CHASING THE TRACE OF THE SACRED: POSTMODERN SPIRITUALITIES

IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN FICTION

A Dissertation

by

ASMAHAN SALLAH

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2010

Major Subject: English

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

Chasing the Trace of the Sacred: Postmodern Spiritualities in Contemporary

American Fiction. (August 2010)

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This dissertation examines the treatment, forms, and representations of

spirituality in contemporary American fiction. Drawing on recent theories in cultural

and critical theory, sociology, and rhetoric, I argue that postmodern fiction finds

sacredness in creative memory and information systems. I analyze E.L. Doctorow's

(2000) *City of God*, Leslie Marmon Silko's (1991) *Almanac of the Dead*, Richard

Powers'(2006) *Echo Maker*, and William Gibson's (1948) *Neuromancer.* In their

quest for the sacred, these works acknowledge the mystic along with the rational as a

legitimate vehicle of knowledge; accordingly, the mysterious and the

incomprehensible are accounted for within the epistemological structure of such

spirituality. Contrary to the disparaging views of postmodern discourse as

depoliticized, the fiction examined in this dissertation redefines the relationship

between the sacred and the secular to engender social change and transformation.

The dissertation stresses the significance of reconsidering the role of literary

spiritualities as a vehicle of transformation. By advancing such reconsideration, the

dissertation achieves two goals. First, it argues for the impurity of the secular as a

construct and sees in this impurity a chance for theory to transcend diagnosis and deconstruction and move toward transformation. Second, by revealing a redemptive sensibility within postmodern discourse, the dissertation challenges Hutcheon's characterization of postmodern culture and discourse as "complicitous critique," showing how culture weaves narratives of restoration to counteract the pressure of fragmentation brought about by global capitalism.

DEDICATION

To my parents for their love and trust

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THEORIZING THE POSTMODERN SACRED

The return of spirituality marks a postmodern countercurrent to the Enlightenment critique and nullification of the sacred. Postmodern thinkers' critique of the Enlightenment paved the way for a postsecular age. Both the postmodernist call for a multiplicity of interpretations and the postmodernist rejection of absolutism enabled the religious and the sacred to emerge again. John Caputo associates the postsecular with the postmodern, relating it to Nietzsche's "death of God" because it implies the death of any version of monism or reductionism, including secularism. Similarly, Santiago Zabala mentions that "[t]he rebirth of religion in the third millennium is not motivated by global threats such as terrorism or planetary ecological catastrophe, hitherto unprecedented, but by the death of God, in other words, by the secularization of the sacred that has been at the center of the process by which the civilization of the western world developed" (2). If "the death of the death of God"[1] manifests itself in science or reason losing an "exclusive right to truth," then "nonscientific ways of thinking about the world, including religious ways, resurface" (Caputo, "On the Power" 133). Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo look at the resurfacing of nonscientific ways of thinking as a part of our cultural

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This dissertation follows the style of *Contemporary Literature*.

conjunction at which "truth occurs at the level of propositions only, not at that of facts" (7). The emergence of language as the meeting ground for the dialogue between natural and human sciences, for example, is for Rorty and Vattimo a manifestation of this propositional truth which has no necessary ties to facts (7). In other words, once we realized that all knowledge can be historicized, the dispute between religion and science in particular and between humanistic culture and scientific culture started to dissolve (Zabala 8).

The contribution that postmodern thinkers offer to this return is the affirmation of faith without categories, without institutions, a "religion without religion" as John Caputo, following Derrida, describes it in his (1997) *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* (160). There is a then a populist return[1] of the spiritual characterized by adherence to traditional forms of religion in different

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[1] Caputo explains that parallelism, saying that the "intellectuals, who are on the left, in a certain way, have caught up to the man on the street, who is on the right. Secularism and the death of God are phenomena known only in academic circles" ("On the Power" 153). In a dialogue with him, he was asked about the relationship of fundamentalism's growth under capitalism in the US and the resurgent interest in religion and theology by contemporary philosophers. In his answer, he confirms what Peter Berger had declared in 1999. Berger identifies Europe and Westerners in higher education circles, especially in the humanities and the social sciences, as exception to his desecularization thesis. The academic subculture is similar in this regard all over the world, he maintains (10). However, I see that Berger's inclusion of Europe as an exception to the desecularization thesis, not an accurate procedure because of his dismissal of the strength of religion in Eastern Europe, in the Balkan specifically. Also, I think that he has ignored many of the higher institutions in the US which have obvious religious affiliations, stressing their affiliation in their job description for prospective candidates. Caputo, on the other hand, sees the two phenomena of persistence of fundamentalism in the capitalistic US and the contemporary philosophers' interest in religion parallel although different in political direction. Caputo explains that parallelism, saying that the "intellectuals, who are on the left, in a certain way, have caught up to the man on the street, who is on the right. Secularism and the death of God are phenomena known only in academic circles" ("On the Power" 153).

degrees and for different purposes. And there is a return of the spiritual characterized

by disassociating spirituality from traditional religion. I suggest "anti-dialectical

spiritualities" as a term to describe the non-oppositional dynamic that shapes

components of postmodern spiritualities, particularly the relationship between the

sacred and the secular, two constructs that the project of Enlightenment put into

radical opposition. The epistemology that underlies such spirituality also reflects an

"anti-dialectical" relationship between reason and mysticism. If New Age and

holistic spiritualities, also postmodern in their revolt against constructs of modernist

reason and the autonomous subject, were characterized by aloofness from the world

and escape from it, contemporary postmodern spiritualities show an engagement

with the world with the ensuing political implications[2]. In other words, contemporary

spiritualities bring to the fore the possibility of a communal salvation, not an

individual one; they open the potential for salvation and redemption to be reclaimed

from heaven to earth. In their writings, major theorists of postmodernism, Derrida,

Foucault, and Baudrillard in specific, attempt to destabilize both the sacred and the

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[2] Comparing the New Age spirituality with the new millennium's, Catherine Albanese states,

> Distinctly broader than the older New Age movement, the new spirituality still shares with it certain themes and cultural practices. Religious experiment and experience are primary; movement and change are good; institutions are suspect; searching and constructing a lifeway for oneself are de rigueur; the feminine principle is celebrated and women achieve notice as religious leaders [. . .] The new spirituality full-blown among us in the early twenty-first century is less shy, however, about its combinative tropes and figures [. . .] So the new spirituality wants to heal flesh and spirit and wants to heal them together, convinced of an abiding correspondence between body and soul; convinced as well of a secret connection between all things; and--following the logic of the connection--convinced that a combinative mingling of religious beliefs and cultural practices is the highway to health and spirit. (19-20)

secular as symbolic constructs, and opt for imagining a "religion without religion."

Such vision carries with it a potential for political transformation. In this

introduction, I provide a theoretical and historical context for my discussion of

postmodern spiritualities in American fiction, arguing that this fiction locates the

sacred in human creativity and information systems. Because of the nature of this

project which draws on both theory and fiction, I also provide a review of the critical

literature relevant to the literary texts that I examine. My presentation of the

theoretical and historical context foregrounds a distinction between religion and

spirituality, a distinction which will serve as an approach to my discussion of the

chosen novels; it will draw attention to the entanglement of the secular and the

sacred in postmodern discourse; and will seek to explain the reasons behind the

engagement of postmodern discourse with religion and/or spirituality.

Discussing the return of religious discourse into intellectual circles, Anthony

Kubiak maintains that while theory was thoroughly secularized in its passage

through European secularism and Marxism, in France, Italy, and Canada, spirituality

has been rising, influenced, "perhaps, by the late work of Jacques Lacan from the

1950s, Emmanuel Levinas's work from the 1960s, and Jean- Paul Sartre's from the

1980s. More recently, Jacques Derrida and Jean-Francois Lyotard in France, Gianni

Vattimo in Italy [. . . have begun to resituate the] discussions of religion and

spirituality in their own analyses of the Real and its relation to the political and

social, to identity, and to identity politics"[3] (89). In modern literary theory

specifically, Suzan Handelman focuses her research in *The Slayers of Moses* (1984)

on demonstrating how secular theorists' discourse has been infiltrated by religion

and mysticism from a hermeneutical point of view. Handelman explores the

influence of Rabbinic and Patristic exegeses and models of interpretation on works

of secular thinkers like Freud, Lacan, Derrida, and Bloom. Also, in *Fragments of*

Redemption, she stresses the intermingling between the sacred and the secular

through showing the relation of Jewish thinkers and philosophers Walter Benjamin,

Levinas, and Greshom Scholem to modernism and postmodernism, suggesting ways

in which "criticism and theology might again vigorously engage each other" (xxiii)

and what cultural materialism could learn from theology (xxii).

     While Kubiak historicizes the resurgence of spirituality in theory and

Handelman traces the entanglement of the secular and the sacred hermeneutically in

works of specific theorists, neither distinguishes between spirituality and religion.

Such a distinction is missing in literary criticism, critical theory, and cultural theory

in general, as well. Eduardo Mendieta's edited collection, *The Frankfurt School on*

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[3] Kubiak, in tracing the resurgence of spirituality in European intellectualism, posits the church-born leftist movements and the American politics of 1960s and 1970s that drew on European philosophers and theologians as two main influences (88). According to him, the FBI's COINTELPRO program and the militant anti-Marxist papacy of John Paul II lead to the diminishment and disdain of spirituality in the realms of academic political thought in the US during that period (87). But, meanwhile, the influence of European philosophers and theologians reached a number of major French intellectuals such as Gilles Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard via the church-born leftist movements and American politics of the sixties and seventies (88) .

Religion, shows that "critical theory's theology can only be a form of 'negative theology'- a theology that begins with the absence of God" (10). The Frankfurt School's critique of religion "turns religion into a source of social critique that transverses the traditional disciplinary boundaries " (11). For example, Horkheimer's "yearning for the wholly other" is a yearning for a "truth whose condition of possibility is the just society" (11). But, sociologists of religion have increasingly been making this distinction clearer in their writing on the topic. Spirituality lately is not understood only in terms of rituals and institutions; for the last twenty years, it has come to be understood as an expression of one's personal search for the sacred beyond the limiting social arrangements of organized religion (Fenn 306). As such, spirituality is intrinsic, immediate, and direct, in contrast to the conventional religious experience which is extrinsic, institutional and focused on defined rituals.

John Milbank maintains that there are two reasons behind the presence of religious subtext in postmodern theoretical discourse. First, unlike modernist attempts at totalization, what Lyotard calls "legitimation by paralogy" attempts to promote the proliferation of local narratives. Religious narratives are, hence, allowed to mutate and to compete endlessly (32). The modern modes of suspicion, "seek to reduce the burden of what it identified as 'irrational' phenomena by showing that they are traceable to an error, a failure of reason" (31). In opposition, postmodern critical thought, represented by Nietzsche and his French contemporary followers, seeks "to show that the apparently strange and arbitrary is not purely arbitrary . . . [and] that apparently rational, common-sense assumptions about self-identity,

motivation and moral values themselves disguise historically instituted mythological constructs" (31).

The second reason for the presence of religious subtexts in postmodern discourse concerns the religious overtones which engulf postmodern critical language (Milbank 32). Among other examples, Milbank refers to Heidegger's talk about 'Being' as if it bestowed grace and to the way in which Nietzsche developed an intuition of an 'eternal' standpoint toward reality, a standpoint which was regarded as the attainment of something valuable and salvific (32). Milbank also points to the language that Deleuze and Guattari use to explain their new concept of deterritorialization . In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they write, "… [deterritorialization] can be called the creator of the earth- of a new land, a universe, . . . This is the meaning of 'absolute'. The absolute expresses nothing transcendent and undifferentiated . . . It expresses only a type of movement qualitatively different from relative movement" (qtd. in Milbank 32, 43).

In spite of these bonds that Milbank detects between postmodern critique and the religious subtext, he denies that the purpose of such endeavor is the mere celebration of the religiosity of postmodern discourse. Milbank's essay touches on one of the objectives of this project which is the historical analysis of the secular as an alleged pure space, a notion which I will elaborate on and argue against in the first chapter. The secular, especially in modern critique, sustains itself through conventional symbolic coding as a pure space. Milbank gives examples from early modern Europe to intimate the imaginary status of the pure secular space. He

maintains that the need to discover a non-Christian political practice which Machiavelli, Bodin, and Spinoza expressed was against the "Christian divorcing of sacrality from the power and disciplined violence of city life;" thus, Machiavelli and later Spinoza tried not to free the secular but to invent a new political religiosity (37). Moreover, he contends that early modern science exhibited a new discourse at once both scientific and theological. Such discourse, according to Amos Funkenstein and Michael Buckley, seeks to explain the world and to prove God's existence, by invoking God as an immediate and not remote cause of finite realities (qtd. in Milbank 37). Manifestations of this discourse and its variants can be seen in works by Descartes, Malebranche, Newton, Kant, and De Bonald's divinely created, not merely legislated social order, "which later gets inverted as Durkheim's 'society is God'" (37-38). Problematizing the secular through understanding its relationship to the sacred demonstrates how both critiques are constituted through the "erection of a new but concealed symbolic order, a new religiosity and a new version of transcendence" (42).

Understanding the relationship between the secular and the sacred enables us not only to gain insight into the formation of the secular as a construct, but also to learn the political potential of the outcome of the interaction between the secular and the sacred. In this regard, Hent de Vries expresses the need for a responsible philosophical response "to the purported return to religion in an era of globalization, virtualization of reality, and the deterritorialization brought about by new media and information technologies" (35). For de Vries, as for Milbank, the question is also that

of "the appropriate political response to these changes, whose consequences are,

perhaps, no longer measurable with the help of terms such as secularism,

postmodernism, multiculturalism, transnationalism, and so on" (35). Looking at

Milbank's analysis next to Alexander Tristan Riley's provides the entanglement of

the secular and the sacred with a historical continuum. So while Milbank sees in

Durkheim's 'society is God' a mutation of an early modern discourse that sought to

blend the scientific and the theological, Riley maintains that Durkheim and Henri

Bergson's approaches to the sacred informed postmodern thought, specifically that

of Baudrillard, Derrida, and Foucault to a lesser extent[4]. In the writings of these

thinkers at least, I see that Milbank has overlooked a conscious attempt to

problematize the secular. Riley, on the other hand, focuses on grounding postmodern

discourse in that of Durkheim, neglecting to show where they diverge. Durkheim's

major work on religion, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, engages in some

notions which appear in postmodern discourse regarding religion. And while I agree

with Riley that there is a continuity of Durkheim's thoughts on religion in

postmodern discourse in some points, I maintain that Durkheim's clear distinction

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[4] George Bataille was the channel through which Durkheim's influence reached thinkers who are often associated with postmodernism, including Foucault but more importantly Baudrillard and Derrida. In 1937, George Bataille formed a neo-Durkheimian group which he called the College of Sociology dedicated to the interrogation of the impure sacred (Riley, "Renegade" 284 and Merrin 14). Bataille follows Durkheim in his interpretation of the sacred, considering it as a "heightened mode of collective experience and communication with others" and describing it as "a privileged moment of communal unity, a moment of the convulsive communication of what is ordinarily stifled (qtd. in Merrin 14).

and disassociation between the sacred and the secular do not find resonance in postmodern discourse. In the following paragraphs, I trace the continuity in two ideas, envisioning the sacred without God and the impure sacred, and I also show postmodern discourse's discontinuity with Durkheim's ideas, especially those pertaining to the separation between the sacred and the profane, on one hand, and reason and faith, on the other.

