus, the virtual realm has a potential to re-territorialize research aiming at ‘thick description’, just as it has affected the development of and recruitment to decentralized religious ‘movements’ by providing new gateways.⁷

Turning to new types of material, the actual propagation of places of ‘online-religion’ (new interactive environments) and tools of ‘religion-online’ (traditional top-down communication) has to be seen in relation to specific offline interests, rhetorics of tradition, authority, and legitimacy, and the real or imagined fears of pollution and dilution.⁸ This is a

⁵ Campbell, ‘The Cult’. It should be mentioned that the concept itself has its roots in earlier sociological research and that other, congruent concepts were offered in the 1960s and 1970s, such as ‘occult establishment’ and ‘underground’, ‘esoteric culture’ and ‘invisible religion’. For elaborations with relevance to the study of modern esotericism see e.g. Barkun, *A Culture of Conspiracy*; Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*; Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion*; Jorgensen, *The Esoteric Scene*; Partridge, *Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 1.

⁶ This understanding of ‘territory’ is anthropological and hence tied to issues of ‘glocalization’; see Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*; Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland*. On market models and commodity networks, see e.g. Ezzy, ‘The Commodification of Witchcraft’; Ezzy, ‘White Witches and Black Magic’; Heelas, *Spiritualities of Life*; Redden, ‘The New Age: A Market Model’; and Stark & Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion*. On the importance of books, journals, and the media, see e.g. Aloï, ‘Rooted in the Occult Revival’; Ezzy, ‘New Age Witchcraft?’; Ezzy & Berger, ‘Becoming a Witch’; Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs*; Johnston, ‘Of Teens and Tomes’; and Truzzi, ‘The Occult Revival’. On older ‘networks’ of books, see Davies, *Grimoires*, chapter 5-8; Ellis, *Lucifer Rising*, chapter 4; and Verter, *Dark Star Rising*, chapter 2-3.

⁷ Much has been done on cyber-Paganism – see e.g. Berger & Ezzy, ‘The Internet as Virtual Spiritual Community’; Cowan, *Cyberhenge*; Ezzy, ‘Commodification’. On the ‘technopagan’ avant-garde, see e.g. Cowan & Hadden, ‘Virtually Religious’; Davis, *Techgnosis*, esp. 190-225; O’Leary, ‘Cyberspace as Sacred Space’.

⁸ For a good summary of the state of affairs in researching these matters, see Dawson, ‘Religion and the Internet’. The very useful distinction between ‘online-religion’ and ‘religion-online’ is proposed in Helland,

sound approach and not new. What is new are the *hybrid* texts we find online, located between text and speech, displaying interpretative practices which on the one hand constructs a meaningful social order and on the other are conditioned by the same order – ideally in the form of ‘virtual community’. As the speech situation is embedded in these sources in a unique way through the medium, it should be possible to see the negotiations, conflicts, and tactics that encircle any text concretely *expressed* in these texts. In order to assess such community and authority building in a virtual environment, I will argue for a discursive approach as a conduit between the traditional methodologies of the History of Religions and the various methodologies of ‘cyber-Anthropology’.⁹ This alternative should facilitate ‘virtual fieldwork’ by softening the textual bias of historiography and the actor bias of participant observation.

New Contexts, New Boundaries: Charting the Satanic Milieu

For all the benefits of the Internet age, it has, in regard to Satanism, also engendered a churning maelstrom of delusion and mediocrity. As individuals like Venger Satanis prove, the path to becoming a Satanic leader in the Internet age involves little more than setting up a Web site and declaring oneself a Satanic leader.¹⁰

A standard web-search for ‘Satan’, ‘Satanic’, and ‘Satanism’ produce hits in the millions, offering anything from *Satan’s Cheerleaders* to film clips outing President Obama’s ‘satanic agenda’. Broadly speaking, there are two main discourses on the satanic today, both of which can be located online. On the one hand, we have the various cultural narratives on Satan and Satanism which form part of the ‘occultural’ landscape of Western societies and are recycled in popular culture, by moral entrepreneurs such as media commentators, conspiracy bloggers and cult watch groups, and by occasional adolescents and provocateurs.¹¹ On the other hand, there are the satanic discourses among self-declared Satanists within a ‘satanic milieu’,

‘Online-Religion/Religion-Online and Virtual Communitas’; Helland, ‘Surfing for Salvation’. For recent studies with special relevance to Religious Studies, I suggest Campbell, *Exploring Religious Community Online*; Dawson & Cowan, *Religion Online*; Højsgaard & Warburg, *Religion and Cyberspace*; and Karaflogka, *E-Religion*.

⁹ As a young discipline, nomenclature is still under negotiation (cyber-Anthropology, Webnography, Netnography, Virtual Ethnography); a good overview is provided by Markham and Baym, *Internet Inquiry* (with extensive bibliography).

¹⁰ Mathews, *Modern Satanism*, 92.

¹¹ Petersen, ‘The Seeds of Satan’, 1-2. Cf. Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, vol. 2, 207-255; Petersen, ‘Smite Him Hip and Thigh’.

appropriating the figure of Satan into identity work.¹² This is a discursive subgroup within the cultic milieu comprised of self-identified satanic ‘belief systems and their associated practices’, and includes ‘the collectivities, institutions, individuals and media of communication associated with these beliefs’.¹³ It is the basic constituency and character of this milieu that is our first concern.

Rising out from the cultic milieu of 1960s’ California, Anton S. LaVey established the Church of Satan in 1966. In the ‘golden age’ from 1966 to 1972, the High Priest and his Church enjoyed a strong media presence, fully in tune with the general upsurge of interest in the occult and witchcraft, which stimulated the condensation of an autonomous *satanic* milieu out of the heterodox discourses at the time.¹⁴ However, as illustrated by even a cursory reading of biographic material, the Church was never alone.¹⁵ As the Internet opened the floodgates in the 1990s, the *quantity* and *visibility* of material produced and distributed by alternatives to the Church of Satan underwent a drastic surge, transforming the satanic milieu itself into a more polyvocal entity through feedback loops.

In consequence, Satanism has become both a global de-territorialized phenomenon and re-territorialized in local contexts outside the United States and LaVey’s original church. First of all, clashes over the definition of Satanism itself have produced numerous small networks, communities, and organizations, first through email discussion groups and Usenet (e.g. alt.satanism) and later through community groups (such as Yahoo and Google) and social network sites (especially Myspace and Facebook). Many have a website of their own and participate in the frequent ‘flame wars’ so prevalent online. Second, even though LaVey’s *Satanic Bible* (1969) has stayed atop the status pile, maintaining its hegemonic status within the Church orbit and even considered a valid ‘primer’ or ‘beginner’s guide’ outside the Church, it now has serious competition from Internet-based material and material *promoted* through the Web.¹⁶

¹² Petersen, ‘Introduction: Embracing Satan’, 3-6; Petersen, ‘Seeds’, 3-12.

¹³ Campbell, ‘The Cult’, 122. I understand ‘belief’ as a dynamic, practiced concept rather than static substance; Petersen, ‘Introduction’, 3.

¹⁴ Petersen, ‘Satanists and Nuts’; Petersen, ‘The Seeds of Satan’, 7-9. Cf. Barton, *The Church of Satan*.

¹⁵ For examples, see Aquino, *The Church of Satan*; Baddeley, *Lucifer Rising*, 100-113; Barton, *The Church of Satan*, chapter 2 and 4; Mathews, *Modern Satanism*, chapter 5.

¹⁶ See Lewis, ‘Infernal Legitimacy’, 42, 44. Studies focusing on ‘cyber-Satanism’ have been few, arguably beginning with Roald E. Kristiansen’s now dated ‘Satan in Cyberspace’ (1995, updated 2001). Important sociological work has been done by James R. Lewis, especially on the basic demographics of Satanism today; see e.g. Lewis, ‘Who serves Satan?’; Lewis, ‘Infernal Legitimacy’; Lewis, ‘Fit for the Devil’. Finally there are a

To take the second issue first, the print-on demand site Lulu.com offers a variety of journals as well as modern-day satanic grimoires such as Michael Ford's *Luciferian Witchcraft* (1995) and Tsirk Susej's *The Demonic Bible* (2005), alongside Church-'approved' essay collections like James D. Sass' *Essays in Satanism* (2007). Books can of course also be bought through Amazon.com or independent printers such as Stephen E. Flowers' Rûna Raven, selling his historical study *Lords of the Left-Hand Path* (1997) and magical primers like Don Webb's *Uncle Setnakt's Guide to the Left-Hand Path* (1999). In the same vein, Michael Aquino's massive e-books on the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set can be downloaded for free from the Temple website.¹⁷ Finally, some websites actually function as archives with material of both introductory and advanced nature, superseding any engagement with printed books – as for example the *Joy of Satan* site and Vexen Crabtree's *Description, Philosophies and Justification of Satanism*.¹⁸

The uneasy connections between these examples point to the difficulty of establishing the *boundaries* of the satanic milieu and satanic discourse from both an insider and outsider perspective. Subjects such as witchcraft, demonology, and Chaos Magick are discussed by many of these writers, and both Diane Vera and Joy of Satan link to a variety of neopagan, esoteric, and occult websites. In contrast, the Church of Satan's disdain towards devil worshipers, neopagans, and occultists is widely documented, even though LaVey frequently borrowed from them all.¹⁹ Thus the discourse of individual Satanists and even identifiable groups often transcend any easy categorization as 'satanic', blending with other identifiable clusters such as the 'neopagan' and 'Left-Hand Path' milieus. Neither field is completely congruent with each other, but they do share a lot of discursive ground, most notably the focus on expressing or transforming the self and the eclectic use of ritualized practices such as magical work, art, music, poetry, or any combination of these. More specifically, what Nevill Drury has dubbed the 'cthonian' orientation towards the carnal, the transgressive, and the subconscious, as well as the choice of darker gods such as Satan, Set, and Kali, makes

handful of case studies; see e.g. Alisauskiene, 'The Peculiarities of Lithuanian Satanism'; Dyrendal, 'Devilish Consumption'; Petersen, 'Binary Satanism'; Petersen, 'The Seeds of Satan'; Ringvee, 'Satanism in Estonia'; Sieg, 'Angular Momentum'; Smoczynski, 'Cyber-Satanism and Imagined Satanism'.