My review of the opinions of these thinkers, starting with Bergson and Durkheim focuses on a very specific thread that runs in their writings, namely the distinction between formal or organized religion and what Derrida eventually called "religion without religion." It is the distinction between these two categories that has lead to the entanglement of the sacred with the secular[5]. Both Bergson and Durkheim were engaged in affirming the power of the cultural through a reconfiguration and redeployment of the religious notion of the sacred in the midst of an intellectual movement in the direction of radical secularization. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson differentiates between static religion and dynamic religion. In contrast to static religion, dynamic religion is an "entirely inward one" (168). He sees that this development of static religion toward dynamic religion marks an advance "of humanity towards civilization" (168). Bergson defines static religion as

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[5] When the category of religion is analyzed down to its constitutive and functional elements, one can isolate these functions or elements and investigate their presence in secular spheres. This is the method that I will be following in chapter two and chapter three in order to demonstrate the zones of contact between the sacred and the secular.

"a defensive reaction of nature against what might be depressing for the individual and dissolvent for society, in the exercise of intelligence" (194). There is "no religion without rites and ceremonies; thus, static religion aims at social cohesion through its rites, ceremonies, and modes of representation. The religious "representation is above all an occasion for these religious acts" (190), while in dynamic religion, "prayer is independent of its verbal expression; it is an elevation of the soul that can dispense with speech" (192). In this analysis, Bergson liberates what he calls "dynamic religion" from religious acts and representations associated with static religion. If the text of a particular prayer in a particular religion is no longer relevant to the practice of religion, then the individual involved in dynamic religion has to resort to his/her inward formation of religion. Bergson finds that static religion attaches "the individual to society, by telling him tales on a par with those with which we lull children to sleep" (*The Two Sources* 200). In his more detailed description of what dynamic religion is, he associates it with mysticism.

Bergson's distinction between static and dynamic religion corresponds to the distinction between religion and spirituality, not only because he describes dynamic religion as "inward" but because he disassociates it from rituals relevant to organized, institutional religion. Moreover, Bergson's opinion on the relationship between reason and mysticism, which I will elaborate on through my discussion of the epistemology of the sacred in postmodern discourse, stresses a non-binary dynamic between the two. Bergson sees that reason, intelligence, or intellect, cannot be purified from superstition, a term under which he discusses myth-making as a

function of religion. He suggests that "we should not be surprised to find that intelligence was pervaded, as soon as formed, by superstition, that an essentially intelligent being is naturally superstitious, and that intelligent creatures are the only superstitious beings" (99). Durkheim, on the other hand, approaches the "contrast between reason and faith" (429) suspiciously only to prove that they are exclusive in their approach to the real. In the conclusion to his major work on religion, he establishes the connection between religion and philosophy based on their common fields of investigation: "nature, man, society" (429). In a leap of thought that I find unjustifiable, he shifts this correspondence between religion and reason or philosophy to that between religion and science. Religion deals with the realities of man, religion, and society, using a language "which does not differ in nature from that employed by science" (429). But science brings "a spirit of criticism in all its doing, which religion ignores." Probably summarizing why science could function as a metanarrtive in modernity, Durkheim glorifies it, claiming that science "surrounds itself with precautions to 'escape precipitation and bias,' and to hold aside the passions, prejudices and all subjective influences" (429). Because they seek to perfect their methods in addressing the same realities, religion and science, from Durkheim's view, "pursue the same end." However, "scientific thought is only a more perfect form of religious thought. Thus it seems natural that the second should progressively retire before the first, as this becomes better fitted to perform the task" (Durkheim 429), replacing religion.

Durkheim argues for the staying power of the sacred without, however, invoking God. Rather, he concentrates on totemism, which he defines as the religion of an anonymous and impersonal force (140, 147). Ultimately, Durkheim identifies society with the notion of a god because he reasons, after analyzing studies of Australian tribes, that "if the totem is both the symbol of god and of society, are these not the one and the same? How could the group's emblem become the face of this quasi-divinity if the group and the divinity were two distinct realities?"(145). Because of his exclusion of the concept of deity from religion, Durkheim was one of the "figures commonly identified as on the side of the rational secularists or Cartesians" (Riley, "Durkheim" 256) in the sociological and philosophical debates raised during the French Third Republic. Durkheim holds that the religious and the sacred are conceptual categories that are superimposed synthetically, artificially, onto empirical, physical reality. He writes, "religion is above all a system of notions by which individuals imagine the society to which they belong [. . .] and although this representation is metaphoric and symbolic, it is not inaccurate" (171).

One theoretical category through which this continuity between Durkheim and postmodern thinkers can also be evidenced is the "impure sacred." Durkheim argues that the religious forces, in addition to being opposed in a binary relationship to the profane, are of two opposing kinds: on the one hand, they "are benevolent, guardians of the physical and moral order, life and death, all the qualities that men value"(304). On the other hand, "there are negative and impure powers that produce disorder, sacrilege, disease, and death (304); "thus all religious life gravitates around

two opposite poles which share the supposition between pure and impure, holy and sacrilegious, divine and diabolical [. . .] But even as these two aspects of religious life oppose each other, they are closely related"(305). The pure and impure sacred are related for being both opposed to profane things and for evoking same kind of reverence that characterizes the sacred. In other passages of his book, Durkheim refers to this reverence as "intensity of experience." There is "horror in religious respect, particularly when it is very intense" he maintains (305); it is close to the "fear inspired by malignant powers," fear that is "not without a certain reverential quality" (305).

Dukheim's binary view of the sacred and the profane distinguishes it from the postmodern perspective. Identifying the religious with the sacred, Durkheim maintains that "religious life and profane life cannot coexist in the same space. For religious life to flourish, a special place must be arranged from which profane life is excluded" (229). Likewise, "religious life and sacred life cannot coexist in the same time frame" (229). According to his analysis, not only "are sacred beings separated from profane ones, but nothing that directly or indirectly concerns profane life must be mingled with religious life" (227). In fact, this polarity of the sacred and the profane is the starting assumption of this project which aims at demonstrating how this duality does not hold in postmodern theory and fiction, particularly in an oppositional dynamic. But it is a duality that might explain the emergence of the separation between the secular and the sacred.

According to Riley, Baudrillard's engagement with the sacred was heavily influenced by theories of Durkheim regarding the impure sacred which he utilized as an analytical category to study forms of knowledge and exchange such as false consciousness (Riley, "Renegade" 293). It is important to note here that while the impure sacred is allied with evil as opposed to good in Durkheim's thought, the impure sacred mutates in Baudrillard's work to actually refer to the profane . Because of this mutation, the oppositional dynamic that holds the sacred and the profane in Durkheim's view does not exist in Baudrillard's engagement with the sacred. Baudrillard's link to Durkehimian tradition was one facet of his break with Marxism and French communism following May 1968. Marxian major categories of analysis such as use value were the target of his criticism in *Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*[6]. This turn in Baudrillad's thought is significant because it explains the theoretical roots of his analysis of the sacred in contemporary culture.

Baudrillard approaches the idea of the sacred through the conflicting relationship between the semiotic and the symbolic, a relationship which permeates much of Baudrillard's analysis of postmodern culture[7], but which does not consistently lend itself to a contrastive analysis. In addition, Baudrillard's writings on the behavior of matter in scientific experimentation confirm an attempt to bridge the disjunction between man and matter, man and nature, and body and non- body,

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[6] See Douglass Kellner's *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond.*

[7] Baudrillard elaborates on this distinction between the semiotic and the symbolic and its impact on contemporary society in his *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*.

evoking a spiritual principle to put an end to these disjunctions. The concept of

impure sacred takes shape in Baudrillard's analysis of the reaction of what he called

the silent majorities, masses that stopped being vocally critical of the political elite.

He argues that it is precisely in spectacle[8] and in revelry in apparent meaninglessness

or "oversaturation with meaning" that the sacred is experienced by the silent

majorities (*In the Shadow* 6-7). Baudrillard sees that this revelry in the excess of

signs and irrationality of modern capitalism is the best approximation of a

contemporary experience of the sacred. Further, the masses, in refusing

"progressive" political mobilization for the modern festival of, for example, a world

cup soccer match (*In the Shadow* 12), explode the Enlightenment mythology of the

social completely. Although such exchange of political engagement for sports

entertainment is troubling because it signals an indifference to the process of

political decision making and transformation, for Baudrillard such exchange belies

the masses' peculiar agency of detaching themselves from the circulating fictions of

the political process. By refusing to engage in political fictions, not only do the

masses prove their comprehension of the theatricality of these fictions, but they also

achieve two other goals, challenging the Enlightenment model of the social and

refusing to be co-opted by the forces standing behind the various forms of political

mobilization.

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[8] In his *Society of the Spectacle,* Guy Debord defines the spectacle, saying "The spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images" (7).

The conflict between the semiotic and the symbolic underlies Baudrillard's impure sacred and his consideration of the masses' rejection of meaning. The binaries which operate in the masses' relationship to meaning have the formula of sign: code:: spectacle: message, where the accumulation of the sign makes the spectacle and defines the symbolic and the accumulation of the code makes the message and defines the semiotic. The domination of semiotic exchange leads, according to Baudrillard, to a paralysis in the circulation of meaning among the masses[9]. He cites as evidence of this paralysis the masses' reception of and reaction to God as a sign. The "Idea" of God, with its attachments of sin and personal salvation, has always been an affair of the clergy. What the masses have retained is "the enchantment of saints and martyrs; the last judgment; the Dance of Death; sorcery, the ceremony and spectacle of the Church; the immanence of the ritual-the contrast to the transcendence of the Idea" (*In the Shadow* 7). These experiences of enchantment, spectacle, and immanence, which Baudrillard refers to also as "degraded practices," shape the impure sacred.

The contrast between the symbolic and the semiotic is significant in Baudrillard's take on the postmodern sacred because "Baudrillard reframes and extends the Durkheimian analysis of the loss of the sacred through an analysis of the contemporary dominance of the semiotic and its impact on human relations" (Merrin

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[9] Baudrillard does not suggest a specific definition of "the masses." He does however seems to use it in order to avoid using the concept of "the social" in previous social theories which he questions. (Kellner, Merrin)

17). For Baudrillard, the symbolic, which he sees as confrontational with the semiotic, is neither a concept, an agency, a category, nor a 'structure' but an act of exchange and *a social relation which puts an end to the real*, which resolves the real, and at the same time, puts an end to the opposition between the real and the imaginary (*Symbolic Exchange* 133). According to Merrin, Baudrillard derives this "concept" from the College of Sociology[10]'s "identification and privileging of an immediately actualized, collective mode of relations and its transformative experience and communication" (Merrin 12). Durkheim's concept of the sacred as a mode of relations mutates in Baudrillard's writing on the implications of symbolic exchange vis a vis the postmodern sacred.

Baudrillard counters symbolic exchange to Marxist political economy by claiming that exchange "itself is based on non-production" (*The Mirror of Production* 79). Following Bataille, he contends that "sacrificial economy or symbolic economy is exclusive of political economy" (43). With this reference to sacrificial economy, he associates symbolic exchange with religious practices. "Primitive man" he says "does not chop one tree or trace one furrow without 'appeasing the spirits" with a counter-gift or sacrifice. This taking and returning, giving and receiving, is essential. It is always an actualization of symbolic exchange

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[10] Members of the College of Society included George Bataille, Roger Caillois, and Alexander Kojeve. The College developed ideas of Marcel Mauss and Durkheimian and produced numerous texts of social and philosophical anthropology, including Caillois's *Man and the Sacred* of 1939 (1980) and Bataille's later books such as Theory of Religion of 1973 (1992) (Merrin 12).

through gods" (*The Mirror* 82-83).   Thus, symbolic exchange is not controlled by the logic of use and exchange values[11]. According to this analysis, Baudrillard establishes the impure sacred which the masses realize by their rejection to be kept within reason and their challenge of "political will" (*In the Shadow* 9-10). While messages are given the masses, "they only want some sign, they idolize the play of signs and stereotypes, they idolize any content so long as it resolves itself into a spectacular sequence"(*In the Shadow* 10). In his interpretation of the masses' fascination with the spectacle, Baudrillard discards ascribing it to mystification; instead, he sees that the masses' refusal of meaning is "a question of an explicit and positive counter-strategy--the task of absorbing and annihilating culture, knowledge, power, the social"(*In the Shadow* 10). However, this sacred d is not apolitical and does not hinder a revolutionary act by the masses. For they

> don't refuse to die for a faith, for a cause, for an idol. What they refuse is
> transcendence; the uncertainty, the difference, the waiting, the asceticism
> which constitute the sublime exaction of religion. For the masses, the
> Kingdom of God has always been already here on earth, in the pagan
> immanence of images, in the spectacle of it presented by the Church.
> Fantastic distortion of the religious principle. (*In the Shadow* 6-7)

Another aspect in Baudrillard's thought that illustrates his construction of the spiritual in addition to his analysis of the masses' relationship to the sacred is a

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[11] See also Kellner's *Jean Baudrillard* (44-45).

reference he makes in *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* to the behavior of

matter in scientific experimentation. He records a correspondence between the

relationship between masses and meanings given to them on one hand and between

matter and scientific experimentation. Baudrillard animates the matter under

scientific investigation, questioning whether the matter itself *reacts* in

hypercomformity to scientific experimentation, in order to escape objectification. In

the context of his discussion of the masses' rejection of manipulation through

passivity and hypercomformity, thus managing to be neither a subject nor an object,

Baudrillard sees that

> it is possible to think that the uncertainty surrounding this enterprise of the
>
> objective determination of the world remains total and that even matter and
>
> the inanimate, when summoned to respond, in the various sciences of nature,
>
> …send back the same conforming signals, the same coded responses, …only
>
> to escape, in the last instance, exactly like the masses, any definition as
>
> object. (*In the Shadow* 33)

In such a case, the relationship between the scientist and the object of his/her

investigation falls in the realm of pataphysics[12]. Moreover, In *Symbolic Exchange*,

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[12] A term developed by Alfred Jarry who defines pataphysics as "the science of the realm beyond metaphysics . . . It will study the laws which govern exceptions and will explain the universe supplementary to this one. . . Definition: pataphysics is the science of imaginary solutions . . ." (Jarry qt in Kellner 162).