¹⁷ See www.xeper.org (accessed November 5 2010).

¹⁸ See www.joyofsatan.org, and www.dpjs.co.uk, respectively (accessed November 5, 2010).

¹⁹ Cf. Petersen, 'Satanists and Nuts', 226-32; 'Petersen, 'We Demand Bedrock Knowledge'; Petersen, 'The Seeds of Satan'.

associations between ‘satanic’ and ‘Left-Hand Path’ groups especially salient and solid boundaries between their respective discourse and practices particularly difficult to trace.²⁰

In an attempt to manage this complexity, we can approach modern Satanism as related to esoteric discourse in general through two complementary strategies of appropriation, namely ‘secularizing’ the esoteric and ‘esotericizing’ the secular.²¹ By analyzing concrete ‘boundary-work’ alongside strategies of legitimation in the satanic milieu, we can see how particular understandings of Satanism are actively built by engaging with a wide variety of cultural material, simultaneously constructing a positive self-religion and distancing oneself from other, competing articulations. Hence rationalist Satanism-s in the tradition of LaVey (including groups outside the Church but sympathetic to the ideology of the founder) are foregrounding natural and pragmatic elements, but infusing the secular narrative with esoteric modes of legitimacy, while esoteric Satanism-s are suffusing the esoteric structure of the ‘cthonian’ with secular modes of legitimacy. In contrast to the systematic discourse of these two types, reactive Satanism-s are appropriating cultural narratives and stereotypes of Satanism as a strategy of resistance-through-inversion, making it a category on the border between the satanic milieu and generalized rebellion.²² In general, the ‘cthonian’ style has had a lot of success in horror movies, avant-garde art, and ‘deviant’ subculture: Vampire groups, modern primitives, and Goths listening to post-punk, industrial, and metal, to name a few ‘scenes’, regularly tap into material provided by Satanism and the Left-Hand Path.²³ Conversely, formal groups in both milieus are trying to control the socialization of subcultural

²⁰ See Drury, *Rosaleen Norton*, chapter 3; Granholm ‘Embracing Others’; Partridge, *The Reenchantment of the West*, vol. 1, 78-84; vol. 2, 207-255; Petersen, ‘Introduction’; and Petersen, ‘The Seeds of Satan’ for academic discussions. Naturally, the boundaries of ‘satanic’ and ‘Left-Hand Path’ milieus rest on the judgments of the scholar, and there is an element of estimation here, as pointed out by Granholm. Nevertheless Satanists of various persuasions, such as Anton LaVey, Michael Aquino, Vexen Crabtree, Stephen Flowers, and Michael Ford all make use of the authority of the ‘cthonian’, the Left-Hand Path as well as Satan in their writings.

²¹ This understanding of Satanism and its relation to esotericism is indebted to Kocku von Stuckrad, Olav Hammer and Wouter Hanegraaff; on this, see Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’, especially 69-73, 103-109; and Petersen, ‘The Seeds of Satan’, 5-12, 19-20.

²² On my typology, see especially Petersen, ‘Introduction’, 6-7 and Petersen, ‘Smite Him’. Such categories are of course ideal-typical and should not be confused with reality; in effect, most groups combine religious and scientific legitimation with symbolic transgression; traditional, symbolic and esoteric views of both self and Satan; and eclectic appropriation from a wide field of influence. Nevertheless, specific instances typically lean on one angle and ‘translate’ the others.

²³ For examples, see Baddeley, *Lucifer Rising*; Nocturnum, *Embracing the Darkness*; Petros, *Art that Kills*.

‘tourists’, dedicated ‘seekers’, and devoted ‘members’ in terms of guided consumption, but to various effects – and outside formal groups the control is entirely individual. In this sense, popular culture and ‘occulture’ are pathways to and from the satanic milieu, blurring core and peripheries considerably.²⁴

Returning to clashes and ‘flame wars’, the conflict over the nature of modern Satanism and LaVey’s heritage in particular intensified after his death in 1997, culminating in a gradual exodus of disgruntled members from the Church of Satan in the early 2000s as the leadership changed.²⁵ Many of these ex-members created websites and local networks, which in turn has forced the Church of Satan to step up its Internet presence while still repeating the trivializing rhetoric on cyberspace.²⁶ The present constitution of the satanic milieu seems to stimulate two distinct reactions to online community building and Internet Satanism, an inclusive/tolerant and an exclusive/dismissive, based on the strength of offline presence as well as organizational integration. This mirrors the activities of many other esoteric ‘subcultures’ online.

The first can be exemplified by Venus Satanias, author of a large amount of YouTube clips and the hostess of the website *Spiritual Satanist*, an associated blog, online store, Facebook page, and live video feed of exotic pole dancing.²⁷ On her website, she states:

Since there are many methods of expressing Satanism, you have to find the one that suits you the best. Only you can know what is right for you in the end. Your choice should be a spiritual or philosophical commitment that is based on an informed decision. In my opinion, there is no one right way to be a Satanist; they are all forms of Satanic expression. But, no matter what the origin of our beliefs, as Satanists, we are all a part of the current of Satanism.²⁸

As a consequence, she formed the Horde of Independent SatanistS (HISS) in 2008 with another Satanist, Nagasiva Yronwode (aka nocTifer), to provide apprenticeship and correspondence for Satanists of a more theistic and esoteric bent. Both are quite prolific writers and networkers on the Internet outside the auspices of the Church of Satan, and as

²⁴ On pathways, see Campbell & McIver, ‘Cultural Sources for Support’; Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, volume 1-2. On guided vs. individual consumption, see Dyrendal, ‘Devilish Consumption’; Possamai, *Religion and Popular Culture* (‘hypo-’ and ‘hyper-consumerist’ religion, defined on page 49).

²⁵ I discuss this briefly in Petersen, ‘Nuts’, 242-43.

²⁶ See e.g. Paradise, *Bearing the Devil’s Mark*, 60-66.

²⁷ Go to www.spiritualsatanist.com for links to all these sites (accessed November 5, 2010).

²⁸ Satanias, ‘Foundations of Satanism’.

such, they blend into the wider assemblage of Thelemites, Chaos magicians, and followers of the Left-Hand Path that are active online. This feeling of connection and ‘movement’ is confirmed by Corvis Nocturnum - Reiki practitioner, psychometrist, Warlock in the Church of Satan, and author of *Embracing the Darkness* (2005):

What becomes clear is that most, if not all of the subcultures covered in this book overlap, having been shaped by the effects of shared philosophies. In doing so, individuals within these subcultures come to share an appreciation for similar ideals, and eventually form larger communities. (...) The answer lies in not focusing on the lines of the picture, but in stepping back and letting these lines blur until all you see is that one image that we’ve become.²⁹

In Nocturnum’s vision Goth, dark spirituality, Satanism, Vampirism, and BDSM are seen as ‘dark subcultures’ which nevertheless cohere in shared ideals, philosophies, and values. Of course, not all Satanists agree with this ‘letting lines blur’ or ‘many-in-one image’ of Satanism. Peter H. Gilmore, current high priest of the Church of Satan, represents the second position based on exclusivity (‘the alien elite’ in church parlance). Interviewed in Nocturnum’s book about adolescents and ‘pseudo-Satanism’, Gilmore remarks:

There are definitely some pathetic web sites and hilariously goofy ‘organizations,’ which are usually some disturbed fellow with a web site and his equally naive online pals pretending to be ‘evil’. That sort of rebellion, using pre-packaged ‘dark’ imagery, usually is short-lived. The only folks who regularly see these antics are people who take a good deal of time to search them out, as the sites and chat rooms that these wannabes frequent receive little traffic.³⁰

Like Satanus and HISS, the Church of Satan has an active presence on the Internet – an official website established in 1997, several semi-official community sites, and a host of affiliated sites like *The CoS Emporium* (shopping) and *Radio Free Satan* (media). Nevertheless, it is quite clear that most of the offerings online are viewed as misguided at best; Satanism needs to be lived in the *real* world, through concrete accomplishments based on a thorough understanding of Anton LaVey’s books. Peter Gilmore has a quite conscious ‘tunnel vision’, viewing all non-aligned Satanists online and offline as losers, devil worshipers or rebel poseurs. By contrasting ‘we Satanists’ with the ‘ghetto of online

²⁹ Nocturnum, *Embracing the Darkness*, 233. Nocturnum’s bioblurb can be found on page 235.