Baudrillard denounces the separation between man and matter; he writes,

> [t]he reality of nature, its 'objectivity' and its 'materiality', derives solely from the separation of man and nature, of a body and a non-body, as Octavio Paz put it. Even the reality of the body, its material status, derives from the disjunction of a spiritual principle, from discriminating a soul from a body. The symbolic is what puts an end to this disjunctive code and to separated terms. It is the u-topia that puts an end to the topologies of the soul and the body, man and nature, the real and the non-real, birth and death. In the symbolic operation, the two terms lose their reality. (133)

In his comment on Baudrillard's pataphysics, Douglass Kellner considers that it is a manifestation of taking social theory into the realm of metaphysics resulting in an attempt on Baudrillard's part to end the philosophy of subjectivity (Kellner, *Jean Baudrillard* 162-163). But while Kellner associates renunciation of subjectivity with the ruling out of possibilities of transformation, he disregards Baudrillard's take on the objects and masses' escape of objectification as a form of resistance. And in his critical stand towards Baudrillard's analysis, Kellner constructs an opposition between human agency and objects' agency, claiming that "by renouncing subjectivity and the possibility of changing, transforming and restructuring objects and situations, one is affirming a hyperconformity that will allow objects to follow their own laws and impulses, and sweep the possibility of intervention in the world"(163). On one hand, this opposition does not exist in Baudrillard's mindset; Kellner's claim regarding Baudrillard's renunciation of the possibility of change is

reductive, on the other. Kellner does not comprehensively evaluate Baudrillard's

thoughts on chances of transformation in many of his writings. For example, Kellner

dismisses Baudrillard's affirmation of the masses' challenge of political will in his *In

the Shadow* (9-10) which I already discussed. In other texts such as "The End of

Production," Baudrillard explicitly points out the threat that "we" can pose to the

system of capital. He says:

> [w]e will not destroy the system by a direct, dialectical revolution of the
>
> economic or political infrastructure. Everything produced by contradiction,
>
> by the relation of forces, or by energy in general, will only feed back into the
>
> mechanism and give it impetus, following a circular distortion similar to a
>
> Moebius strip. We will never defeat it by following its own logic of energy,
>
> calculation, reason and revolution, history and power, or some finality or
>
> counter-finality. . . .We will never defeat the system on the plane of the real:
>
> the worst error of all our revolutionary strategies is to believe that we will put
>
> an end to the system on the plane of the real. (*Symbolic Exchange* 36)

While Baudrillard's spectacle attempts to liberate the sacred sign from the

political economy of capitalism, Derrida's philosophical endeavor is to liberate the

sacred from the religious, to destabilize the opposition between reason and

mysticism, and to propose justice as the new site of the sacred[13]. Derrida's general

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[13] Derrida addresses Heidegger's analysis of the word "spirit" in his *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question.* Many commentators consider that *Of Spirit* is Derrida's apologia for Heidegger. For example, Gillian Rose's "Of Derrida's Spirit" sets out to expose the logic lurking in Derrida's reading of Heidegger's use of the word to show- as one of the article's goals- "the continuity between

interest in religion was to "situate and raise again questions of tradition, faith, and

sacredness and the relation to the premises of philosophy and political

_____

Derrida's defence [sic] of Heidegger and his own approach to modernity, Nazism, and the Holocaust as it has been developed in these later commentaries"(447). The book follows Heidegger's use of this word, starting with Heidegger's *Being and Time* and culminating in his *Rectoral Address*. Derrida notes in the third chapter of his book that Heidegger most often inscribes the noun (Geist) (German for spirit) or the adjective (geistig, geistlich) (spiritual) in "a linked group of concepts or philosophemes belonging to a deconstructible ontology, and most often in a sequence going from Descartes to Hegel" (14) in propositions in which "*the spiritual, then, no longer belongs to the order of these metaphysical or onto-theological meanings*" (my italics 14). In Heidegger's *Time and Being*, the word "spirit" "relates back to a series of meanings which have a common feature: to be opposed to the thing, to the metaphysical determination of thing-ness, and above all to the thingification of the subject as supposed by Descartes" (15). Through this analysis, Derrida starts his explication of Heidegger's use of the word by foregrounding its opposition to abstractness. To further follow how Heidegger deconstructs "spirit," Derrida traces the implications of enclosing/or not enclosing the word in Heidegger's texts within quotation marks (23 ff). He notes how Heidegger "barely gives it shelter" and how even when "admitted, the word is contained at the doorstep or held at the frontier, flanked with discriminatory signs, held at a distance by the procedure of the quotation marks"(29). To Derrida, the word makes its appearance, celebrating the disappearance of the quotation marks in the *Rectorship Address* in which Heidegger talks about the self-affirmation of the German university as being determined by spirit (31-32). Derrida notes how the self-affirmation of the German university is of the order of the spirit, and is lead by the rector whose mission is spiritual (32). Rather than enclosing the word within quotation marks, Heidegger "himself emphasizes the adjective 'spiritual' right from the beginning of the *Address* (33). At the center of the *Address*, Derrida sees that Heidegger provides the definition of spirit having linked it to a series of headings, namely questioning, world, earth and blood, and determination. According to Derrida, Heidegger exalts the spiritual in what Derrida considers a key paragraph with these four determinations of spirit: "…,but spirit is the being-resolved to the essence of being . . ., and the *spiritual world* . . . of a people is not the superstructure of a culture, and no more is it an arsenal of bits of knowledge . . . and usable values, but the deepest power of conservation of its forces of earth and blood, as the most intimate power of e-motion (sic). . ."(qtd. In Derrida 36). In the course of his comment, Derrida interprets Heidegger's celebration of the spiritual and his definition of the word "spirit," saying, "[th]e celebration corresponds properly, literally, to an *exaltation* of the spiritual. It is an elevation" (37). Moreover, Derrida's full rhetorical and deconstructive analysis of Heidegger's use of the word includes a rhetorical analysis of the adjectives that can be formed from the word "spiritual" in German and which cannot be translated one to one in English. The *Rector Address* in specific dissociates the word from its metaphysico-Platonic-Christian meanings and inscribes it with nationalist connotations.

culture"(Anidjar 3). A pivotal notion in his analysis is the Abrahamic, a notion like

that of "The People of the Book" is of Islamic origin (Anidjar 3). Both of these

notions assert that Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as the major monotheisitic faiths

are the three branches of one single faith. Derrida's occupation with this notion in

almost all his writings on religion is ascribed to its implications of "reclaiming

territorialized roots, the reoccupation and gathering of a site of welcoming

togetherness" (Anidjar 3). In "Faith and Knowledge," a lecture Derrida gave in

Capri, Italy during a conference on religion, Derrida draws on Kant, Hegel, Henri

Bergson, and Heidegger to negotiate a formulation of a concept of religion within the

limits of reason, his main starting point being the Enlightenment critique of religion.

In the beginning of the lecture, he defines his audience and his purpose, saying:

> …whatever our relation to religion may be, and to this or that religion, we are
>
> not priests bound by a ministry, nor theologians, nor qualified, competent
>
> representatives of religion, nor enemies of religion as such, in the sense that
>
> certain so-called Enlightenment philosophers are thought to have been. But
>
> we also share. . .an unreserved taste, if not an unconditional preference, for
>
> what, in politics, is called republican democracy as a universalizable model,
>
> binding philosophy to the public "cause," to the res publica, to "public-ness,"
>
> once again to the light of day, once again to the "lights" of the
>
> Enlightenment<aux lumières>, once again to the enlightened virtue of public
>
> space, emancipating it from all external power (non-lay, non-secular), for
>
> example from religious dogmatism, orthodoxy or authority (that is, from a

certain rule of the doxa or of belief, which however, does not mean from all

faith). . . . we shall doubtless attempt to transpose, here and now, the

circumspect and suspense attitude. . .in thinking religion or making it appear

"within the limits of reason alone."("Faith and Knowledge" 47)

This declaration of audience and purpose of his speech relates the present attempt of

these postmodern thinkers and philosophers to the most prominent role that reason

plays in the Enlightenment's attitude towards religion. Although Derrida seeks to

rethink religion within reason, reading Kant's attempt to do the same, but focusing

on the ultimate cause of a "universalizable" model of republican democracy, he

translates the urgency of the here and now in a creative search for an emancipated

public space which allows room for faith. Moreover, Derrida stresses that "[i]n these

times, language and nation form the historical body of all religious passion" ("Faith

and Knowledge" 44).

Derrida had already specified the urgency of here and now in a preceding

paragraph in the speech where he pondered the unprecedented resurgence of religion

("Faith and Knowledge" 44) and responses of surprise and astonishment towards it

by "those who believed naively that an alternative opposed Religion, on the one side,

and on the other, Reason, Enlightenment, Science, Criticism (Marxist Criticism,

Nietzschean Genealogy, Freudian psychoanalysis and their heritage), as though the

one could not but put an end to the other?" ("Faith and Knowledge" 45). Derrida's

protest against this bifurcation of concepts and categories in approaching the human

experience bears traces of Durkheim's work, who in spite of his distinction between

the sacred and the profane, maintains that spiritual sentiments are as significant as scientific knowledge. Durkheim validates the importance of religious sentiments when he states that his entire study of religion "rests upon this postulate that the unanimous sentiment of the believers of all times cannot be purely illusory"(312) and that together with William James, another contemporary "apologist of the faith," (312) he admits that these religious beliefs rest upon a specific experience whose demonstrative values is, in one sense, not one bit inferior to that of scientific experiments, though different from them" (312).

Derrida's invitation to rethink religion within the limits of reason alone interests me in its endeavor to link rationality to the sacred, which he seeks to find under a religion that can "today be effectively universal . . . no longer restricted to a paradigm that was Christian or even Abrahamic"("Faith and Knowledge" 53)[14]. In the context of explaining his endeavor, Derrida states that "faith has not always been and will not always be identifiable with religion, nor, another point, with theology. All sacredness and all holiness are not necessarily, in the strict sense of the term, if there is one, religious" ("Faith and Knowledge" 48). Tracing Kantian analysis of religion, Derrida refers to Kant's explicit distinction between moral religion and reflective religion. Moral religion is "interested in the good conduct of life (die

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[14] Derrida's engagement with the religious has been the focus of many analysts of his writing. Hent de Vries' in his *Philosophy and the Turn to Religion*, links Derrida's work on religion to "the formal structure of religion, as well as of theology, notably of negative theology, from its Platonic and Neoplatonic sources through the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, Meister Echart, Angelus Silesius all the way to Heidegger, Marion, …and Levinas" (32).

Religion des guten Lebenswandels); it enjoins [man] to action, it subordinates

knowledge to it and dissociates it from itself . . . "("Faith and Knowledge" 49). The

other form of religion does not depend on revelation to validate itself; rather

reflecting faith relies on rationality. In reflecting faith, knowledge, represented by

historical revelation, takes a second rank in relation to reason. Following Kant,

Derrida describes reflecting faith as a concept that "does not depend essentially upon

any historical revelation and this agrees with the rationality of purely practical

reason," hence; "reflecting faith favours good will beyond all knowledge. It is thus

opposed to 'dogmatic (dogmatische) faith.' If it breaks with this 'dogmatic faith,' it

is insofar as the latter claims to know and thereby ignores the difference between

faith and knowledge"(49).

For any culture of a faith without dogma to make its way, Derrida maintains,

such faith "cannot be contained in any traditional opposition, for example, that

between reason and mysticism"("Faith and Knowledge" 56). He sees that if justice

has to be the foundation of authority that comes with faith, "reason ought to

recognize there what Montaigne and Pascal call an undeniable 'mystical foundation

of authority.' The mystical thus understood allies belief or credit, the fiduciary or the

trustworthy, the secret (which here signifies 'mystical') to foundation, to knowledge,

we will later say also, to science [. . .]"(56-57).

If, however, dogmatic faith is associated with revelation, Derrida associates

his project for religion with revealability. He describes revealability as "more

originary than all revelation (46, 53). Revealability will facilitate "the experience of

the sacred, the holy or the saved (heilig) (…) to be reawakened unscathed"(54).

Derrida's revealability, this entry to the sacred, is originary because he demands that

it "precede all determinate community, all positive religion. . ." (55) and that it link "

pure singularities prior to any social or political determination, prior to all

intersubjectivity, prior even to the opposition between the sacred (or the holy) and

the profane" (55). This revealability is a fiduciary link, a link to the other with an

invinciable desire for justice (56). And although Derrida describes the link as

revealability without revelation, or messianic without messianism, he declares that it

follows no determinate revelation and belongs properly to no Abrahamic religion

even though he, "for essential reasons of language and of place, of culture, of a

provisional rhetoric. . ." continues "giving it names marked by the Abrahamic

religions" ("Faith and Knowledge" 56).

In his search for language to describe this originary link, Derrida resorts to

topographical metaphors. While revelation is connected to light because it reveals,

the place where it originates is connected to three places that Derrida chooses as

metaphors for his search, the island, the promised land, and the desert. He finds that

the metaphor of desert is the one most suitable to be the space of revealability. The

invincible desire for justice "is not and ought not to be certain of anything, either

through knowledge, consciousness, conscience, foreseability or any kind of

programme as such. This abstract messianicity belongs from the very beginning to

the experience of faith, of believing, of a credit that is irreducible to knowledge and

of a trust that "founds" all relation to the other in testimony" (56). In his comments

on Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge," John Caputo writes, "Derrida means to mime and mimic the Enlightenment's desire for a universal, transnational, neo-international, purely rational religion, by proposing a certain desertification of religion, but without entirely deserting it and without excluding faith." (*The Prayers* 154). Desertification is the metaphor for a religion that does not presuppose a certain nation or a certain culture because it is a "religion that can be thought within reason alone, not a local or a national religion but a religion for all and everywhere, a place for the displaced. But that requires that we do not imagine that reason stands alone, without faith" (*The Prayers* 155).

In Caputo's view, "messianicity without messianism means opening to the future" (*The Prayers* 155) and is the explanation of Derrida's "the coming of the other as the advent of justice" (Anidjar 27-28). Caputo describes such religion as having no ties to the determinable faiths, returning "as postmodern faith and hope, as postmodern reason and universality, the heart of a justice and a democracy to come in a heartless world"(*The Prayers* 156). Because it precedes all determinations, this justice allows the hope for a universalizable culture of faith, permitting a " 'rational' and universal discourse on the subject of 'religion' " (56). Moreover, this faith cannot be "contained in any traditional opposition for example between reason and mysticism" (57).   As Neil Saccamano analyzes Derrida's deconstruction of Enlightenment critique in relation to faith, he contends that Derrida, unlike Kantian critique, does not deny knowledge to make room for faith, and unlike Marxist

critique, does not deny faith in the name of knowledge (412)[15]. In *Rogues*, Derrida elaborates on this formulation of the religious within reason:

> It is what I've called elsewhere[16]the awaiting without horizon of a
> messianicity without messianism. It goes without saying that do I not detect
> here even the slightest hint of irrationalism, obscurantism, or extravagance.
> This faith is another way of *keeping within reason [raison garder]*,
> however mad it might appear. If the minimal semantic kernel of reason we
> might retain from the various lexicons of reason, in every language, is
> the ultimate possibility of, if not a consensus, at least an address
> universally promised and unconditionally entrusted to the other, then
> reason remains the element or very air of a faith without church and without
> credulity, the raison d'etre of the pledge, of credit, of testimony beyond
> proof, of the raison d'etre of any belief in the other, that is, of their belief and
> of our belief in them- and thus also of any perjury. (*Rogues* 153)

Caputo sees that Derrida's description of religion without religion is "bound up with testifying and testimony" (*The Prayers* 156) the giving of which is a "promise to

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[15] Critique is the self-critique of reason in general, and its 'primary use [ihr erster Nutzen]' is to perform what Kant figures as a 'policing' function: critique distinguishes among the faculties, sets their proper boundaries, and determine their jurisdictions so as especially to make room for faith by restraining theoretical or speculative reason from venturing beyond the limit of experience, the condition of knowledge, and encroaching upon the domain of moral-practical reason, which alone must postulate and think God, freedom, and immortality. (Kant qt. in Saccamano 408)

[16] Referencing his "Faith and Knowledge."

speak the truth, . . . to keep on speaking it, to stick with one's word, again and again, to repeat, to reiterate, to confirm that I am speaking the truth"(*The Prayers* 157).

Contrary to Derrida'a attempt to think of religion within the limits of reason, Michel Foucault's access to the Impure sacred was "unreason." Through his work, Foucault has sought to apply the notion of the Durkheimenian impure sacred to excluded forms of knowledge such as madness and sexuality (Riley, "Durkheim" 254-255). For Foucault, transgression is the continuous interrogation of limits and boundaries. In "A Preface to Transgression," he associates transgression with the sacred. Because there is nothing to desecrate in the absence of God, the possibility of transgression revives the sacred. As understood by Foucault in his readings of George Bataille and Maurice Blanchot, the transgression of limits defines "the difficult, perhaps literally inconceivable space in which limits are transgressed without being erased" (69). This revival of the sacred is achieved through a transgressive language engaged with sexuality and art.

Drawing on Bataille and Sade, Foucault maintains that transgression crystallizes the sacred; it "prescribes not only the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance, but also a way of recomposing its empty form, its absence, through which it becomes the more scintillating"(30). Foucault sees that the importance of sexuality derives from its connection to the death of God (50), from replacing the search of totality with the interrogation of the limit and from the "apparition of a form of thought in which [. . .] the act of transgression replaces the movement of contradictions" (51). He supports this claim by reiterating Bataille's

opinion in *Eroticism* that '[e]roticism can say what mysticism never could' (qtd. in Foucault 51). However, it is the language that engages with sexuality, eroticism, and art not sexuality and eroticism per se that provides an experience of transgression. In the contemporary world, the spheres of transgression, in particular sexuality or eroticism, have been absorbed by anthropological and humanist discourses which confine them to "unilluminating reversals of prohibitions" (Foucault qtd. in Simons 69).

Interestingly as Foucault finds sacredness in transgression through language, the language he himself uses to describe the interaction between transgression and the limit reveals the spiritual dimensions of his search for the implications of transgression in a world "now emptied of objects, beings, and spaces to desecrate" (30). The language he uses in dissecting the nature of transgression simulates that of a spiritual experience. In his analysis, he constructs a mystic space which foregrounds infinity. "A Preface to Transgression" culminates in Foucault's talk about the "inner eye" and his post-structuralist view of the relationship between transgression and limit. In his description of the interaction between transgression and the limit, he states that "their relationship takes the form of spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust" (35); so "transgression is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the lawful" (35). Significantly, in this Foucauldian space, because the relationship is not modeled after the binary opposition paradigm, the existence of the two is "so pure and so complicated, it must be detached from its questionable association to ethics . . .; it must be liberated from the scandalous or

subversive . . ." (35). In other words, the relationship does not connote any ethical implications; for Foucault, "[t]ransgression is neither violence in a divided world (in an ethical world) nor victory over limits (in a dialectical or revolutionary world). . ." So what purpose does transgression achieve? The goal of transgression for Foucault is mere affirmation. Transgression "contains nothing negative, but affirms limited being-affirms limitlessness" (35). This affirmation contains nothing negative and nothing positive; it just affirms this limitlessness. Foucauldian transgression is a leap into infinity, illustrating his view of transgression as a vehicle for sacredness.

Despite Foucault's warning against linking transgression to automatic political progressiveness, transgression "has been viewed as an attractive construct in relation to marginalized and oppressed groups, …allowing individuals to shape their own identities by subverting norms which compel them to repeatedly perform as subjects with a particular marginal identity, such as disabled or ethnic minorities"(Allan 93). Peter Stallybrass and Allon White see that this view of transgression is inevitable because cultural identity is inseparable from limits and is a boundary phenomenon (200). Consequently, the space which Foucault associates with the sacred provides opportunity for transformation.

Traces of the Sacred in Contemporary Fiction

The fiction which is the focus of this project is preoccupied with "religion without religion" and the "impure sacred." The works examined, E.L Doctorow's (2000) *City of God* , Leslie Marmon Silko's (1991) *Almanac of the Dead*, Richard Powers' (2006) *The Echo Maker*, and William Gibson's(1984) *Neuromancer* treat

spirituality as a quest for the sacred. As a result, my main interest will be "how do postmodern writers define the sacred in their works?" and "what are the zones of contact between the sacred and secular?" "What are the forms of spirituality that come out of the interaction between the sacred and the secular in a postmodern age? And what are their implications, whether ethical or political?" These questions are important not only because they feature in these works and any comprehensive literary critical involvement with the works will have to take them into consideration, but also because "the category of belief can again be taken seriously as constitutive of our lived traditions" in a post-metaphysical age in which there are no absolute truths, only interpretations (Robbins 17).

The fiction examined in the next four chapters features spirituality as a deepening relationship to the sacred. In their search for the sacred, these works acknowledge the mystic along with the rational as a legitimate vehicle for knowledge; accordingly the mysterious and the incomprehensible are accounted for within the epistemological structure of such spirituality. I argue that an epistemology where reason ceases to nullify mysticism and intuition is the outcome of a redefinition of the secular and its relation to the sacred. In my analysis of these works, I demonstrate how human creativity and information systems become new sites where the relationship between the sacred and the secular is rearticulated. I also contend that an ethos of interconnectedness marks the ethical implication of anti-dialectical spirituality.

Marked by a rejection of conventional religion's condescension of the realm of matter, postmodern literary spiritualities embrace consumerism and thrive within a variety of times, places, bodily behaviors, and cultural practices. In fact, "Spiritual" as an adjective has become a component of the imaginative construction of many daily performances. To sociologists, David Vaos and Steve Bruce, this phenomenon signals a linguistic diffusion of the meaning of the word. To them, "[t]he spiritual is being hollowed out; the label may be used to flatter anything from earnest introspection to beauty treatments, martial arts to support groups, complementary medicine to palm reading" (44). To this project, "spiritual" has not been "hollowed out" but rather multiplied and diversified in an attempt to resacrilize what was supposed to be secular. By demonstrating the political and ethical implications of the contact between the sacred and the secular, I argue that postmodern discourse has the potential for transformation and reconstruction.

Linda Hutcheon introduced the "complicitous critique" model to describe the role cultural expressions like art, literature, and architecture might play in such a postmodern age. Although my analysis acknowledges the entanglement of cultural expressions in the conditions of their production, it foregrounds their transformational role. According to Hutcheon, postmodern culture "uses and abuses the conventions of discourse. It knows it cannot escape implication in the economic (late capitalist) and ideological (liberal humanist) dominants of its time. [. . .] All it can do is question from within" (xiii). To the "complicitous critique" rubric belong all kinds of texts which question, problematize, denaturalize, defamiliarize, and

definitely deconstruct while self-consciously being implicated within corporate capitalism. But cannot such culture which is enough empowered to perform all this analytic activity also reconstruct?

In the search for ways in which culture weaves narratives of restoration, I distinguish between two sensibilities within the postmodern discourse, the descriptive sensibility which postmodern theorists like Lyotard and Baudrillard stand for and the redemptive sensibility, whose manifestations can be seen in projects of constructive postmodernism[17]. By looking at postmodern culture in relation to spirituality, I aim to foreground this redemptive sensibility, the reconstructive effort that cultural expressions exert in order to transcend diagnosis and deconstruction towards transformation. Based on the texts analyzed, I will argue that problematizing the secular provides us with terms for analysis that counteract a fragmented subjectivity and a lost agency facilitated through rehabilitation of the sacred and a search for a communal identity. Spirituality, as featured in these postmodern works, signals a subversive activity aimed at restoration.

Literary criticism that treats spirituality in postmodern fiction employs the word "spirituality" to refer to the conventional meaning of religion as a set of beliefs, rituals, and the relevant institutions; New Age religions; secular spiritualities;

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[17] See SUNY series in Constructive Postmodern Thought. Constructive postmodernism posits itself as a contrast to deconstructive postmodernism inspired variously by pragmatism, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, and Jacques Derrida (Griffin x). Also, see Martin Schiralli's (1999) *Constructive Postmodernism: Toward Renewal in Cultural and Literary Studies* and Suzi Gablik's (1991) *The Reenchantment of Art*.

mysticism; ethnic religions; and appropriated forms of traditional religions. In theoretical studies, discussions of postmodern spirituality involve postmodern theology, postmodern a/theology, which posits itself as the negation of conventional theology, and the intersection of postmodern spirituality with ethics. David Ray Griffin's *Sacred Interconnections* is an example of theoretical discourse that sets out to foreground the relevance of spirituality in an array of cultural practices such as environmental politics, economy, science, law, and art. Formalizing many themes about spirituality in postmodern culture, this edited collection is part of a self-declared project of   "constructive, revisionary postmodernism" (xi), providing a postmodern world view "toward which we can realistically move" (219).

John A. McClure's (1995) article is among the first essays to discuss the relationship between contemporary fiction and spirituality. It draws attention to the significance of spirituality in postmodern culture and postmodern texts, making general references to works like those by Pynchon, Silko, Reed, and Don DeLillo among others. McClure maintains that many such "postmodern texts are shot through with and even shaped by spiritual concerns"("Postmodern/Postsecular" 143), and that some of the features of fiction which "secular theorists have singled out as definitively postmodern must at least in some cases be understood in terms of a post-secular project of resacralization"(144). Privileging magic as a master form of power in works of postmodern writers strikes him as problematic, and maybe premodern. In the course of this dissertation, I argue that such implementation of magic in postmodern texts is not a simple return of the premodern, but an attempt to

destabilize the Enlightenment's exclusion of the mysterious as a channel of spirituality and knowledge.

In his book, McClure shifts his argument to maintain that postsecular fiction tells stories about new forms of "religiously inflected seeing and being" (*Partial Faiths* ix). However, he does not see in these forms an aspiration to providing any full form of faith. Postsecular stories in the works he examines trace the turn of secular-minded characters back toward a "weakened religiosity" with secular, progressive values and projects. McClure's emphatic message is that the reenchantment of the world does not result in converting to traditional forms of religion, although the examined texts express a disappointment with secularism (*Partial Faiths* 7). In accordance with McClure's disparaging view of the use of magic in postmodern texts, Paul Matlby considers "visionary moments" in postmodern texts a discourse of mystification that would disengage us from self-understanding as social, political, and culturally diverse subjects (9). Matlby frames epiphanies, or visionary moments, as "spiritual higher" knowledge (1), considering visionary moments an aspect of intuition, or occult faculties (3, 19). He considers that literary visionary moments make claims about redemption through their association with higher spiritual knowledge. While Matlby's purpose is to present his concept of "critical literacy" as a postmodern corrective force to demystify and disenchant "mystical narratives," and to deflate the "fantasy" of the visionary moment, the present project will analyze visionary moments as components of the narrative's representation of spirituality and moments of social transformation. Even

if the visionary moment as a form of spiritual knowledge is a premodern literary tradition, why has it persisted in postmodern fiction, and why do authors seem to write through it and to present it in their fiction as an approach to knowing and understanding?

Coleman and Ben-Bassat attempt to answer this question in their work from a different angle. Coleman sees that the concern with spirituality in African American fiction is a reflection of the reality of the majority of African Americans, while Ben-Bassat sees it as a postmodern vehicle for disengagement with reality in order to reengage with it. James W. Coleman's *Faithful Vision: Treatments of the Sacred, Spiritual, And Supernatural in Twentieth- Century African American Fiction* focuses on examining the religious themes in African American fiction as a "faithful vision" that the canonical and postmodern African American texts deal with. Such faithful vision "represents reality because it is beyond comprehension that African Americans could emerge from the destructive past as complex human beings without the agency of the sacred, spiritual, and supernatural that subverted the plans of people with power"(2). Coleman's first chapter establishes African American fiction as modes of writing across naturalism, realism, and modernism, but not postmodernism. In addition, his treatment of texts like Morrison's *Beloved* and Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* focuses on the spiritual/religious element in order to understand its role as an outlet of salvation in the African American experience in the past and does not attempt to contextualize the role of spiritual element in African American fiction as part of the whole postmodern America.

Ben-Bassat in her *Prophets without Vision: Subjectivity and the Sacred in Contemporary American Writing* employs transcendentalism, Gnosticism, and traditional Christianity in order to understand the relationship between the political and the religious. She identifies religious awakening with ethical awakening in conversion narratives in works by John Updike, Flannery O'Connor, James Baldwin, Grace Paley, and Alice Walker and maintains that these conversion narratives feature "concrete political historical anchorage and its traumatic loss for the benefit of ethical awakening" (14). In other words, political identities must be shattered in order that prophetic awakening, her term for the text's engagement with spiritual and religious concerns, may be staged and communicated. In spite of the fact that characters in the chosen texts are strongly anchored in class, gender, and ethnicity, Ben-Bassat notes a simultaneous break down of political identifications, along with the amplification of an ethical call. While Bassat studies the correlation of the spiritual element with identity politics and with characters' ethical development, Jean Petrollle's book foregrounds the coexistence of the sacred and the secular in a postmodern search for personal and communal salvation.

Jean Petrolle traces the religious in postmodern culture through her study of postmodern allegory. She defines postmodern allegory as a mode or a genre that poses epistemological and ontological questions using ancient rhetorical strategies, such as dream-vision, episodic structure, intertextuality which evolved to serve religious cultural purposes(7). She examines this genre in the virtual reality film, in feminist experimental novels, in avant-garde film, and in the American Indian novel.

She maintains that "postmodern discourses including postmodern allegories have been reluctant to abandon the theological, cosmological, and salvational discourses" that are associated with the practice of religion (5). She shows in her discussion that the postmodernist skepticism about the true and the real can and does coexist with religious thinking. Petrolle connects the use of allegory and its capacity of interpretation to the search for relief from personal and collective suffering (129), and demonstrates that postcolonial novels particularly "infuse" their allegories of nation with religious discourses.

The previous analyses deal with spirituality as a set of beliefs consciously embraced by an individual. Although my analysis takes into consideration this aspect of spirituality, it primarily examines spirituality as performances that are not necessarily tied to particular religious views. More specifically, the interaction between the secular and the sacred as a site for the emergence of the spiritual has not been addressed. The actual entanglement of the secular and the sacred requires more analytical clarity, not further conflation. Consequently, on the analytical level, these critical works do not clarify the kind of relationships that bond the ethical, the spiritual, the religious, and the political, as contemporary American fiction envisions them. My project focuses on ways in which postmodern culture redefines the secular by connecting it to the sacred; thus the project fills a gap in the emergent academic literary scholarship on the relationship between postmodernism, contemporary fiction, and spirituality.

In Chapter I, I trace the relationship between reason and the mystical in E.L. Doctorow's *City of God* (2000), particularly the revelation of God in the postmodern urban life world.   I argue in this chapter that Doctorow's text calls for a rejection of the dichotomy of reason and mysticism. In its attempt to interweave the secular and the sacred, the text presents a critical attitude toward the scientific drive for certainty and for setting up rigid boundaries between faith and reason, the mystical and the rational. In *City Of God*, Thomas Pamberton's conversion experience to an alternative form of Judaism comes as a result of his refusal to embrace polarized ways of approaching knowledge and judgment. Associating himself with Virgil, the narrator invites scientists to join him, on a quest for the unknown, saying "I invite you, I challenge you, to come with me, as Dante went with Virgil, I am your guide to the infernal of consciousness . . . the dreck of the real, our wrecked romance with God. This new hell is where our inquiry begins" (Doctorow 192). His relationship, as a novelist, to the scientists, as representatives of human reason, is a reversal of that of Dante, the poet, to Virgil, an allegory of human reason. In addition, I compare Sarah's search for a new conceptualization of the sacred with Derrida's destabilization of the opposition between reason and religion and his concept of "religion without religion."