³⁰ Gilmore in Nocturnum, *Embracing*, 139.

Satanism’, the high priest simultaneously downplays the numbers, coherence and influence of social contenders and monopolizes satanic discourse as ‘LaVeyan’.³¹

While the reaction of Gilmore or some Church zealots are not surprising, the reciprocal ‘defrocking’ of the black pope, his successor Gilmore, and the institution itself by ex-members and non-joiners are even less unexpected. Thus the Internet is overflowing with Church ‘rap sheets’, LaVey-biographies, and ‘anti-LaVey’ statements. Such dismissiveness is not rare in cultic circles, but it has a certain edge in the case of the Church of Satan because of its age, founder, and status.

Virtual Milieus, Imagined Communities: Modelling the Satanic Milieu Online

What we end up with for Satanism, then, is a movement whose members rarely if ever meet face to face, and who almost never engage in group religious activities. The primary activity of contemporary Satanists appears to be emailing or otherwise engaging in online discussions with other Satanists.³²

How, then, are we to grasp this proliferation of antagonistic inclusions and exclusions of Satanism online? Specifically, is there any validity to the unsubstantiated ‘large, heterogeneous online community’ postulated by Chris Mathews, echoing the inclusivist assertions of Venus Satanas and Corvis Nocturnum above?³³ The temptation to appropriate an emic term and talk about a ‘satanic community’ or ‘movement’, understood as a broad heterogeneous social trajectory much like the ‘black’ or ‘gay’ community, should be anchored in empirical fact, as shown by the conflict between inclusive and exclusive viewpoints.³⁴

A starting point for analysis could be a representative list, which in essence charts a selection of observable groups and sites. What is possible online, though, is to utilize various free ‘webometric’ meta-tools to expand the basic list with additional information. As I noted in the introduction, the very idea of a milieu is show-casing the interplay between abstract,

³¹ See for example Gilmore, ‘A Map for the Misdirected’; Gilmore, *The Satanic Scriptures*, 170-186; and many interviews available online such as Shankbone, ‘Satanism’. This position is frequently and forcefully asserted on affiliated community sites as well. See also the pre-Internet ‘Satanic Bunco Sheet’ in Barton, *The Church of Satan*, 125-28, which is reproduced in an updated form on the Church website at <http://www.churchofsatan.com/Pages/Bunco.html> (briefly analyzed in Petersen, ‘Binary Satanism’, 600-601).

³² Lewis, ‘Fit for the Devil’, 131.

³³ Mathews, *Modern Satanism*, 91.

³⁴ An example of such appropriation of emic nomenclature can be found in Joseph Laycock’s study of the ‘vampire community’, imported to highlight all self-declared vampires in contrast to the occultural ‘vampire milieu’; see Laycock, *Vampires Today*.

de-territorialized spaces within global flows of occulture, and local *re-territorializations* of the milieu, fixing flows in intelligible localities. The Internet has much value in mapping both, and I have used three meta-communicative tools to answer three relevant questions: Who was responsible and when was the site established? How popular is the site and what is its reputation in the milieu? And finally: Who is connected to whom?

The first list (see **Table 1**) provides basic registration data (date, registrant, and/or domain) for some well-known groups as well as relative newcomers and obscure sites, spanning the popular to the marginal. I have tried to be representative in including both rationalist and more esoteric sites as well as various media and community outlets, but as the offerings are staggering, they are selected on impressionistic criteria from my browser ‘favorites’ (based on years of snowball sampling and accumulation from literature from and on the field). After compiling the list, I have used the website Europe Registry’s *WHOIS domain search* to access domain registrars for information.³⁵ Although the results are unsurprising, this method fixes the sites in time and place, something seldom given in the ‘here and now’ of online production.

What do we learn? First, Internet Satanism of course predates 1996, but mainly as a text-based phenomenon. With the World Wide Web and the graphics-based web browsers introduced around 1993, usage gradually shifted from text to hypertext and image. We can see how the Church of Satan and the Temple of Set, as well as offshoots and affiliates, purchased domain names from the mid-nineties to establish a graphics-based online presence. The earliest community sites and message boards, satannet.com and the 600 club, were in place before 1998 as well. Of course, many sites (outside my sample) are now either defunct or static exhibitions with no updates for several years, so a given start date does not guarantee activity, just as a given registration date is not an absolute start date; for example, the Church of Satan existed on www.coscentral.net/cos for at least two years before actually launching the present address. Conversely, the Satanic Reds had a geocities-address for a decade before ‘upgrading’.

³⁵ See <http://whois.europeregistry.com/displayWhois.php>. In some cases I have cross-checked with www.betterwhois.com and www.whois.com, but neither work on non-American sites.

Domain name	Registration date	Registrant (if applicable) and/or domain server (if relevant)
The Undercroft and Letters to the Devil – both hosted by www.satannet.com	1996	L. Ventrue/ NS3.ninethirteen.com + NS1.ninethirteen.com
Church of Satan (Anton S. LaVey) – www.churchofsatan.com	1997	Peter H. Gilmore/ Central9.ninethirteen.com + NS9.ninethirteen.com
Temple of Set (Michael Aquino) – www.xeper.org and www.templeofset.org	1997	Robert Menschel/ NS1.Xeper.org + NS2.Xeper.org
First Satanic Church (Karla LaVey) – www.satanicchurch.com	1998	None* (FSC Intl.)
First Church of Satan (John Allee) – www.churchofsatan.org	1998	John Allee
The 600 Club – www.the600club.com	1998	None* (The 600 Club)
Purging Talon – www.purgingtalon.com	1999	Matt Paradise
NocTifer's Real Satanism site – www.satanservice.org	1999	Nagasiva Yronwode
Radio Free Satan – www.radiofreesatan.com	2000	Shane Bugbee
Temple of the Vampire – www.vampiretemple.com	2000	None* (TOTV)/ Central9.ninethirteen.com + NS9.ninethirteen.com
Vexen Crabtree's Description, Philosophies and Justification of Satanism site – www.dpjs.co.uk	2001	Simon Crabtree
Satanisk Forum – www.sataniskforum.dk	2001	A. O. Lap
Diane Vera's Theistic Satanism site – www.theisticsatanism.com	2005	Diane Vera (Church of Azazel)
Joy of Satan – www.joyofsatan.org (also hosted on www.angelfire.com/empire/serpentis666.html)	2005 (2003)**	Andrea Dietrich (Maxine Dietrich)/ NS1.joyofsatan.org + NS2.joyofsatan.org
Modern Church of Satan – www.modernchurchofsatan.com	2006	None*
Stephen E. Flowers' Rûna Raven newsletter and community – www.edred.net	2006	Stephen E. Flowers
Temple of the Black Light - http://www.templeoftheblacklight.net/main.html	2007	None*
Venus Satanas' Theistic Satanism and Magick site - http://www.spiritualsatanist.com/	2007	Venus Satanas
Satanic Reds (Tani Jantsang) – www.satanicreds.org	2009***	Johnni Pedersen (J. Nymann)

Table 1: Registration data for a selection of satanic/Left-Hand Path websites, based on information collected from <http://whois.europeregistry.com/displayWhois.php> on November 15, 2010. *) 'None' refers to registrants with high privacy settings, which affect searches. **) www.joyofsatan.com links directly to the angelfire website, as does most of the material on the joyofsatan.org site. ***) Satanic Reds recently moved from a geocities address – the group's online birth is around 1997 (see Satanic Reds, 'The Roots of the Satanic Reds'; Lap and wolf, 'Satanismens danske rødder', 14).

Second, turning to registrants, the geographical distribution is predominantly American, but this is an artefact of both the Californian birthplace of modern Satanism and my sampling bias. Most names are well-known and confirm the identity of most groups, although privacy settings prohibit disclosure on a number of occasions. Apart from providing email addresses and even offline addresses in some cases, a registrant search is helpful when following linkages between groups by biography, although, again, a given registrant is no guarantee for continued affiliation or the presence of large numbers. In the case of domain servers, I am fully aware that many diverse websites are hosted on individual servers. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the Church of Satan, the Temple of Set, and the Joy of Satan operate with name-specific domain servers, and in the case of the Church of Satan, actually hosts The Undercroft, Letters to the Devil, and the Temple of the Vampire, reinforcing the feeling of connection between these sites.³⁶

Next, to gauge the respectability and popularity both within the milieu and in general, I have entered the same domains into Alexa's *Web information database*.³⁷ The list, **Table 2**, is sorted by *traffic rank*, a number 'based on three months of aggregated historical traffic data from millions of Alexa Toolbar users and data obtained from other, diverse traffic data sources, and is a combined measure of page views and users [reach]'.³⁸ By combining daily visitors and quarterly page views, the number gives us a clue to the relative popularity of the site over time compared to simple lists of unique page views. Nevertheless, data on sites with a traffic rank over 100.000 are not entirely trustworthy, which obviously applies to all the satanic and Left-Hand Path sites measured here. The only sites with some popularity are the Church of Satan and (somewhat paradoxically) Joy of Satan's page base on the angelfire network, and they are still very far from Scientology or YouTube. Most of these sites are decidedly 'fringe'.