Using Daniel Bell's functional definition of religion in conjunction with Paul Ricoeur's understanding of revelation, I focus in the second chapter on memory narratives as sites for the emergence of the sacred in Richard Power's *The Echo Maker* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*. I argue that these texts

locate the sacred in memory and its creative aspects and demonstrate how these two novels put the sacred in contact with the secular. I show how memory in both of these novels performs the functions of religion such as building communal connections.

Both texts locate sacredness in memory narratives which also open new possibilities of self-knowledge and the knowledge of others, the Native American community and Seese in *Almanac of the Dead*, and Marc and Weber in *The Echo Maker*. In recording one's memory, the self can be discovered and recreated. The memory narrative as an imaginative text reorganizes one's relationship to oneself and to the other. Because of its organization of the data of experience, the memory narrative acquires a revelatory quality. In his analysis of nonreligious and religions fictions alike, Ricoeur stresses the revelatory aspects. Revelation for Ricoeur is understood in performative, not propositional terms; it is an event of a new meaning between text and interpreter, rather than a body of received doctrines under the control of a particular magisterium. He emphasizes the "areligious sense of revelation" of figurative and sacred texts (Wallace 8- 9). I argue in this chapter also that the act of remembering is revelatory because of the postmodern concept of time that both novels employ. In *Almanac of the Dead*, the act of revealing diaries and notebooks confirms that connections binding past with present and future, the living and the dead, are of spiritual nature. Silko's postmodern vision of time as circular engenders a necessary condition for the revival of spiritual heritage of Native

Americans and for keeping these connections. In old Yoeme's notebook, Zeta reads "Sacred time is always in the Present" (136).

In the final chapter, which discusses Gibson's *Neuromancer*, I combine Baudrillard's take on the topology of body and non-body with Kathryn Hayles' post-humanist critique to argue that *Neuromancer* implements cyberspace a site for transcendence, connection, and sublimity. I note how the topology of body and non-body finds an end in the "bodiless exultation of cyberspace" (Gibson 22), using the dialectics of pattern/randomness as a vehicle. To do this, I use Hayles' theorization of the dialectics of pattern/randomness as an epistemic shift away of the presence/absence dialectics. In this particular information space, "pattern and randomness are bound together in a complex dialectic that makes them not so much opposites as complements or supplements to one another" (Hayles 25). The last point in the chapter will elaborate on the ethical implications of the matrix regarding the construction of the self. The complex dynamic of the matrix offers the potential for an emergent subjectivity rather than given, "distributed rather than located necessarily in consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than occupying a position of mastery and control"(Hayles 291).

CHAPTER II

BELIEF IN THE CITY: DECONSTRUCTING THE SACRED IN

DOCTOROW'S *CITY OF GOD*

In this chapter, I analyze the epistemological ground on which postmodern

discourse addresses the relationship between the sacred and the secular. I develop my

reading of this relationship by juxtaposing E.L. Doctorow's (2000) *City of God*'s

assessment of the role the sacred should play in everyday life to Derrida's distinction

between different aspects of the experience of religion. Comparing treatments of the

relationship between the sacred and the secular in postmodern fiction, exemplified

by Doctorow's text and postmodern theoretical discourse, exemplified by Derrida's

thoughts on this subject, the chapter provides a comprehensible argument about the

relationship between the secular and the sacred from a postmodern perspective.

Ultimately, the significance of such analysis is twofold. First, it illustrates a

postmodern response to the Enlightenment's dismissal of religion as irrelevant to the

real, which is one of the objectives of this dissertation. Second, it grounds the

following chapters' analyses of the representation of the sacred in an epistemology

that takes account of the intellect as well as the mystical. My analysis of Doctorow's

City of God suggests that the return of the religious in postmodern discourse is not a

return of religion per se, but an attempt to deconstruct the secular as a symbolic

construct by reconnecting it to the sacred. My mode of inquiry, then, suggests a

distinction between the religious, understood as institutional and external, and the

spiritual, understood as immediate and internal, to the privilege of deconstructing the secular as a symbolic construct. This deconstructive-reconstructive response to the "predominant interpretations of the boundaries believed to demarcate the secular from the religious, the profane from the sacred, reason from revelation, . . ." (de Vries 2) is not only a philosophical response to the recent return of religion into the public sphere, but a political move in its search for an ethics that can affect social relations without resorting to dogmatic beliefs. I argue that Doctorow's *City of God* calls for a reevaluation of the relationship between the sacred and the secular through raising questions about the limits of our knowledge, through stressing a mystic relationship with God, through connecting to the sacred texts on an aesthetic level, and through calling for universalist ethics grounded in reason. The novel's employment of Einstein, Wittgenstein and St. Augustine provides discursive zones of contingency between the fictional and the historical that parallel spaces of contingency between reason and mysticism on one hand, and between the sacred and the secular on another that the novel highlights. I trace the dialogue that the novel creates between its characters, be they fictional or factual, and show how in its resolutely postmodern structure, its reliance on first and third person narrators, different levels of fictionality, and a variety of genres such as the documentarian use of holocaust diaries, proclamations by historic figures, and appropriation of popular songs, the novel offers at its end a non-cathartic resolution to one of its major themes, that of defining the sacred outside the confinements of organized religion.

The novel ends in a non-cathartic fashion, rejecting closure, providing space to reflect on Sarah's own thinking of God as "Something Evolving" (256).

Through a disjointed narrative, the novel depicts the interactions of three main characters in the city of New York. The plot is fragmented and interrupted by different genres of writing and digressions, occasionally commenting on the ideas that the characters dramatize throughout the novel. Tom Pemberton (Pem) calls himself "Divinity Detective" after a large cross's theft from his parish church of St. Timothy's and its appearance on the roof of a nearby "alternative" synagogue of Evolutionary Judaism. His search for the cross leads him to meet rabbi Joshua Gruen and his wife rabbi Sarah Blumenthal. Pem falls in love with Sarah after the murder of her husband in Lithuania in search for his father-in-law's secret diary which documented the suffering of Jews in Nazi ghettos. Pem has been going through crisis of faith and eventually converts to Evolutionary Judaism. Acting as the narrator of the novel in some of its passages, Everett, a staunch secularist and an author, records these events. Through their conversations, their speeches, and their inner thoughts, Pem, Everett, and Sarah dramatize the polemical discourse over the relationship between the secular and the sacred at the fictional level in the novel.

City of God treats spirituality from different perspectives, depending on the character's voice that treats this theme. All these voices, although of different backgrounds and beliefs, choose a deconstructive approach, and then a reconstructive one. Through the fictional and the factual characters, the novel tackles the epistemological formation of the sacred, its relationship to politics, and the

history of the connection of the sacred to the secular to suggest that if we can surpass

grounding human knowledge in a dialectical dynamic of opposition, then a new

understanding of the sacred and more productive ways of connecting to it should

emerge. Doctorow's employment of his own essays in this novel gives the reader a

hint to his intentions. Postmodern in its form, and in its outlook on epistemology of

the sacred, the novel offers the reader a chance to reevaluate the significance of

science as a powerful narrative in modernity, and the role reason should play in

postmodern lives. New meanings of the sacred from a secularist's point of view and

that of an Episcopalian priest and a free thinking rabbi endow the novel with the

political potential to intervene in the theoretical discourse of postmodernism, which

suggests that envisioning the sacred "necessitates" that reason and mysticism are not

opposites (Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge" 57).

The novel's representation of the connection between the political and the

religious contextualizes the relationship between reason and religion. The analysis of

this representation helps me advance my argument about the novel's search for a

faith that does not oppose reason. In other words, the novel presents a political frame

for religious beliefs in order to create an exigency for a reconsideration of the

relationship between faith and reason. This reconsideration exposes examples of

conflict between reason and religion not to justify a rejection of faith, I claim, but to

justify the need for a faith that does not contradict reason and to suggest

characteristics of such faith. This movement from the relationship between religion

and politics to the one between religion and reason is dramatized through Pem's character.

Through Pem's character, the novel argues for a distinction between religion and politics-based religion. The reader encounters Pem's derision for the political genesis of the sacred. This derision unfolds in a reassessment of our relationship to the sacred and the role reason should play in its formation. For Pem, the Episcopalian priest, who is in the process of dissecting his own faith, questioning the role of politics in the emergence of religious sects and wondering at the callousness of the Church regarding the holocaust, it is the correlation between the sacred and politics that eventually pushes him to evaluate the relationship between reason and his faith, and to look for other formations of the sacred that are not in conflict with reason. Also, the novel foregrounds the view of Pem's bishop who looks at this relationship as complimentary rather than oppositional. This investigation of the "origins of the sacred" (69), even the "possible biological origin of the sacred"(70) leads Pem to believe that power is the main player in making beliefs. He, for instance, locates the theological divisions between Gnostic Christians and institutional Christians in power struggles (70). After referring to the theological difference between the Gnostic who rejected Jesus' resurrection except as a spiritual metaphor, and Christians who opted for a literal interpretation of the resurrection and whom he already calls institutionalist, Pem mentions that the latter "were understandably concerned that their persecuted sect needed a network to survive, with rules of order and common strategies for survival, the concept of martyrdom

being created to make something positive from their terrible persecution"(70). He then narrates the overlap between the political and the religious in the history of the church. Both Pem and his audience at the church know these "elemental things" about the political history of Christianity; however, the difference between him and his audience is that his audience considers them "distractions of the intellect" (71). To them, these distractions are irrelevant. To Pem, they should be seen as a challenge to the validity of the faith. He believes that the sacraments still unify him with his audience and wishes not to be expunged from the ranks, while doctrines set him and his audience apart till he converts to reform Judaism, adopting rabbi Sarah's views regarding the sacramental practices.

Pem's emphasis on reason is manifested in an examination of some of the Catholic doctrines. Catholic theology, he thinks, is in conflict with reason; the theology of original sin, for example, "is hard-pressed to hold the line against common sense. So, for instance new born babies who die unbaptized as Catholics are condemned to the limboic upper reaches of hell?"(66). The punitive fantasies of original sin have resulted according to Pem in

> generations of terrorized children and haunted adults and given those
> Calvinist graveyards in New England, a particular poignancy as they
> call to mind the witch burnings, scourgings, and self-denials of the ordinary
> joy and wonder of life on earth to which the unindoctrinated mind is
> naturally heir. . . How, given the mournful history of this nonsense, can we

presume to exalt our religious vision over the ordinary pursuits of our

rational mind? (*City of God* 66)

The desire to reformulate the relationship between reason and religion is not

metaphysical per se. Pem's questioning of this relationship originates in his criticism

of the history of both Catholic and Calvinist mythologies, in the historical

consequences in faiths that do not recognize rationality. Pem's conflict of faith is not

an individual's one; rather, it is informed by particular cultural influences. I draw

attention to these influences on Pem because they contribute to Pem's assessment of

the role reason should play in shaping faith.

Pem's arguments about religion mirror liberal protestant theology. Richard

Niebuhr, the Yale theologian, described this faith in 1937, maintaining that it is

about "a God without wrath [who] brought men without sin into a kingdom without

judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross" (qtd in Smith and

Snell 288). Also, Pem's questions about the gospels reiterate Elaine Pagels's

discussion of the tension between authority and revelation in her *The Gnostic*

Gospels (1979) and other works. In the discussion between Pem's bishop and the

narrator, Pem's bishop complains to Everett that Pem has never quite shaken the

sixties (161). According to Pem's bishop, Pem was a child of the sixties who "would

take the Gospels for what they were, a manual for revolution" (163). The bishop

believes that Pem leapt to the barricades and stayed there, that he remained in the all-

or-nothing nature of what he wants (161). In his attempt to analyze Pem's present

attitude towards faith, the bishop suspects that the counterculture has seeped into the

belief of Pem, particularly through the figure of bishop James Pike, a contemporary

of Pem's father, bishop of Virginia. Pike, who is a factual character, cast doubt on

the Immaculate Conception and the Trinity, and Pem's father signed on to the heresy

charges against him. According to Pem's bishop, Pem has internalized the views of

his natural father, standing for historic church, and those of the maverick adopted

father and set them against each other (162). He expresses disappointment in what

he calls Pem's naiveté for setting these two views against each other. Pem, according

to his bishop, should have known that "reason and faith, rather than being

incompatible, are complementary" and that reason

> no less than faith sanctifies the ethical life. Both would liberate man from
>
> himself. The same mind that conceives the mathematical theorem loves the
>
> order of a world under God. Reason and imagination are parallel paths to
>
> God. They need not intersect. One can call on perspective to imagine them
>
> as merging in the human experience … if in the distance. (162-163)

The bishop sees that reason and faith are parallel paths to the sacred, merging in the

human experience. Pem arrives at this understanding in his remarks to the bishop's

examiners (65). In his talks to the bishop's examiners, he reframes the relationship

between reason and mysticism, starting with the perception of God. In spite of the

discouraging affiliation between politics and some religious beliefs, there is a chance

for the emergence of faith that does not contradict reason and that can be socially

transformative.

The novel stages Pem's initial contemplations on the relation between reason and mysticism through a question concerning the nature of the connection with God, which he thinks can be intellectual as well as emotional. "Sacred truth" for him has to include the human mind; it cannot be isolated from the "whole being," the vessel of sensation. His starting point is to wonder at the limits of feeling God as part of our being:

> [t]he sensation of God in us is a total sensation given to the whole being, revelatory, inspired. That is the usual answer to the questioning intellect, which by itself cannot realize sacred truth. But is the intellect not subsumed? Does the whole being not include the intellect? Why wouldn't the glory of God shine through to the human mind?
>
> I take the position that true faith is not a supersessional knowledge. It cannot discard the intellect. It cannot answer the intellect with a patronizing smile. I look for parity here. I will not claim that your access to the numinous is a delusion if you will not tell me my intellect is irrelevant . . . (*City of God* 65)

Through Pem's arguments, the novel posits that the relationship between the intellect and the numinous is far from being oppositional, and is also a condition for true faith. Pem's ruminations on the relationship between reason and perception of God also lead him to refuse an exclusionary link between reason and the sacred. He remarks that the relationship between intellect and faith is complex and not oppositional.

Another aspect to which Pem draws the attention of his audience is that the Gospel stories were "science and religion[;] they were everything"(65), inclusive of mystical practices and empirical ones. In other words, the equivalence between reason and faith holds between the numinous and science. He ends the first segment of his analysis by asking a rhetorical question of "why wouldn't the glory of God shine through to the human mind?" (*City of God* 65). At this peak moment in Pem's crisis of faith, he simultaneously rejects the binary of intellect and belief, and calls for a reclamation of the role of former in the latter. In other words, the novel, at a turning point in the plot when Pem is questioning his faith, rejects the opposition between reason and belief and the subordination of reason to belief, but without rejecting the latter.