³⁶ Additional information on the issue of servers can be found on RobTex's *Domain Name System search* at <http://www.robtext.com/dns/>. A search on Church of Satan, for example, reveals that the COS Emporium, Art of Coop, Dark Candles by Helena, and even the First Church of Satan use ninethirteen.com, sometimes under another name; <http://www.robtext.com/dns/churchofsatan.com.html> (November 24, 2010).

³⁷ See www.alexa.com.

³⁸ See Alexa, 'About the Alexa Traffic Rankings'. I have chosen traffic rank over the more intuitively understandable 'unique visitors' and 'site views' stats from e.g. www.siteanalytics.com because of this aggregate nature – by combining quarterly and daily activity, a relatively stable number or rank is reached, which is all I need for comparison between my chosen sites.

Domain name	Orientation and type	Traffic rank – Alexa	Links to the site – Alexa	Inlinks – Yahoo
Church of Satan www.churchofsatan.com	Rationalist website	189.260	585	33053
Vexen Crabtree http://www.dpjs.co.uk/index.html	Rationalist archive	638.054	94	572
Venus Satanas http://www.spiritualsatanist.com/	Esoteric website with blog	823.751	29	640
Modern Church of Satan www.modernchurchofsatan.com	Rationalist website with message board	890.559	3	115
Purging Talon www.purgingtalon.com	Rationalist media website with blog	1.042.576	98	972
Joy of Satan www.joyofsatan.org and www.angelfire.com/empire/serpentis666	Esoteric website with community sites	ORG: 1.043.688 ANGEL: 230.947	ORG: 28 ANGEL: (0)	ORG: 1505 ANGEL: 49
Temple of the Vampire www.vampiretemple.com	Esoteric website with community	1.254.593	(65)	4961
First Church of Satan www.churchofsatan.org	Esoteric archive	1.280.688	84	768
Temple of Set – www.xeper.org	Esoteric website, archive	1.298.692	(100)	9469
Diane Vera www.theisticsatanism.com	Esoteric website	1.490.341	46	422
Undercroft, Letters to the Devil www.satannet.com	Rationalist community sites (closed and open)	1.526.325	52	569
The 600 Club – www.the600club.com	Rationalist community site	1.633.231	(26)	285
Temple of the Black Light http://www.templeoftheblacklight.net/main.html	Esoteric website, archive	1.889.509	(27)	299
NocTifer – www.satanservice.org	Esoteric website	2.198.730	71	10448
First Satanic Church www.satanicchurch.com	Rationalist website, links to the600club.com as community	2.689.478	32	180
Stephen E. Flowers www.edred.net	Esoteric community and archive	5.695.414	20	115
Radio Free Satan www.radiofreesatan.com	Rationalist radio station	6.636.606	36	766
Satanisk Forum www.sataniskforum.dk	Rationalist website with message board	8.186.840	9	77
Satanic Reds www.satanicreds.org	Esoteric website, archive	No data	1	6
Scientology Intl. www.scientology.org	For comparison – Website and forum	32760	1228	34432
YouTube – www.youtube.com	For comparison – video sharing	3	686.159	8.546 mio.

Table 2: Data on a small selection of satanic/Left-Hand Path websites providing a traffic rank, measuring aggregate traffic based on average daily visitors and average quarterly page views, and the number of **links to** the site, both based on information gained from www.alexa.com on November 18, 2010. Note that the lower the traffic rank, the higher the activity. For comparison, I have provided **inlink** numbers from Yahoo’s site explorer at www.siteexplorer.search.yahoo.com (November 18, 2010).

Similarly the number of *links to sites* is wildly imprecise, as Alexa only counts links ‘from sites visited by users in the Alexa traffic panel. Links that were not seen by users in the Alexa traffic panel are not counted’.³⁹ Accordingly the numbers seem quite low. For this reason I have done another search on Yahoo’s site explorer, providing ‘inlink’ data that seems intuitively more correct. Both these inlinks and Alexa’s link numbers are from diverse sources, from Wikipedia and Facebook to other satanic sites, making the data somewhat complicated to use uncritically. Nonetheless, used heuristically the relations between the sites do say something significant about relative strength, network building, and authority whether we are working with one or the other data set. We could call it a *reputation* or *saturation* indicator. The Church of Satan score high on both searches, indicating a stable network *to* this site. Anomalies include Vexen Crabtree’s site, The Joy of Satan, the Temple of the Vampire, the Temple of Set, and NocTifer’s satanservice.org; otherwise, most sites are in the tens or hundreds, indicating a small integration both in the milieu and outside. Concluding on the basis of traffic rank and links we can say that most satanic and Left-Hand Path sites live in obscurity.

The middle column is not based on Alexa data, but my own typology of modern Satanism presented above, as well as the type of site (dynamic website, static archive, community). This information is provided to align the sites in the satanic milieu according to orientation and online according to function. In the present case, it is not possible to say anything conclusive about the strength of representation online, as the numbers are too tentative; nevertheless the Church of Satan’s rationalist Satanism seems to outperform all its ideological competitors in terms of popularity and reputation. Only the Joy of Satan comes close in terms of traffic, perhaps because of the wildly eclectic and freely accessible material distributed across a range of mirror sites. On the other hand both rationalist and esoteric sites seem to be well-established, visited, and interlinked.⁴⁰

In an attempt to answer the final set of questions about connectivity, I used a third meta-communicative tool called *Issue Crawler* to perform ‘snowball’ and ‘co-link’ analyses on the sample which could be translated into a visible representation called a ‘cluster map’

³⁹ I quote from the small drop-down explanation window next to the number. See also the Alexa FAQ on ‘Sites Linking In’.

⁴⁰ An interesting feature of Alexa searches I can only hint at here is the various data on user activity, demographics, and geographical spread of individual websites. As a whole, the tendencies of the demographic data do seem to confirm James R. Lewis’ conclusions about average age, education, geography, and online activity; see Lewis, ‘Who Serves Satan?’; Lewis, ‘Fit for the Devil’.

(see **model 1 in the appendix**).⁴¹ Basically, a snowball analysis crawls a given set of sites for links and retains them; this can be done in up to three degrees of separation, resulting in enormous clusters of equivocal links and nodes. In contrast, a co-link analysis only retains outlinks that at least two starting points have in common, restricting the model to confirmed relations. The results are by far the most provisional, as I have yet to strike a balance of starting points in either mode to get a manageable model. The problem lies in the nature of Internet linking itself as well as my experience with such cluster mapping tools – all of my data sets were either too large and inclusive or too exclusive and limited, resulting in misleading charts. If too inclusive, as most snowball searches were, the data included irrelevant Facebook pages, porn sites, and other inappropriate links in unmanageable files of 60 or more megabytes (that is 40000+ links and nodes, too large for modelling). If too exclusive, as the model offered here surely is, many interesting relations disappear because of the specificity of co-link measurement. Nevertheless, I find this map based on a co-link analysis of fourteen starting points vastly more useful for the present purpose, as it only charts *significant* links that are mutually supported, indicating a certain amount of commonality.

Although the model at first glance looks confusing, some of the nodes are recognizable sites from the previous lists (Church of Satan, Satannet, Satanservice, Purging Talon, Temple of Set, the Temple of the Vampire, and Radio Free Satan). Other sites are expected, like the Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance (www.religioustolerance.org) who have written extensively and fairly about Satanism, and the Feral House – Coopstuff connection to Church of Satan (via publisher Adam Parfrey and the artist Coop, both affiliated with the Church of Satan). In addition, when perusing the ‘extract URLs’ result file behind the model, we find that angelfire.com covers Diane Vera and Joy of Satan, geocities.com covers the old Satanic Reds site, and so on. All the same, many of my starting points are absent, which is surprising when taking the inlinks provided in table 2 into account. A high number of links to the site does not guarantee a central place or even a node in the cluster map, indicating that sites such as Vexen Crabtree’s or Venus Satan’s have a reputation (i.e. inlinks) *outside* the satanic milieu in a narrow sense. Looked at in another way by correlating with table 1, of the websites established before 2000, only the First Satanic Church, First Church of Satan, and the 600 club are *absent*; after 2001, only Diane Vera, Joy of Satan, and Satanic Reds are *present*, and only *by proxy* (through host domains and not their

⁴¹ The program can be found at www.issuecrawler.net. The following description is based on the website’s instructions and Bainbridge, ‘Expanding the Use of the Internet’.

individual sites). So duration seems to play a role. On the other hand, many of the nodes are not associated directly with Satanism (like otohq.org, Ordo Templi Orientis' (now defunct) directory) or not operational, limiting the explanatory power if relying too heavily on the map alone.

Is there a 'large, heterogeneous online community' of Satanists, as Chris Mathews, Venus Satanus and Corvis Nocturnum claim, or is it rather a bunch of loose networks with one dominant community, as Peter Gilmore asserts? As the cluster map shows, relations and networks of communication do exist. Correlated with tables 1 and 2, we do see actual community *sites*, but little to confirm any community in the singular. Combined with a little surfing on these sites, it is obvious that networks are established by linkage; for example, Diane Vera links to blog and forum networks, and Satanic Reds lists 'members' and affiliates.⁴² But little *interlinkage* is done. Twelve of the nineteen sites I have analyzed do not even show up on a co-link analysis, indicating that little is done to build or strengthen the network into a mutual practiced community or movement of interest. In fact, using 'community' in the singular glosses over (or completely ignores) the struggles and conflicts inherent in actual delimitations of 'community' between the various groups and actors. It would seem that heterogeneous communities in the plural do develop both online and offline, but mostly around relatively homogenous social entities, such as the ideologies, worldviews, and practices of *organized* satanic groups with specific texts, spokespersons, and interpretations. This is visible in the cluster map confirming the gist, if not the conclusion, of Gilmore's argument discussed earlier. For the wider cultural context and the ephemeral networks within, 'milieu' is in fact a much better term.

This substitution is not done to criticize the veracity of perceived feelings of togetherness or the authenticity of emotional, ethical, and aesthetic communion between satanic seekers. Rather, it is to emphasize the *discursive* nature of these emotions and cognitions, and the imaginary nature of communities and currents. Thus I do not reject the basic understanding of modern Satanism as a cohesive current, but I do claim that this cohesion is of a second order far less communitarian and far more fuzzy than implied in terms

⁴² On Vera's networking, see <http://theisticsatanism.com> (accessed November 27, 2010). She links to a blog network with a handful of participants (surprisingly active as well), a forum network with one forum and some site lists mainly consisting in a handful of defunct pages. She is also an avid Facebook group administrator. On Satanic Reds, see Satanic Reds, 'Member Sites' . Most of the 19 member sites are defunct or haven't been updated for 3 or more years.

like ‘community’ and ‘movement’ in the singular.⁴³ In contrast, ‘milieu’ is acting as an aggregate noun demarcating certain ideological and symbolic interests and shared patterns of consumption, and it should be understood as a mid-level analytical concept between the general ‘occulture’, or boundary culture between margin and mainstream, and distinct communities, groups and organizations within it, which is the normal unit of analysis in sociological and historical studies of contemporary Satanism.

In his article ‘Community and Identity in the Electronic Village’ Derek Foster proposes a conceptual framework that is useful in this context. His point of departure is Benedict Anderson’s influential idea of *imagined communities*: All communities larger than face-to-face networks must be imagined, such that ‘in the minds of each lives the image of their communion’.⁴⁴ Forster subsequently states that

Community, then, is built by a sufficient flow of ‘we-relevant’ information. The ‘we’ or the collective identity that results is structured around others who are seen as similar to the ‘me’. In this sense, community, like any form of communication, is not fully realized without a conception of the self.⁴⁵

Thus it is complicated navigations of recognition between the public and the private, the subjective and the collective that creates (produces) the community: ‘That which holds a virtual community intact is the subjective criterion of togetherness, a feeling of connectedness that confers a sense of belonging. Virtual communities require much more than the mere act of connection itself’.⁴⁶ The ‘more’ hinted at is of course *intentional* communication and *interpretative* practice.⁴⁷ So while there may be an imagined ‘Satanic community’ which has a social reality for some inclusive-minded Satanists, the model shows little performance of this community outside a narrowly defined ‘we’ and a lot of resistance from other sectors of the milieu. Accordingly, we should be very careful not to homogenize and simplify the

⁴³ See Petersen, ‘Introduction: Embracing Satan’, 4-6.

⁴⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6. Note omitted.

⁴⁵ Foster, ‘Community and Identity’, 25.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 29. See also Appadurai, *Modernity*, whose notion of ‘locality’ as a phenomenological concept is tied to the concept of ‘neighborhood’ (both virtual and spatial) as ‘situated communities’ (p. 178-79).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 34. Forster refers to Jürgen Habermas’ central positioning of the *speech act* and concludes the article with the comment: ‘Perhaps then, the fullest understanding of the term [virtual community] is gained by grounding it in the communicative act itself’ (*ibid.*, 35 and the model on page 34).

Internet or milieu as singular entities as 'a multiplicity of cultural phenomena' is contained within these concepts.⁴⁸

In any case, people tend to cluster in networks around discourses and practices sharing specific themes, even if they move from one to the next in their search for knowledge and experiences. There are thus various levels of 'we-information' and a choice of avenues of 'togetherness' and 'antipathy' from which to build communities in the plural, all of which are distributed and amplified by the virtual realm. The early 'frontier' of de-territorialized online Satanism has been both strengthened and weakened by the gradual re-territorialization of Satanism-s online in the past decade, limiting heterodoxy and constructing boundaries to establish a semblance of dominance. All the websites discussed have 'border zones', whether it is a guestbook, a forum or user-generated content, stimulating conflict within and between local domains. To understand such communities and authorities online, we have to understand the 'morphology' of discourse online, something enacted in speech – or writing. This brings us back to the doorstep of the text. We will now turn to some interesting ways of re-assessing the text-centric methodology of historiography in light of these 'webnographic' reflections.

From Book to Bit: A Brief Aside on Textual Genetics

The Maasai do not simply 'believe' in everything they actually say, although what they may, nevertheless to themselves, be adequate expressions of what they believe. And if they 'believe', there may be various degrees and modes in which they believe.⁴⁹

To assess textual practice online we must revisit the issue of inferences from oral, written, ritual, or pictorial *expressions* to individual or collective *systems of belief*. As Tord Olsson has convincingly argued, we have to be extremely careful when analyzing utterances as representations, as the adherents of a given religion do not necessarily *believe* what they are saying and doing – even though they nevertheless consider it 'adequate expressions of what they believe' – because what they are saying and doing is context-dependent. In other words, we cannot expect the multitude of divergent expressions of a religion to be systematically connected in an isolate, coherent system implanted in peoples' heads or in the culture shared by them; thus it is dangerous to make such inferences through general models of historical development or psychological priorities.

⁴⁸ Markham, 'The Internet as a research context', 360. See also Kendall, 'Recontextualizing "Cyberspace"', who suggests four research contexts eminently applicable to the study of milieus.

⁴⁹ Olsson, 'Verbal Representation of Religious Beliefs', 75.

This is especially clear with representations of gods which ‘are conditioned by genre and speech situation’⁵⁰ and as a result can manifest themselves radically different in different contexts: Anthropomorphic and concrete in myths associated with a narrative situation and pantheistic and abstract in hymns related to a situation of praise.⁵¹ Tord Olsson states that ‘the situation is that different understandings dominate in different speech contexts; and with reference to oral literature, given conceptions find expression in given genres’.⁵² As such it is prudent to include reflections of the formal traits of aesthetic and communicative genres in the analysis of religious expressions, and most importantly, to be careful when homogenizing *beliefs* (plural) into monolithic *systems of belief* (singular).

These constructivist rules of thumb do not become any less relevant when we address sources found on the Internet. I see at least two avenues of application in the present context. First, we can apply genre-dependency of gods directly, transferring Olsson’s analysis of representations in oral texts to the various texts found in Satanism. In other words: *how* Satan (and other sinister beings) is understood must be related to genre and speech context. Whether the favored mythological being is a metaphor, a symbol, or a real entity is partly dependent upon the dogmatic stance of the group or person in question, but also upon the conduit in which this ‘belief system’ is communicated – reflexive essays, mythical narratives, and (especially) hymns, prayer, and ritual texts such as invocations. For example, the figure of Set in Michael Aquino’s Temple of Set is explicitly anthropomorphic in ceremonial texts and declarations on the transferral of authority, and more psychologized and vague in essayistic reflections.⁵³ Similarly, Satan in LaVey’s *Satanic Bible* is symbolic for the dark force in nature, human carnality, and self-awareness in the intellectual essays of the second part, the Book of Lucifer, and anthropomorphic in the first, third, and fourth parts. The latter is clearly the effect of genre, as they are literary, ritual, or mythic in nature and often downplayed later as ‘phase-one Satanism’.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, the ‘theistic’ expressions found in *The Satanic Bible* (the ritual parts in particular) remain as artefacts, appropriated and interpreted by Satanists as well as outsiders,

⁵⁰ Olsson, ‘Verbal Representation’, 91.

⁵¹ Cognitive studies have made analogous discoveries indicating that the concept of god is cognitively different when related to context, e.g. Barrett, ‘Exploring the natural foundations of religion’, especially 29-30. Understanding, content and situation are dependent upon each other.