At a later stage in the novel, Pem extends his views on the relationship between reason and mysticism to that between the sacred and the secular. In his discussion with Everett, Pem sees that the sacred cannot be secluded from everyday life. From Pem's point of view, being an adamant secularist hinders Everett from understanding the possibility of reclaiming the sacred from traditional places and practices and bringing it down to people on the streets, in their own lanes of traffic. It will not be the property of certain clergy, but a shared perceptive experience of a community. He tells Everett, "As a secularist, you don't understand-if there is a religious agency in our lives, it has to appear in the manner of our times. Not from on high, but a revelation that hides itself in our culture, it will be ground-level, on the

street, it'll be coming down the avenue in the traffic, hard to tell apart from anything

else" (*City of God* 254).

The novel's view of this anti-dialectical, non-oppositional, connection

between reason and mysticism challenges Charles Taylor's opinion which states that

it is disenchantment[18] that facilitates the collapse of the two spheres into each other

(226). In an enchanted world, he writes, there is a strong contrast between sacred[19]

and profane. He maintains that with religious reform, "there is no more separate

sphere of the 'spiritual' where one may go to pursue a life of prayer outside the

saeculum; and nor is there the other alternation, between order and anti-order, which

Carnival represented" (266). Identifying the spiritual with the religious at this stage

of his discussion, Taylor maintains that what marked off the "spiritual" sphere was

that its members dealt with the sacred, present in concentrated form in certain times,

places, persons and actions, in feasts and churches, clergy and sacraments"(266).

Taylor's analysis rests on a sharp duality between the sacred and the secular, and on

a conflation between the spiritual and the religious, serving as a good example of the

predominant interpretations, to which I referred in the introduction, and which de

[18] Taylor borrows this word from Max Weber. For Weber, the movement of Occidental history is best accounted for not in terms of a protracted struggle for political freedom and equality or for proletarian ownership of the means of production, but as a progressive emptying of magic from the world. The history of the West is best captured by Die Entzauberung der Welt, or "demagnification." The world is disenchanted when it is assumed that one can master all things by calculation.(Germain 28)

[19] By sacred, he means certain places such as churches, certain agents such as priests, certain times such as feasts, and certain actions such as saying the mass, in all of which the divine or the holy is present (446)

Vries rightly believes need to be reevaluated. My later analysis of St. Augustine's *City of God* in relationship to Doctorow's novel will elaborate on the connection between the sacred and the secular on an experiential level, further diffusing these dualities.

Taylor's analysis reflects the Enlightenment's assessment of the relationship between religion and reason as oppositional, Pem's postmodernist outlook revises this assessment, refusing to abandon religion all together, but to historicize it and to grant reason a role in shaping faith. Such rationalization of religion relies on historicizing religious scripture (65) through subjecting it to textual criticism, on considering certain founding stories in religion, such as the original sin of Adam and Eve, as parables, and on understanding how these stories become instruments of social control (66) or grand narratives. Investigating further the hierarchal structure of knowledge in human societies, the novel questions the place of science as a narrative and as an infallible discourse, stressing the need to distinguish between science and reason.

Projecting science as a narrative, the novel paves the way to changes in our perception of the epistemological justification for relegating the sacred to the rank of the mystical. Recording the voices of Einstein, Wittgenstein, and the narrator's echoes of their epistemological concerns, the novel foregrounds the limited compatibility between reason and science, shaking the reader's trust in empirical knowledge and demanding a reconsideration of our connection to the sacred. Switching between first person and third person point of view, and between different

levels of omniscience, the narrator contemplates the limitedness of science and hints

at its status as a metanarrative, puffed by powerful media, that needs to be

questioned. Referencing both traditional physics and modern physics, the narrator

expresses science's inability to answer fundamental, rational questions about natural

phenomena:

> Because my revered Sir Isaac's mechanical model of the universe makes one
>
> or two assumptions that cannot be proven. The idea of absolute motion and
>
> absolute rest, for example, the idea that something can move in an absolute
>
> sense without reference to anything else. This is clearly impossible, a concept
>
> that cannot be proven empirically, by reference to experience. The ship that
>
> moves on the sea does so with reference to the land. Or if you prefer with
>
> reference to another ship, moving at a greater speed or a slower speed. Or by
>
> reference to the dirigible overhead. Or to a whale beneath the sea. Or to the
>
> current of the sea itself. Always to something. And this is true of a planet as
>
> well. There is nothing in the universe that can be proven to move absolutely
>
> without reference to something else in the universe, or for that matter without
>
> reference to the universe in its entirety. (*City of God* 36)

Through the example of classical physics, represented by Isaac Newton, the narrator

complains about the glorification and even "reverence" given to science although

science was not always successful in explaining natural phenomena. The importance

of perspective, the inevitable interference of the observer's relation to the observed

in the final results of scientific experiments and studies, is only one instance of what

classical physics missed; yet, we continue to believe in the superiority of scientific knowledge over other types of knowledge. So, why is thinking about the certainty of scientific discoveries absent from public sphere? Why do contradictions implicit in scientific principles and fundamental questions go unnoticed? Because of the way, according to the narrator, "press and the radio people have relieved" us of thinking about what scientists say. Asking science geniuses fundamental questions is not only an insult to the genius but also to the person asking the question, "because of course the human mind can always find out the truth, because however hidden it may be, eventually it will emerge"(38). After generally addressing the gap between science and reason, the novel projects its criticism of this gap from a language philosopher's perspective.

The novel tackles the gap between reason and science through the character of Wittgenstein. He declares that he is speaking "posthumously" (190), introduces himself as a twentieth- century philosopher of language, and claims he is as revolutionary as Einstein, the latter against Newtonian physics, he against "the metaphysical gibberish of everyone from Plotinus to Descartes" (*City of God* 191). Furthermore, he purports to comment on the empiricism of Planck, Rutherford, Fermi, …etc,-all Europeans which Americans have elevated to celebrity status (191). The intellectual dilemma he expresses is that these scientists are righteous empiricists; yet, they seem to propose scientific notions that are opposed to logic. He derives his example from the different physical states of light because "light partakes of mutually exclusive states of being" (192). According to his understanding,

scientists have proved that light is composed of a stream of light packets or particles or quanta. These "quanta have the properties not of particles but of waves, depending how, in the submicroscopic realm, you choose to observe or measure light, so will it respond as one or the other" (192). That the physical identity of light is observer dependent leads the impersonated Wittgenstein to believe that all matter, not only light, is indeterminate. The indeterminacy of the nature of light at the "submicroscopic" level alerts Wittgenstein to a conflict between science and logic which states that a thing cannot be both itself and not itself. If "light partakes of mutually exclusive states of being," then there is a tension between science and logic. This conflict prompts him to invite scientists to explore the "infernal shambles of human reason" in a journey similar to that of Virgil leading Dante. Associating himself with Virgil, he invites scientists to join him, on a quest for the unknown, saying "I invite you, I challenge you, to come with me, as Dante went with Virgil, I am your guide to the infernal of consciousness . . . the dreck of the real, our wrecked romance with God. This new hell is where our inquiry begins" (192). His relationship, as a philosopher of language and narrator of this passage, to the scientists, as representatives of human reason, is a reversal of that of Dante, the poet, to Virgil, an allegory of human reason. Wittgenstein's significance in the passage stems also from the impact of his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) which shattered the belief in language's capacity to investigate metaphysical questions, challenging the modernist claims over any certain knowledge of the world. Wittgenstein's invitation to lead scientists symbolizes an attack on science's claim to

certainty of knowledge. If science can sometimes be illogical, and if language is incapable of expressing metaphysical notions, then we have to doubt how much we actually can know about the world.

Having objected to the discourse of science's infallibility, the narrator, as Wittgenstein, delves into investigating the arrogance of science. The narrator sees that some scientists embody this arrogance. As a narrative, science legitimizes its own power in shaping our understanding of the world. However, this scientific narrative in its ever insatiable desire to homogenize the world under equations and coded principles, fails to obtain other aspects of knowledge which cannot be grasped empirically. The power of science as a metanarrative has endowed it with arrogance that the narrator personally experienced:

> a large number were jerks. I've since run into a few of them in their adulthood and they are still jerks. It is possible the scientific character of mind is by its nature childish, capable through a life of a child's wonder and excitements, but lacking in real discernment, lacking sadness, too easily delighted by its own intellect. [. . .] I think they simply are lacking in holy apprehension. I think the mad illiterate priest of a prehistoric religion tearing the heart out of a living sacrifice and holding it still pulsing in his two bloodied hands . . . might have had more discernment. (*City of God* 12)

The narrator's emphasis on discernment and apprehension calls on science to see its preoccupation with its successes as an obstacle in the way of a more complete knowledge, knowledge which might shed light on the presence of God. To give

credibility to its critical stance on science, the novel endows a science celebrity with a platform to extend his doubts regarding the incapability of science to embrace "holy knowledge." This platform represents a shift from fictional discourse to historic discourse as Doctorow reinscribes Einstein's reflections on this topic.

Through Einstein's character, the novel juxtaposes different views on the creation of the universe, the existence of God, and the ways to talk about God. As knowledge of God is an essential element in traditional religion, it becomes also a part in any spirituality that aspires to be liberated from traditional religion, even as such spirituality will dwell on the denial of God's existence, as is the case for example in negative theology. Through Einstein, the novel challenges the atheist view of a universe which came to existence by chance, but also suspects the traditional concept of the Creator. An unspecified narrator tells us:

> -That the universe, including our consciousness of it, would come into
> being by some fluke happenstance, that this dark universe of
> incalculable magnitude has been accidentally self-generated . . . is
> even more absurd than the idea of a Creator.
>
> Einstein was one physicist who lived quite easily with the concept of
> a Creator. He had a habit of calling God the Old One. . . Albert thought of his
> work in physics as tracking God, as if God lived in gravity, or shuttled
> between the weak nuclear force and the strong nuclear force, or could be seen
> now and then indolently moving along at once hundred eighty-six thousand
> miles per second . . . not exactly the concerned God people pray to or

petition, but hell, it's a start, it's something, if not everything we have if we

want to be true to ourselves. (*City of God* 25)

The novel's projection of Einstein's search for and belief in God in this passage

reflects Einstein's fascination of the physical laws that govern the universe. It is not

enough to worship God in the traditional way people do; one must know God

through the universe. Because the novel's argument about science in its relation to

the knowledge of God, as an aspect of its search for the sacred, is projected through

the character of Einstein, I quote in the following paragraphs from Doctorow's

collection of essays titled *Creationis*ts, in which he reiterates and elaborates on his

novel's rhetoric on science in relation to belief as articulated through Einstein.

In "Einstein: Seeing the Unseen," Doctorow writes that even if Einstein could

describe God only as the Old One "surely there was a faith in that image, perhaps an

agnostic's faith that made it presumptuous for any human being to come to any

conclusion about the goodness or incomprehensible amorality of God's universe or

the souls it contained until we at least learned the laws that governed it"

(*Creationists* 163). In other words, Einstein's faith is one grounded in a rationality

that is non-empirical, allowing for "seeing the unseen." However, it is the systemic

knowledge of governing laws that defines the growth of this faith and determines its

possibilities of redemption. Doctorow's understanding of Einstein's cosmology

stresses the latter's belief in such possibility, stating:

The crackling vastness of black holes and monumental conflagrations, the

ineffable something rather than nothing, such an indifference to life as to

make us think if God is involved in its creation he is so fearsome as to be

beyond any human entreaty for our solace or comfort of the redemption that

would come of our being brought into his secret-this consideration did not

seem to be part of Einstein's cosmology. (*Creationists* 163)

Einstein's fascination with the universe did not distance him from God; he "was not

a stylish writer, but chose words for their precision"(*City of God* 25) called God "Old

One," implying he knew God intimately, enough to believe that God could provide

humanity with a source of solace. "Old," however, meant other things as well for

Einstein. To prove the accuracy of Einstein's description from a scientific point of

view, the narrator cites scientific evidence, the discovery of a sacred ossuary cave of

the Neanderthals in western Italy and asserts, "[t]hat's how old God is. So Einstein is

right about that. And *One* . . . because God is by definition not only unduplicable and

all-encompassing but also without gender. So the phrase is really very exact: the Old

One. Not much of a revelation, of course" (25). Putting this scientific evidence about

God's presence or the antiquity of the idea of God against the traditional god that

people pray to, the narrator suspects that Einstein's ease with the concept of a

Creator as manifested in the universe, is everything we can know about God, "not

exactly the God people pray to or petition" (25), "not exactly," as language has

already mediated between God and us. The narrator's preoccupation with the

concept of a creator belies his preoccupation with language; this preoccupation

which partly informs his references to Einstein appears also in his reference to St.

Augustine's *City of God*. The narrator of Doctorow's *City of God*, Pem in the

following quotation, expresses his admiration of St. Augustine's thought, saying "I pick up my old paperback Augustine. *City of God*. Every page almost totally underlined. Well now, wait a minute, he's hell of writer, Augie. You would like him, wouldn't you? With his writer's bag of tricks" (222). Augustine's *City of God* shares with Doctorow's novel the title, the examination of the relationship between the sacred and the secular, and Augustine's own preoccupation with language.

How to speak about God in a precise manner was a central question throughout St. Augustine's spiritual and philosophical life. He sought to achieve an accurate description of God that would define the relationship between a city that people build and a city that is grounded in the recognition of God's authority. His quest of faith and God had several detours and landmarks, passing through "Platonism, Manichaeism, Deism, and even the *Star Wars* version of the creator who is referred to as the Force" (Robert Barron 35). St. Augustine mentions in his *The Trinity* that he will attempt to say things that cannot be said as they are thought by a man (qtd. in Barron 41). In other words, he is striving to overcome the problem of conceptualization and to close the gap between the signified and the signifier, mirroring Einstein's effort to achieve accuracy in his description of God. Doctorow's *City of God* revises this quest for precision. In the final pages of the novel, the narrative platform is given to Sarah Blumenthal, the rabbi of Evolutionary Judaism.

Through Sarah's final speech, we are told that this quest for precision in how we talk about God is irrelevant to our version of determined religions. In a post-structuralist mode, God is hard to be understood as a signified. Language is only a

network of signifiers leading to each other. Sarah's final speech to the Conference of American Studies in Religion expresses this infinity of signification which stands as a barrier between us and whatever might be outside the text. She wonders whether

> The idea of God could be recognized as Something Evolving, as civilization has evolved-that God can be redefined, and recast, as the human race trains itself to a greater degree of metaphysical and scientific sophistication. [. . .] So that we pursue a teleology thus far that, in the universe as vast as the perceivable cosmos, and as infinitesimal as a subatomic particle, has given us only the one substantive indication of itself-that we, as human beings, live in moral consequence.

> In this view the supreme authority is not God, who is sacramentalized, prayed to, pleaded with, portrayed, textualized, or given voice, choir, or temple walls, but God who is imperceptible, ineffable, except . . . for our evolved moral sense of ourselves. (*City of God* 256)

The rejection of a textualized God trapped in human significations systems is a rejection of a God who had been constructed and historically determined. Such a textualized god is de-constructible and does not qualify for the role of supreme authority. Sarah continues her speech to envision the ethical consequences of this suspicious textuality. She poses one of the most significant questions in the novel:

> [i]s it possible that the behavioral commandments of religion, its precipitate ethics or positive social values, can be maintained without the reference to the authority of God? In my undergraduate seminar in metaphysics at

Harvard, the professor said there can be no ought, no categorical imperative

in Kantian terms, no action from an irresistible conscience, without a

supreme authority. But that does not quite address the point. I ask if after the

exclusionary, the sacramental, the ritualistic, and simply fantastic elements of

religion are abandoned, can a universalist ethics be maintained-*in its*

numinousness[20]? (255)

Through Sarah's discourse, the novel epitomizes the question of re-

envisioning the sacred. Sarah's central question revolves around the possibility of

redefining the sacred, taking into consideration its relationship to the secular and

suggesting that the gap between the two is only a theoretical construct. Her call on

theologians to find other venues for seeking the sacred outside the traditional

meaning of the sacred poses a revolutionary challenge facing theologians, requiring

them, not secular philosophers or secular social theorists, to engage in restructuring

their system of knowledge and field of expertise. She involves theologians in the task

of redefining the sacred, saying "Dare we hope the theologians might emancipate

themselves, so as to articulate or perceive another possibility for us in our quest for

the sacred? Not just a new chapter but a new story?" (255) not only because she is a

rabbi and has the confidence to suggest that her peers have the ability to do that, but

also because she puts the self-acclaimed secularism of modern democracies under

---

[20] Rudolf Otto coined the word "numinous" to refer to the "overplus of meaning" that the word "holy" carries (Kevin McCarron 295).

scrutiny. Sarah suggests that modern democracies are not secularist as they claim to be, that although their Constitution enacted the separation between state and church, they devised its ethical standards based on religious texts, creating a "hallowed secularism"(255). The Constitution adapted the best essence of the Judeo-Christian ethical system as the basis for the civil law. According to Sarah, this ethical base of the civil law points to an *appropriation*, not only a separation (255-256).

In his investigation of ways the secular was constituted, Talal Asad argues that the secular "is neither continuous with the religious that supposedly preceded it (that is, it is not the latest phase of sacred origin) nor a simple break from it (that is, it is not the opposite, an essence that excludes the sacred)"(25). Drawing on Wittgenstein's notion of grammar, Asad aims at showing how contingencies relate to changes in the grammar of concepts- that is, how the changes in concepts articulate changes in practices (25). Asad subscribes to the view that the secular is neither singular in origin nor stable in its historical identity. Because the secular and the religious are not fixed categories, "there is nothing *essentially* religious, nor any universal essence that defines 'sacred experience' " (25). He also mentions that the "supposedly universal opposition between 'sacred' and 'profane' finds no place in premodern writing" and that the overriding antinomy was not between a supernatural sacred and a natural profane (32). According to Asad, "It was late nineteenth century anthropological and theological thought that rendered a variety of overlapping social usages [of the 'sacred'] rooted in changing and heterogeneous forms of life into a single immutable essence, and claimed it to the be the object of a universal human

experience called 'religious' " (31). In fact, Augustine's *City of God* illustrates

Asad's claim. I find it useful here to elaborate on the relationship between the secular

and the sacred through a brief discussion of the sacred city and the secular city in

Augustine's *City of God*. This discussion will frame Sarah's quest of redefining the

sacred.

St. Augustine's *The City of God* and Doctorow's *City of God* share the study

of human societies in relation to the sacred. St. Augustine composed *The City of God*

in order to counter the charges made after the sack of Rome in 410 that the empire

had collapsed because of the nefarious influence of Christianity. R.A. Markus writes

that one important purpose of the *City of God* was to refute the anxieties of high

functionaries in the Roman Empire who found it difficult to understand how

Christians could give full weight to the claims upon them of obligations towards the

civil community (xi). The work itself is a sustained inner dialogue of a man whose

intellectual world had been shaken (Markus 53). To refute the Roman functionaries'

claim, St. Augustine set out to study the opposition between two cities, one of the

impious, the other of saints (Markus 45)[21]. The two categories were typified by the

biblical images of Babylon and Jerusalem. In St. Augustine's previous work, Rome

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[21] For an elaborate discussion of the political implications of the city from Augustine's point of view, see Eugene TeSelle's *Living in Two Cities: Augustinian Trajectories in Political Thought.* TeSelle believes that "Augustine first thought it possible to live fully in both cities at the same time, to be fully bathed in divine light yet active in the material world. Then he came to the conviction that this is impossible under current conditions-that we are so firmly enmeshed in the sensory world that we can be citizens of the city of God only through faith and hope . . .Duality, in other words, may be built into the human situation" (xi).

was always identified with Babylon. With its fall, this identification in his thought also collapsed. In fact, St. Augustine's originality, according to Markus, is that he liberated the Roman Empire from sacred history. The Empire has become no more than a historical, empirical society with a chequered career, whose vicissitudes should not be directly correlated with the favor of the gods, pagan, or Christian, given in return for services rendered. Rome becomes a space suspended between the two cities, that of the righteous and that of the unjust. This means that for Augustine, the Empire has become neutral theologically. This conclusion regarding Rome makes it representative of the city of man, the secular city which Augustine finds no justification to purely polarize to the city of God. Members of the City of God can serve the state; similarly, adherents of the earthly city are to be found with the Church (Markus 59)[22]. Markus thinks that St. Augustine is aware of the fact that the overlap of the two cities on an institutional level is incompatible with their formal definition which is mutually exclusive. What makes this compatibility possible on experiential level is the existence of a wide range of activity which forms the proper object of concern to all human beings, whatever the values to which they are ultimately committed. In Book eleven, Augustine writes that the two cities are "interwoven, as it were, in this present transitory world, and mingled with one another" (430). The people constituting a res publica are agreed in valuing certain

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[22] For a discussion on the secular time in Augustine's *City of God*, see Michael Horton's "The Time Between: Redefining the "Secular" in Contemporary Debate" in James K.A. Smith's edited *After Modernity? Secularity, Globalization & the Re-Enchantment of the World.*

things; they need not be agreed in valuing them on identical scales of values, still less do they need to agree on the objects upon which they set supreme value (Markus 69). This view of the relationship between the sacred city and the secular one indicates, according to Markus, that Augustine understands the saeculum[23] not as a no-man's land between the two cities, but as their temporal life in their interwoven, perplexed and only eschatologically separate reality. Here and now the two cities melt into one another; their boundaries are invisible and cut across all visible social groupings (Markus 62-71). The mingling between the two cities across social groups stresses agreeing on the values, not on their reference. Consequently, agreement on values, not on the justification of values, shifts envisioning the relationship between the sacred and the secular from the philosophical realm to the experiential realm.

Although Sarah's starting point in questioning the possibility of redefining the sacred is philosophical, quoting her undergraduate seminar professor at Harvard who claims "there can be no *ought*, no categorical imperative in Kantian terms, no action from an irresistible conscience, without a supreme authority" (255), her motives are not philosophical. Although she believes theologians should be involved in finding out the postmodern possibility of reclaiming the sacred, Sarah's motives for restructuring of the sacred, its values and its implications are neither

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[23] Saeculum is the Latin word for a big tract of time, an age. The adjective is 'secular.' It came to mean ordinary time, the time which is measured in ages, over against higher time, God's time, or eternity (Taylor 264-265).

metaphysical nor theological, but pragmatic, having to do with the order and functionality of human societies. Isolating the "positive social values" or the "behavioral commandments of religion" (255-256) from its mystical elements will de-sacralize these values such that they become revered not for their presumed sacred origin, but for their actual use and productivity. Also, severing the bonds between these values and between sacred authority renders them applicable in the secular field, through the human agency, effort, and authority, not the divine one.

Her ambition that theologians redefine the sacred is prompted by the demographic explosion on earth and the consequential competition over available resources, an old competition which will intensify with the increasing number of consumers, making the twentieth century a nostalgic time of heavenly peace for the future dwellers of earth where there are

> huge megacities of people all over the planet fighting for its resources. And
>
> perhaps with only the time-tested politics of God on their side to see them
>
> through. Under those circumstances, the prayers of mankind will sound to
>
> heaven as shrieks. And such abuses, shocks, to our hope for what life can be,
>
> as to make the twentieth century a paradise lost. (*City of God* 255-256)

For these reasons, the ways of restructuring the sacred are, according to Sarah, dependent on the extent to which human societies can apply standards of ethics universally. Her wondering whether "after the exclusionary, the sacramental, the ritualistic, and simply fantastic elements of religion are abandoned, can a universalist ethics be maintained-in its numinousness?" implies that she is striving for ethics that

are liberated from identity politics of both God and man. The rationale behind her

questioning the sacramental elements of religion is that these elements are cultural-

specific while her aim is to achieve a universal code of ethics. The result of such

universal ethical system is the indiscriminate application of human rights to all

humans regardless of religion or culture.

It might sound contradictory with a postmodern outlook to suggest any

universal approach to ethics, but this universality is the result of ridding the sacred of

culturally conditioned values and from all forms of power at its genesis. To illustrate

the context of this claim to universality in Sarah's speech, I compare it with

Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge," a presentation which he gave at a conference at

Capri, Italy. Derrida's concept of "religion without religion" ("The Power of the

Powerless" 146) which he explores in many of his later works on religion is the

starting point of this project, as I have mentioned in the introduction. I read Derrida's

thoughts next to Doctorow's text prompted by their common focus on understanding

the experience of religion in relation to secularity in a postmodern context.

In his often cited "Faith and Knowledge," sets out to shake the opposition

between "Reason and Religion"(FK 65) because he thinks that

> one would blind oneself to the phenomenon called 'of religion' or of the
>
> 'return of the religious' today if one continued to oppose so naively Reason
>
> and Religion, Critique or Science and Religion, technoscientific Modernity
>
> and Religion. . . .if one continues to believe in this opposition, even in this

incompatibility, which is to say, if one remains with a *certain* tradition of the

Enlightenment . . . (FK 65)

In this passage, Derrida proposes a reconsideration of the relationship between

reason and religion and urges us to question the heritage of the Enlightenment which

considered this relationship one of mutual exclusiveness. If the return of religion

requires an informed response by postmodern thinkers, a deeper understanding of

what constitutes religion is likewise necessary. Caputo thinks that Derrida, especially

in "Faith and Knowledge" means to "mime and mimic the Enlightenment's desire

for a universal, transnational, neo-international, purely rational religion, by

proposing a certain desertification of religion, but without entirely deserting it and

without excluding faith" (*The Prayers* 154). Although I agree with Caputo that

Derrida is trying to stay loyal to the Enlightenment's ideal of rationality, I think that

his engagement with religion in "Faith and Knowledge," exceeds mimicking to

destabilization.

In most readings of the Enlightenment's period, historians posit that it "was a

desire for human affairs to be guided by rationality rather than by faith, superstition,

or revelation; a belief in the power of human reason to change society and liberate

the individual from the restraints of custom or arbitrary authority; all backed up by a

world view increasingly validated by science rather than by religion or tradition"(

Outram 3). Materialist Julien de La Mettrie, a physician and philosopher, argued in

his (1747) *L'Homme Machine* that there is "no such thing as a soul" (Outram 34),

removing the "immaterial element from human beings" (Williams 42).

Derrida starts his revision of the Enlightenment-inspired opposition between reason and religion by insisting on breaking down the religious into two distinct, heterogeneous experiences, one of faith or belief, and one of the sacred or the holy (Fk 70). He attempts to isolate constituents of religion in order to seek their manifestations in secular life. By desertification, Derrida refers to a process through which certain structures, which appear in the texts of determinate religions, are disclosed, emptied of their content, and formalized so that what remains of these structures mark a certain universal logic of justice (Smith 199). In "Faith and Knowledge," Derrida calls this universality "desertification" implying its innocence and liberation from both constraints and possibilities of place. This universality is the chance that the sacred has to reemerge in connection to the secular. The new possibility of the sacred for Derrida resides outside sacramental religion, without referencing the authority of God. What Sarah calls positive social values without the authority of God, Derrida interprets as "conducting oneself in a moral manner," acting "as though God did not exist or no longer concerned himself with our salvation" ("Faith and Knowledge" 50). He continues to say that desertification provides a chance "to uproot the tradition which bears it, to atheologize it" and "without denying faith, this abstraction frees a universal rationality and a political democracy which is indissociable from it" (29). In his discussion of Derrida's essay, Caputo affirms that freeing religion from over-determination creates a strong potential for justice, writing, "With no ties to determinable faiths, as their most extreme abstraction, this religion returns, again and again, as postmodern faith and

hope, as postmodern reason and universality, the heart of justice and a democracy to come in a heartless world" (*The Prayers* 156). It is practical reason which facilitates this detachment between the authority of God and values:

> In enabling us to think (but also to suspend in theory) the existence of God, the freedom or the immortality of the soul, the union of virtue and of happiness, the concept of "postulate" of practical reason guarantees this radical dissociation and assumes ultimately rational and philosophical responsibility, the consequence here in this world, in experience, of this abandonment. [24] (Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge" 51)

Both Doctorow's *City of God* and Derrida envision universality as a feature of the postmodern sacred. This universality, along with desertification, becomes an attribute of the new sacred which is not bounded by place, or by culture. Freeing the sacred from constraints of place, but not time, reverses the transcendence of traditional sacred which is not constrained by time although it might be constrained by culture in its beginning and later manifestations. The universal religion in this Derridean sense, is a religion that "can be thought within reason alone, not a local or a national religion but a religion for all and everywhere, a place for the displaced"

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[24] Practical reason is the general human capacity for resolving, through reflection, the question of what one is to do. See Jay R. Wallace's "Practical Reason", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2009 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.),
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/practical-reason/>.

(Caputo, *The Prayers* 155). Derrida reiterates this reference to universality in

Specters of Marx where he posits the term of "New International" to refer to the

profound transformation, projected over a long term, of international law, of its

concepts, and its field of intervention. "New International," Derrida writes,

> is an untimely link, without status, without title, and without name, barely
>
> public even if it is not clandestine, without contract, "out of joint," without
>
> coordination,   without party, without country, without national community
>
> (International before, across, and beyond any national determination),
>
> without co-citizenship, without common belonging to a class. (85)

What I find laudable in Derrida's thinking about "religion without religion" is his

attempt to disassociate the religious from the experience of sacredness, saying that

"[a]ll sacredness and all holiness are not necessarily and, in the strict sense of the

word, if there is one, religious" ("Faith and Knowledge" 48). He maintains that

religion marks the convergence of belief, which he defines as "believing or credit,

the fiduciary or the trustworthy in the act of faith, fidelity, the appeal to blind

confidence, the testimonial that is always beyond proof, demonstrative reason,

intuition" on one hand, and "the experience of the unscathed, of sacredness or of

holiness" on the other (FK 70). Separating both experiences further, Derrida sees that

it is possible to sacralize the unscathed without bringing into play an act of belief

(FK 70).

But while this distinction is clear in his analysis and runs parallel to the

distinction between the religious and the holy in Sarah's speech (Doctorow, *City of*

God 255), the agent in Derrida's analysis is not so lucid. Sarah commissions theologians with the task of enacting this distinction; Derrida keeps his recommendation of this distinction in the theoretical field, perhaps hinting that it is the role of philosophers to carry out this mission. So despite his differentiation between sacredness and belief, Derrida's site for sacredness, justice, stays in the hands of philosophers[25]. By doing so, Derrida undermines the role of theologians in abstracting the sought- after sacred, keeps the sacred sanctioned by reason, but shifts the Enlightenment's oppositional dynamic between religion and reason. The resulting abstract of "religion without religion" is characterized by its universality.