⁵² Olsson, ‘Verbal Representation’, 82-83.

⁵³ See Petersen, ‘The Seeds of Satan’, 9-11; and Petersen, ‘Satanists and Nuts’, 236-38.

⁵⁴ See Petersen, ‘We Demand Bedrock Knowledge’, 86-87; Petersen, ‘Smite Him’, 361-62..

making it possible for interpreters to see both atheistic and theistic currents in LaVey's work. Peter Gilmore chooses an explicitly atheistic and materialistic interpretation, foregrounding the essays of the Book of Lucifer and the anti-occult writings of LaVey, while esoteric Satanists such as Michael Aquino, Diane Vera, and John Allee approach LaVey's fuzziness by various means to underscore 'non-reductive' interpretations of Satan.⁵⁵ So while theistic Satanism does exist, all extractions of 'dogma' from utterances and texts must be related to genre and context. Any 'real' entity can be a dogmatic position, but it can also be an artefact of genre. This is relevant in fieldwork situations and in the engagement with texts, especially where irony, conscious ambiguity, or relative communication related to audience adds an extra layer of confusion on the thorned issue of representation.⁵⁶

The second possibility of appliance is different. I would suggest we apply genre-dependency and speech contexts more broadly as a theoretical reorientation of *how we view* texts; this is not so much about the nature of gods as about how Olsson's insights on oral literature can be applied to 'hypertext' and new media practices. Basically, online texts constitute a new genre. I will focus on a particularly interesting example, namely the 'posts' and 'threads' on message or discussion boards, which is both a common form of community software and an accessible field for research. Here we move from fixed text consumption to fluid text production and to the discursive negotiations of ideology, identity, and community in hybrid texts. An analysis of these floating hybrids *between* text and speech should be mindful of the hybridity of both the isolate post and the thread as a whole, as well as the relation between threads and other types of text and performance - it is never sufficient to analyze a single post. The specific boundaries must be placed pragmatically in relation to the concrete research program; it is the dialogical aspect which is of interest here.

Of course, 'texts' are not only referential, content-oriented, and fixed, and 'speech' is not only performance. However, thought of as generic extremes on a continuum these types could illustrate different aspects of the functionality of communication – here primarily the *asynchronous* and the *synchronous* on one hand and the *mediate* and the *immediate* on the other.⁵⁷ 'Posts' and 'threads' could be placed on this continuum as expressions between 'chat'

⁵⁵ Petersen, 'The Seeds of Satan', 4-5 (Aquino), 25-26 (Vera). Gilmore's position is made very clear in Shankbone, 'Satanism', as is Allee's in Allee, 'Church of Satan Rap Sheet'. An analysis of the various wordings of standard rituals and especially invocations to Satan/Set across groups would illuminate this perspective, as would the use of personal correspondence in Aquino, *Church of Satan*, but space is limited.

⁵⁶ See Petersen, 'We Demand Bedrock Knowledge', 92; Petersen, 'The Seeds of Satan', 12-20.

⁵⁷ See e.g. Yates, 'Researching Internet Interaction', 96-97.

and 'email' on a scale going from text to speech. In his analysis of 'cybertalk', Norman Denzin is making similar connections through his concept of 'performance speech', a text which, when in the form of a thread, is messy, dialogical, immediate, situated and constantly re-interpreted, as speech, but which is precisely *also* a text because it is written and therefore more unambiguous, proofread and thought through beforehand.⁵⁸ As such, 'performance speech' is enacted, hybrid text revealing the immediacy of speech and the 'mediacy' or fixation of writing, and thus the provisional and intermittent character of communication. The written dialogue is in other words 'betwixt and between', at once producing community and fixating meaning, including and excluding, which is especially useful in an analysis attempting to correlate structure and actor, system and practice, or speech situation and expression. Let us have a look at a specific example.

Authority and Hybrid Texts: Discussing 'Ritual' on Satanic Forum's Message Board

[Sp34k:] *makes a lovely curtsy* A-hoy out there land crabs... I have been thinking 'Many Satanists say that they go through different rituals and achieve a greater power/force within themselves when they perform it/When it is performed' Well, I am curious and want to know how the rituals YOU perform are done 'if you perform rituals' And how does one achieve this 'strength'?⁵⁹

This is the first post in a thread on the Danish *Satanisk Forum Message Board*, an official public discussion board established in 2002 by the organization Satanisk Forum (Satanic Forum) to facilitate interaction between members and accommodate guests.⁶⁰ 'Sp34k' risks his digital nose and asks the other participants about their take on the significance and interpretation of ritual in a satanic context. As we can see from the meta-data discussed in the third section, Satanisk Forum is a small fish in the global satanic milieu, ranking low in both traffic rank and inlinks. This is most likely due to the language barrier as well as the quite explicit and enforced rationalist take on Satanism which prohibits any large-scale networking with esoteric Satanists, talk of 'Satanic community' and 'Satanic "subculture"' notwithstanding.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Denzin, 'Cybertalk and the Method of Instances', 111-112.

⁵⁹ SFO, 'ritual=styrke'. Posted October 25, 2005. Bear in mind that it is impossible to convey the general feeling in Danish of this and the following quotes, in part because I have to correct spelling and grammar in my translation.

⁶⁰ I have previously discussed Satanisk Forum in Petersen, 'Binary', 600-606; and Petersen, 'We Demand Bedrock Knowledge', 99-102. I have followed the organization's spokespersons and message board since 2001.

⁶¹ See SFO, 'bylaws', article 2 (my translation).

Satanisk Forum itself developed from a small group of individuals associated with the Church of Satan-affiliated organization Prometheus Grotten (the Prometheus Grotto, briefly named COS DK) in the late 1990s. In the aftermath of LaVey's death, they reorganized first as an independent group and later after internal disagreement, split the organization into two separate entities in 2001, of which Satanisk Forum was the largest and most successful in terms of media penetration and subcultural support. Today, although the activity has declined due to further schism and general fatigue, Satanisk Forum is the most visible and accessible association of rationalist Satanists in Denmark with about 200 members and 555 participants on their message board. I have chosen this particular thread because it reflects the character of the board in the heyday of the group, even though it is now certainly a thing of the past.

'Sp34k's post is characterized by an immediate and speech-oriented form. It is filled with language markers of an oral nature and the sentence constructions are typical of speech, not writing. In addition, one finds a lot of grammatical and spelling errors, an expressive use of quotation marks (as in 'if you perform rituals' and 'strength' which marks a reservation or addition), and a use of the slash to optimize or vary information. Notice also the common paralinguistic use of asterisks to perform an action in writing: '*makes a lovely curtsy*'. This is typical of chat- and SMS-language and is a written contextual event – a stage management of sorts. The many speech codes soften the written form and set an informal tone, but the post is in effect a written text using oral codes and is as such asynchronous and mediate in spite of the form. The post gives the impression of an inquirer who is of minor importance on the specific message board, in the off-line group behind it and in the amorphous milieu of Satanists online.

'Sp34k' is asking two questions: How other Satanists perform rituals and how he (or one) achieves strength through them. The same day, 'Amina' answers:

There aren't many users of ritual on the board (in particular) judging by earlier threads. As a replacement I would recommend the section on rituals in 'Gud er (stadig) blå'⁶² which gives some theoretical background. Otherwise you might relate to peoples experiences with certain types of rituals by thinking of some piece of music that has affected you strongly. The special thing about rituals is that they speak directly to our feelings in the same way music can do. The best known satanic rituals are those mentioned in 'The Satanic Bible' and 'The Satanic Rituals'. In my opinion these rituals are not practiced by many, however.⁶³

⁶² *Gud er (stadig) blå* [God is (still) Blue] is an accessible academic treatment of contemporary religions written by the Danish Historian of religion Mikael Rothstein.

⁶³ SFO, 'ritual=styrke'. Posted October 25th 2005. My translation.

This post is much more text-oriented and distanced than ‘Sp34k’s’: Notice the construction of sentences and the informational ‘flow’ in the text. It seems proof-read and professional. ‘Amina’ refers to previous threads on the board, academic literature (*Gud er (stadig) blå*), personal experience (articulated through a ‘we’), Anton LaVey’s books and personal assessments in the beginning and end. Without rejecting the question outright the answer nevertheless communicates that practicing rituals is something marginal in satanic circles (not many users (in particular), not practiced by many), something natural (equal to strong emotions) and something that can be studied in both academic and satanic literature (Rothstein and LaVey).⁶⁴ An interpretation of ritual is thus articulated that is not only substantiated by the content of the text, its ‘what’, but also its form, the ‘how’, for example through the references to real texts offline and the textual essayistic appearance of the post itself.

After the initial encounter the thread develops into a pseudo-conversation where ‘Sp34k’ is lectured by ‘Amina’ and ‘Wolf’ on such subjects as dream travels, New Age, nihilism, and religious education in primary school.⁶⁵ The characteristics found in the two posts analyzed above is consistent with these; ‘Sp34k’ is using a lot of emoticons and codes from speech, while ‘Amina’ is writing longer and more essayistic posts. ‘Wolf’ is interjecting brief comments (more like corrections) twice, in both instances referring to written materials found online, namely Wikipedia and the FAQ on *Satanic Forum*’s website. One gets the sense that ‘Amina’ and ‘Wolf’ are playing ‘good cop – bad cop’ with ‘Sp34k’, gently correcting his mistakes (such as mentioning out-of-body experiences in the same breath as satanic rituals or claiming to have read New Age’s website in the singular). It is here important to understand that different message boards and discussion groups provide different degrees of freedom – they produce different types of hybrid text, depending on such matters as *moderation* and *tacit rules* within the group. A heavily moderated site results in spellchecked and corrected posts similar to essays, while a less moderated site results in messy posts filled with errors in grammar and spelling, emoticons, and chat-style abbreviations similar to the immediacy of speech.⁶⁶

This relates to a core problem: Whether traditional and virtual, both community and communication *implies power*, setting the issues of authority and authenticity in the

⁶⁴ The other answer on the same day, by ‘Zigma’, refers to a text from the groups own magazine, *Satanic Bulletin*. The article in question is written by ‘Amina’.

⁶⁵ See the following eight posts, all from October 26, 2005, at SFO, ‘ritual=styrke’.

⁶⁶ See e.g. Connery, ‘IMHO’; Denzin, ‘Cybertalk’.

foreground of all engagements with virtual texts and virtual populations. In her study of religious authority online, Heidi Campbell discusses the necessity of understanding the asymmetric relations between actors and religious hierarchy, structure, ideology, and text when analyzing authority at play.⁶⁷ Her empirical research indicates that ‘multiple layers or perceptions of authority’ have to be discerned, yet the understanding of authority itself is curiously old-fashioned. For online hybrids and discursive constructions of togetherness, Bruce Lincoln’s definition of authority as the right to speak explicitly ties its presence to a dynamic and concrete instance of authorization and trust:

discursive authority is not so much an entity as it is (1) an effect; (2) the capacity for producing that effect; and (3) the commonly shared opinion that a given actor has the capacity for producing that effect. More precisely, I take the effect to be the result of the conjecture of the right speaker, the right speech and delivery, the right staging and props, the right time and place, and an audience whose historically and culturally conditioned expectations establish the parameters of what is judged ‘right’ in all these instances.⁶⁸

Consequently, the right to speak is a structural process in a symmetrical relation with persuasion and force and not an essential ‘thing’, a process which merges the concepts of ‘power’ and ‘community’ as relational authorization.⁶⁹ A lot of elements indicate that ‘Amina’ and ‘Wolf’s’ posts have hegemonic or authoritative status, both when considering the formal characteristics and the content. In addition, when moving beyond the posts themselves, such circumstances as the fact that they are both site administrators and moderators on the board, both are members of Satanisk Forum (which is indicated by a banner below the avatar) and both have posted extensively (2460 and 1117 posts respectively at the time of writing – that is about 30 percent of *all posts* on the board when combined) contribute to this conclusion.⁷⁰ On the other hand, ‘Sp34k’ has joined the message board five days before his inquiry, is not a member of the parent group and has posted 102 times (about

⁶⁷ Campbell, ‘Who’s Got the Power?’. See also the introduction to Dawson & Cowan, *Religion Online* and Dawson, ‘Religion and the quest for virtual community’ for more on virtual community and power.

⁶⁸ Lincoln, *Authority*, 10-11.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 4-6, 11. See also the distinctions presented in Lincoln, *Discourse and the Construction of Society*.

⁷⁰ All of these meta-textual data can be accessed easily on the website itself. They are in fact founding members of Satanisk Forum, members of the governing board, founding members of the message board, and number one and two on its list of members. Spokespersons indeed.

1 percent of all posts, which makes him an active member on the board – but I will return to that below).

This asymmetry of authority is further expressed in the marked difference between the ‘old guard’ and new members. If we compare with other threads on the message board such as ‘A request to the users’ and ‘LaVey’s “The Satanic Rituals”’,⁷¹ we can categorize posters within diminishing roles of status and power: Administrators, active members of the *Satanic Forum*, active non-members, inactive members of Satanisk Forum, infrequent posters, ‘I have been issued a warning’-debaters (indicated by another banner on the profile), and the banned or expelled. But aside from the date of registration and membership of the parent body all of these roles and positions of power are constituted communicatively – they exist locally by the very fact that there is intentional communication.

Hence we can follow the discursive construction of conceptual meaning and online community through individual posts and threads. Core members are articulating one discourse and marginalizing others, such that some posts have more meaning than others even though there are several interpretations present within one thread. This is in fact a virtual community with an inside and an outside. This becomes evident about a year later when the hegemonic interpretation of rituals is challenged by ‘Satani’, who writes:

It is different how one has one’s rituals, some has them to prove to themselves that they are worth more and actually mean something. I hold (perform) rituals to support my faith, not to prove anything. I believe in myself and really don’t care what everybody else is saying and think of me. I trust only myself and my god satan. I am the inverse of what the Christians. A real God fulfils one’s wishes, that never happened when I was a Christian, never. I know that the Christian’s God take care of light and dry weather. In that case I do the opposite. I listen to satan. Have been to some ritual meetings, one feels valuable and is a servant of Satan. Sometimes I lie outside at midnight, full moon and rain. And feel satan’s power. He is the one that is the creator, him that should be respected. Does someone have other rituals? – I would like very much to hear about it.⁷²

This post is different than the previous ones both in form and content. To take the last aspect first, ‘Satani’ is more in synch with the spirit of ‘Sp34k’s’ initial inquiry than ‘Amina’ or ‘Wolf’. The post provides answers to both what rituals are performed (listen to Satan, ritual meetings, lies outside at midnight with a full moon and rain) and to what strength or power

⁷¹ See SFO, ‘En anmodning til brugerne’; SFO, ‘LaVey’s Sataniske ritualer’.

⁷² SFO, ‘ritual=styrke’, posted November 18, 2006. This post has so many errors I have omitted the use of [sic]; thus all errors in the translation are intentional.

one gains from it (support faith, fulfil wishes, feel valuable, feel Satan's power). This is an interpretation of rituals that is radically different from 'Amina' and 'Wolf's', whose understanding corresponds to the official, rationalist, and psychologizing discourse of the Satanisk Forum as articulated through the FAQ, the official magazine and so on. 'Satani', on the other hand, is referring explicitly to Christianity in an anti-Christian, theistic, and deeply metaphysical discourse; rituals work because God and Satan exist – God provides us with light and dry weather, Satan fulfils one's wishes. Formally, the post has traits of both speech and text, although the oral and immediate nature is predominant. This is expressed in amplifying adverbs, repetitions (that never happened when I was a Christian, never), syntax and spelling, the absent subject in several sentences, and finally the double question in the end. The text-oriented and mediate can be seen in the overall coherence and flow of the post.

'Satani' does not stand a chance. On the same day 'Wolf' quotes the passage about light and dry weather and dryly remarks that the answer to that rather should be found in meteorology⁷³, while 'Amina' the next day asks where 'Satani' gets his ideas from, as 'your description of your faith on the face of it seems very different than what most other Satanists express'.⁷⁴ Even though 'Satani' dutifully answers that the meetings take place in cemeteries at midnight with 'a lot of Satanists' and are called 'The Holy Sign', and that we can read about them 'in the Satanic books'⁷⁵, 'Amina' is not convinced. She effectively ends the 'discussion' by first referring to 'the many books and articles I have read together with about ten years in the milieu' and secondly through a total deconstruction of 'Satani's' post by embedding it in an academic discourse – she demands explicit references and calls his interpretation of rituals 'ostensive acting', an emulation of popular Western demonology by living out a mythical frame. 'Satani' has not written a post since.

In conclusion, the thread as a whole is also an example of a hybrid text. We can see that there is a hegemonic discourse of ritual, but that it has to be articulated, indeed activated and re-constructed constantly. In this case powerful resources like brutal moderation or banning does not appear, but it is obvious that there are more open and more closed posts which in themselves are playing up against group values as formulated in other threads, in the FAQ and on the group's website. 'Sp34k' ends on the inside of this community while 'Satani' ends on the outside, and it is to a large degree a matter of 'walking the walk and talking the

⁷³ Ibid., posted November 18, 2006.

⁷⁴ Ibid., posted November 19, 2006.

⁷⁵ Ibid., posted November 19, 2006.

talk' (or perhaps 'when in Rome...'). Perhaps 'Sp34k' *cannot* write in another way, but through the oral codes and traits his inquiry exhibits an imprint of genuine interest in knowledge as well as community. 'Amina' and 'Wolf' are accommodating and enter into cautious dialogue with him, whereas they cut off 'Satani' completely because he *challenges* the boundaries of the established discourse.

There are many paths to follow from this example. One course is to focus on how socialization works as a unification or regimentation under the hegemonic discourse of Satanism on the site. Substantially, contributors have to read the FAQ before posting⁷⁶; Formally, they have to conform to certain stylistic rules (understood both orthographically and rhetorically).⁷⁷ Posters such as 'Sp34k' and 'The ONE' are examples of users who are socialized successfully – they write a large number of posts and adopt 'Amina's', 'Wolf's' and therefore Satanisk Forum's discourse – while 'Satani' and 'Woland' are users who, though expressing very different interpretations of Satanism and huge differences in communicative skill, nevertheless are not successfully socialized; they write a small number of posts and disappear rather than adopting anything. Two other interesting types are exemplified by 'Einstürzende', who produces a lot, but does not adopt the discourse (but his posts gradually become friendlier towards 'Amina' and 'Wolf'; they simply avoid contentious issues), and 'Serdan' and 'Ko18', who post a lot of mainly divisive writings and are eventually banned by the moderator ('Wolf').⁷⁸ On a formal level, contributors who are inside the virtual community become more text-oriented, even though literacy is not a guarantee of affiliation. Nevertheless, when compared to other forums there seems to be an overweight of academics and thus a clear tendency towards intellectualization and an academic orthographical norm, and this is of course related to such off-line contexts as the membership base of the parent body, Satanic Forum, and the extant values here.

⁷⁶ This is a classical response to many inquiries especially from pupils and students. See e.g. SFO, 'Hvad indenbære satanismen...'

⁷⁷ See 'Wolf's' posts Wolf, 'Nye retningslinjer' from 2005 and Wolf, 'Danskproblemer' from 2007, both posted as moderator of the board.

⁷⁸ For a discussion of similar dynamics on Baha'i.message boards, see eg. Piff & Warburg, 'Seeking for Truth'.

Concluding Remarks

The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong.⁷⁹

The hybrid texts of a discussion forum can be utilized to isolate and analyze themes (as ‘ordinary’ texts), but they are even more useful when used to take a closer look at the creation of discourse, closure and conflict – the constructivist perspective. The virtual community is *both* creating the text *and* created with it, because the text contains both the pros and contras to the discourse itself. This presents the opportunity to track both the formal and substantial constitutive traits of the interpretative practice inherent in the hybrid text. We can look at the ‘careers’ of individual debaters in a formal and/or substantial sense, take a closer look at thematic *leitmotif*, or stratify the nuances between the different articulations and degrees of engagement, status, and activity.

Hence I agree with Mark MacWilliams that virtual communities are *at least* ‘symbolically real heteroglossic spaces’, constituting a ‘diverse mixture of voices’ that creates places in which to include or exclude others.⁸⁰ Naturally, not all communication, nor communication in itself, creates community, but it is difficult to imagine a community both off- and online *without* communication.⁸¹ In a sense, the tool and the place align themselves. As a consequence, I have focused on the meso-level of discourse, a middle-ground between actor and structure and thus an entity that can be found both *in* the singular utterance, expression or text (understood as text, speech, image, action etc.) as well as *between* utterances without being *above* them. The concept of ‘discourse’ marks an attention towards exactly the constructive and dialectical aspects, that is an integration of the structurally conditioned (‘what’) and the conditioning in practice (‘how’).

Sociologically, the use of new media entails new opportunities for transformation and interaction, but also old problems and struggles. Satanisk Forum and the Church of Satan are not that far apart in organizational ethos oriented towards the real world, and they do share strategies of in-group cleansing and out-group marginalizing, especially when compared to other, more esoteric groups less socially embedded offline such as Venus Satanus and HISS. In contrast to individual networks, organizational relations need to be regulated or the boundaries between group and wider setting become unstable. In a wider picture, whether the

⁷⁹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, 452-453.

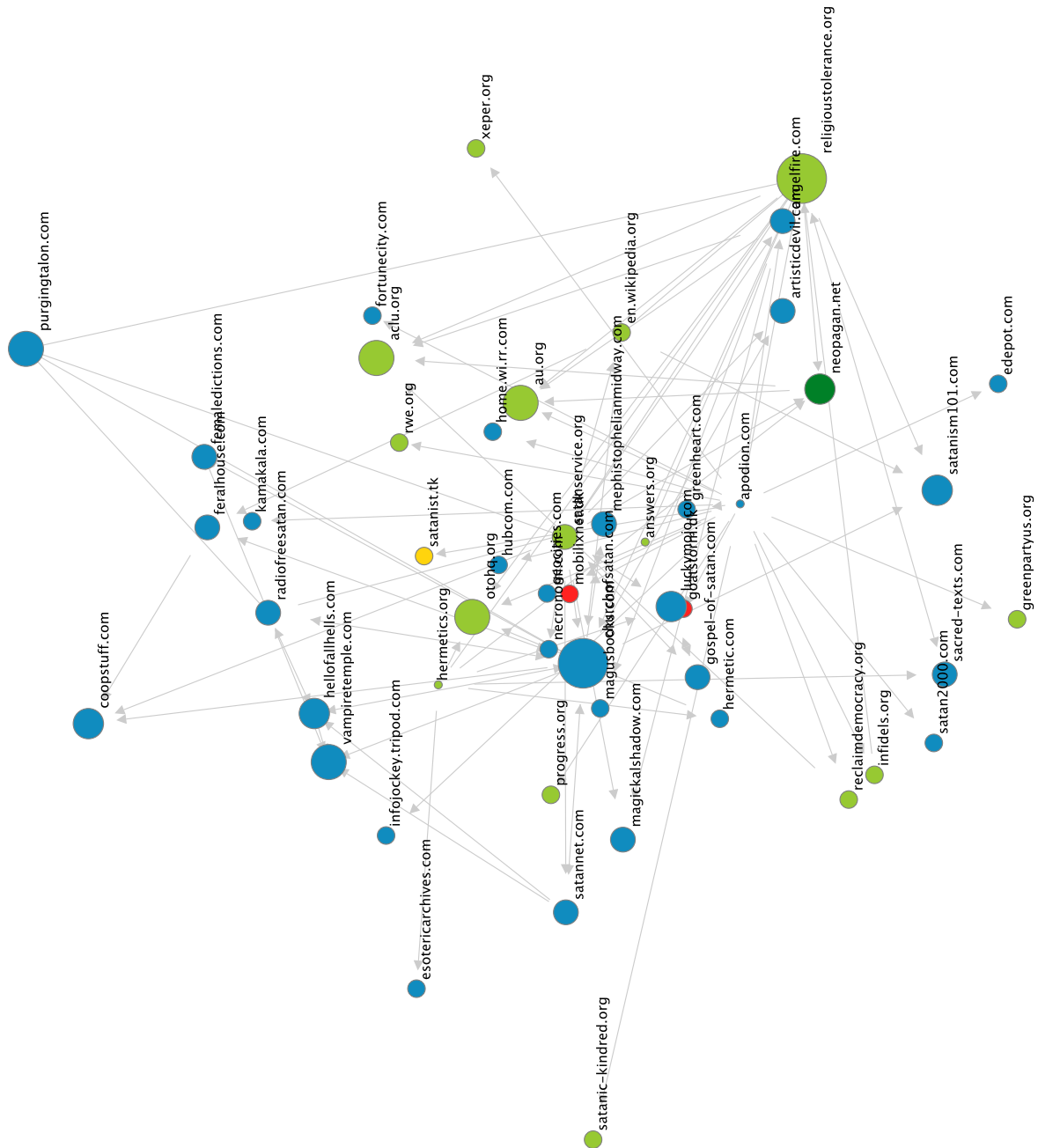
⁸⁰ MacWilliams, ‘Digital Waco’, 180-182.

⁸¹ Foster, ‘Community and Identity’, 24, 30.

tool of communication is used honestly or deceptively, and whether the virtual place itself is viewed as a goldmine or a rubbish heap, depends on the identity of the group in question, the relations of participants, and a host of other aspects tied to global and local factors. The Internet is heterogeneous and constantly negotiated to different extents depending on situation, individual interests, and collective decisions.

The basic analysis presented here can of course be extended to other comparable religious milieus exhibiting a decentralized and fragmented nature offline and online, such as the 'Thelemic milieu' around various OTO-groups and networks, which resembles the satanic milieu studied in the present context. The proliferation of accessible sites makes it possible to follow currents, groups, and individuals from a variety of perspectives, and the webometric meta-tools provide both data and visual aid when charting these milieus from the ground up. We can study official organizational websites, compare them with regional or individual sites, and thus facilitate a geographical comparison of distinctive styles and common iconography, parlance, and identity. Or we can focus on the milieu itself, through Facebook fan pages of supporters, detractors, and even concepts; online literature archives; relevant studies available from private sites; and Wikipedia or one of the increasingly specialized Wikis. Finally, when combined with the reflections on virtuality and power, we can use this methodological apparatus on a micro level as well, and be attentive to the small-scale interventions and their ideological and performative dimensions. The discussions on message boards as hybrid texts are an obvious source for these investigations; indeed, the hybrid text is a new genre with direct access to plays of power and discourse.

Appendix. Model 1: Cluster map of 50 nodes, based on a co-link analysis of 14 starting points performed at www.issuecrawler.net on November 11, 2010. The map shows individual websites and outlinks that at least two starting points have in common, indicating mutual links in the online satanic milieu.



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