Universality is also a concern of the secularist Everett, the writer who sometimes takes the role of the narrator in the novel. Most interestingly, it is his conceptualization of an "over-soul" (11), a spiritual belonging that he feels when he describes New York. He voices his belief in universality when he talks about New York, glorifying its cosmopolitanism and longing for a human society free of borders:

> New York New York, capital of literature, the arts, social pretension, subway tunnel condos. [. . .]
> . . . and how can I not know I am momentarily part of the most spectacular phenomenon in the unnatural world? There is a specie recognition we will

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[25] For more on Derrida and religion, see Yvonne Sherwood and Kevin Hart's *Derrida and Religion: Other Testaments*.

never   acknowledge. A primatial over-soul. [. . .]

And so each of the passersby on this corner, every scruffy, oversize,

undersize, weird, fat, or bony or limping or muttering or foreign-looking, or

green-haired   punk-strutting, threatening, crazy, angry, inconsolable person

[. . .] is a New Yorker, which is to say as native to this diaspora as I am, and

part of our great sputtering experiment in a universalist society proposing a

world without nations where anyone can be anything and the ID is planetary.

(*City of God* 10 - 11).

This universality of the sacred is one of the qualities of the sacred which Sarah asks

theologians to conceive and articulate. The other attribute of this postmodern faith,

in addition to its universality, is that it "cannot be contained in any traditional

opposition, for example that between reason and mysticism" (57). Deriding this

opposition stands behind Sarah's quest of the sacred as a "new sort of narrative."

Sarah looks at the quest for the sacred as a new sort of narrative, not just a

new component of an old narrative. The quest she is seeking requires restructuring

the narrative which links the secular with the sacred, such that opposition is no more

the subtext that generates the surface narrative, but an alternate relationship that

considers both the sacred and the secular as lived experiences with declared

messages and functions. In the newly constructed space between the sacred and the

secular, manifestations of the sacred are not stable. Sarah's discussion of the "soul"

indicates that this instability originates in the interaction between the secular and the

sacred. Sarah compares the orthodox approaches to understanding "soul" with those

of reform teaching and Reconstructionism. She shows that in Reconstructionism, a predecessor to Evolutionary Judaism, ideas of the soul and so on are considered to be tentative, "all dictates as to God and God's nature are in the suspension of our progressive knowledge, and what we hold to in the meantime is the tradition itself, its folkways, its proven means for structuring life in moral terms and providing beauty and consolation" (194).

The conversation on the relationship between religious rituals, their sacredness, and their significance continues at another night in the Synagogue of EJ. Sarah was trying to show the congregation the differences between Orthodox and Evolutionary Judaism, and tells the congregation: "I can't take seriously the sacred obligation regarding the ritual sacrifice of animals to appease or honor God. . . . Another instance: I don't think it is required of me in this century to wear a prayer shawl with fringes knotted at the corners as specified in Numbers so that I won't forget the Ten Commandments. I think I can be trusted not only to remember them but to live by them" (250). When asked what would happen to the tradition and where to draw the line-when there is nothing left, Sarah explains:

> There is a line you draw and it's this: God is not honored by a mechanical adherence to each and every regulation but by going to the heart of them all, the ethics, and observing those as if your life is at stake, as it may well be, I mean, your moral life, your life of consequence as a good, reflective, just, and compassionate human being. Isn't that what Hillel meant? 'What is

hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor. That is the whole Torah,' he said.

'The rest is commentary upon it.' [26](*City of God* 250).

When a member of the congregation asks her about her own opinion, Sarah starts her answer quoting her husband saying that reconstruction is only a start, but she interprets this start as one through which

> one can presume to examine every element of the tradition without bias and
>
> decide what to dispense with and what to keep, but not merely for the sake of
>
> making linguistic sense, not for the cherishing of beauty, or consolation, not
>
> for preserving our cultural identity for its own sake, because that finally is
>
> insufficient, a theology in neutral, idling. Tradition should   be subject to
>
> one's irreverence to get back to where it began. (194)

The push for an originary approach to sacred practices and texts implies a paradoxical connection between the seeker of sacredness and the source of sacredness. The direct relationship between the seeker and the sacred text for example challenges piled interpretations of the text by the clergy and the theologians. The awe of discovering the source by the seekers themselves opposes the reverence traditionally held for the official exegeses of sacred texts. The pre-scriptural moment is an acknowledgment on the part of the seeker that she is capable of perceiving God's presence on her own. Examining the tradition with a purpose in mind- be it

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[26] Hillel the Elder is a famous Jewish rabbi, born at Babylon about 110 B.C and was instrumental in the development of the Talmud or Mishna. See Joseph Thomas's *Universal Pronouncing Dictionary of Biography and Mythology.*

interpretive, through language, or psychological through looking for ways of salvation, or cultural for constructing an identity- pollutes the quest for the sacred, according to Sarah. A pre-designed method of dealing with the sacred renders it subject to mediation, and turns it into another version of culturally structured text open for manipulation by anyone. The paradox of awe and irreverence when dealing with the tradition endows the seeker with a fresh outlook on tradition, and enables her to connect to it in a pure state of understanding, without bias:

> only that, back down to the ground level of simple . . . unmediated awe. It is
> there, which is necessarily the state of irreverence, the sharp perception of
> God's presence in the fact of our consciousness . . . and therefore
> everywhere and in everyone and everything-it is that constancy of awe we
> hope for, a pre-scriptural state as alive to us as the contemporary moment,
> and which, of course, comes with absolutely no guarantees. That is where
> we begin . . . (*City of God* 194)

This paradox also is another facet of the rejection of the dichotomy of reason and mysticism. It is through reason that the seeker examines the tradition, but the parallel perception of God in the seeker's consciousness is mystical. On a textual level, Sarah's suggested experience of dealing with the scriptures involves also a site where the reader acknowledges the susceptibility of the text to rational reasoning and failing its test. But in spite of failing the expectation of rationality, the text can still be connectable to the reader on another cognitive level. It is an experience similar to that of reading poetry where reasoning might not lead to knowledge, but does not

stand as a barrier between the poet and the reader. In this sense, reading religious

texts becomes an aesthetic experience. The faithful reader of the scripture holds back

the authority of reason and enters into another level of communicating with the text

on the level of taste and feelings, and imagination. When Sarah moves to give

examples of her ideal practitioners of religion she says:

> …It is just those uneasy promulgators of traditional established religion who
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> are not in lockstep with its customs and practices, or who are chafing under
>
> doctrinal pronouncements, or losing their congregations to charismatics and
>
> stadium-filling conversion performers, who are the professional religious I
>
> trust. The faithful who read scripture in the way Coleridge defined the act of
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> reading poetry or fiction, i.e., with a willing suspension of disbelief. (255)

Sarah's reference to Coleridge and the act of reading poetry or fiction as an approach

to understand the scripture stresses an aesthetic connection to the sacred text. This

aesthetic approach to the sacred is shared by Sarah, the reform rabbi, and Everett, the

secularist. During the conversation between Pem and Everett, who believes that God

and religion are incompatible propositions, considering the former ahistorical and the

latter historical, Everett recognizes the greatness of such stories such as The

Decalogue or the Ten Commandments (90), but historicizes them. For example, he

tells Pem that the Decalogue is structurally "modeled on the ancient Mesopotamian

lord-and-vassal treaties"(91). Also he attempts to show Pem that dozens of Greek

mystery cults told of resurrection (91). To his mind, historicizing religious stories

and mystic events does not present a dilemma to a secular minded person, but it does

create lot of trouble to someone who is religious but not fundamentalist (91) because in this case, one has to turn the truth of his/her faith into edifying poetry, becoming a religious schizoid whose right brain believes and the left can only relish the sentiment of believing (91),thinking "Jesus as the chosen son is no more valid than Jews as the chosen people" (*City of God* 91).

While Sarah defends unmediated awe in approaching the sacred and relating it to the secular, Pem, because of his Anglican background, demands more emphasis on reason, challenging his audience to be fair by granting them that their acclaimed connection to the mystical could be a reality if they acknowledge the weight he places on the role intellect should play in faith. Parallel also to Sarah's questioning of the sacred as mediated tradition, Pem draws attention to the human agency involved in narrating the stories of the Gospels. To him, the act of telling stories is conditioned by restrictions and by freedoms, so is the act of weaving gospel narratives; "there is no more dangerous than the storyteller"(65), he says. It is Augustine, who edited Genesis 2-4 into a doctrine of original sin (66). Considering the role of the storyteller as an editor of the sacred text is one way to understand the historical consequences of faith, which for Pem are not favorable. One of the ways to rid the sacred text of the influence of the editor is to deal with the text, as Sarah suggested also, as a source of an aesthetic experience, through which, the story of the Fall, for example, becomes a "parable of the glory and torment of human consciousness" (*City of God* 65).

The distrust Sarah shows in following doctrines blindly does not prevent her from pointing out the potential of her project of redefining the sacred for "to hold in abeyance and irresolution any firm convictions of God, or of an afterlife with Him, warrants walking in His spirit, *somehow*" (my emphasis 255). I think that Sarah's use of "somehow" in this context is indicative of the novel's take on the relationship between reason and mysticism. Holding in abeyance and irresolution firm convictions about God and afterlife could be a result of not finding empirical evidence to support these convictions. But such deferring of certainty marks the gap between positive, experimental knowledge and "sharp perception of God's presence in the fact of our consciousness. . . and therefore everywhere and in everyone and everything"(194) as she said previously in the course of her discussion of Reconstruction in Judaism. The perceptive awareness of God's presence *everywhere* yields this state of walking in His spirit. From Sarah's perspective, if God is everywhere, then she can have experienced "walking in His spirit" which engulfs everything, according to her. So, although "somehow" indicates vagueness in her speech, it also signals openness of possibilities of connecting to God in all directions with no specific site for connection, collapsing the gap between the sacred and the secular. Both Pem and Sarah, who celebrate their marriage at the end of the novel, view the sacred and the secular permeable to each other, not separate or exclusive of each other.

As a postmodern novel, Doctorow's *City of God* does not employ synthesis between these dramatized dilemmas and documented proclamations, but rather

frames them within a pastiche of genres. The novel stages the discourse on the

relationship between the sacred and the secular in the form of intellectual speeches

and dilemmas in the life of its fictional characters and in the form of proclamations

by historical figures such as Einstein, Wittgenstein, and St. Augustine. Doctorow

constructs a network of responses to the issues that these characters actually explored

in their works. Through their speeches to their audiences at places of worship, the

fictional characters explain the philosophical and pragmatic dimensions of their

dilemmas and challenges. This non-synthetic juxtaposition between the speech of

fictional characters, who the narrator tells us they are based on real characters, and

the speech of historic characters, provides the different polemics over the

relationship between the sacred and the secular. The novel, as such, does not aspire

towards narrative unity. However, the pastiche of genres and narrative voices in *The

City of God* does not prevent it from thematizing its argument on the relationship

between the sacred and the secular. In fact, it is through this pastiche that the novel

achieves its political character, as an interlocutor with its culture (Tololyan 246) and

zeitgeist when spirituality has resurfaced as an influential force in the political public

sphere. The novel employs and parodies St. Augustine's *The City of God* which also

analyzes the relationship between the secular and the sacred. With this political

intervention, the novel revises Jameson's description of pastiche as "blank parody"

(65). Through employing different levels of fictionality ranging from quasi-

documentary to autobiographical to purely fictional and quasi-fictional, prompting

the reader, through its technique not only through its theme, to reevaluate certainty of

human knowledge. Through its network of question and responses, the novel argues against the infallibility of science and its status as a meta-narrative in the structure of knowledge, calling for a more inclusive approach that would tolerate mystical knowledge and aestheticize our connection to the sacred texts.

In this chapter, I have analyzed the epistemological ground for postmodern spiritualities as they manifested in Doctorow's *City of God*. I claimed that in postmodern discourse on spirituality, knowledge should take account of both the intellect and the mystical in fathoming a postmodern sacred, and that such knowledge legitimates a concept of the sacred that is interconnected to the secular. I also showed, through the juxtaposition of Derrida's "Faith and Knowledge" with Doctorow's *City of God* that such epistemological look yields an ethical perspective that sees in justice a universal postmodern characteristic of the sacred. With this postmodern reconsideration of the mystical, the novel puts the secular in contingency with the sacred, sharing with Derrida an originary look at the sacred, freeing it from the constraints of place and nationalities. In its focus on universality of ethics, a rational approach to the sacred text that does not exclude the aesthetic, the mystical, and the perceptive; the novel revises the Enlightenment paradigm of the hegemony of empirical reason and replaces the actual universality of Euro-centrist thought with a utopian universality of justice.

In the next chapter, I will demonstrate some of the manifestations of the interconnectedness between the secular and the sacred in Richard Powers *Echo Maker* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*. I will show that creative

memory is a site where the mingling between the sacred and the secular can be witnessed and experienced.

CHAPTER III

CREATIVE MEMORY AS REVELATION DISCOURSE: SACRED MEMORY IN

LESLIE MARMON SILKO'S *ALMANAC OF THE DEAD* AND RICHARD

POWERS' *THE ECHO MAKER*

"The thread of culture-and religion-is memory" Daniel Bell

I have argued in the previous chapter that Doctorow's novel puts the secular
in contact with the sacred by protesting against the infallibility of science, calling for
a more inclusive epistemology that would tolerate mystical knowledge and
aestheticize our connection to the sacred text. In this chapter, I trace the contact
between the secular and the sacred in two novels, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of
the Dead* (1991) and Richard Powers' *Echo Maker* (2006). Both of these novels
possess a thematic continuum with *The City of God*. Powers' text shares with
Doctorow's the theme of rejecting the dialectical relation between modernist reason
and spirituality, and it furthers this thematization by pointing to the power of
memory as a site of sacredness. Silko's text glorifies creative memory, embodied in
memory narratives, as a zone of contact between the sacred and the secular.
Analyzing Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Powers' *Echo Maker*, I argue that these
texts locate the sacred in memory and its creative aspects, embodied in memory
narratives. By examining manifestations of the sacred in this chapter and the next
chapter, I demonstrate how these two novels sacralize what is supposed to be secular,
problematizing the secular as a construct. Such problematization of the secular, as

this project aims to, provides us with terms for analysis that counteract a fragmented subjectivity and a lost agency facilitated through rehabilitation of the sacred and a search for a communal identity. Both Silko and Power's texts are engaged in exploring memory as a site for re-envisioning the sacred. They both look at memory's potentials and performances as comparable to the performative powers and aspects of the sacred, such as forecasting the future, building connections leading to the formation of communities, and defeating the linearity of time. *The Echo Maker* is more explicit in its rejection of traditional religion, associated with institutions. It confirms the Enlightenment view of religion as in conflict with science but resists the total renunciation of the spiritual in America. While Silko's text focalizes its treatment of memory through creative memory narratives, embodied in old and new notebooks and records of past events, *The Echo Maker* foregrounds the cognitive processes associated with memory as they reconstruct the self and connects them to the novel's vision of the sacred. The act of remembering in Powers' *The Echo Maker* facilitates the sacred through defeating the linearity of time, annihilating self borders, and recreating a communal bond among humans and nature.

To fully explain manifestations of the sacred in creative memory, I establish the relationship between religion and memory in anthropological and sociological discourse, turn to Derrida and Paul de Man's thoughts on memory, and to Paul Ricoeur's rhetorical approach to analyzing the idea of revelation as a narrative. Broadly speaking, the word "religion" refers to sets of beliefs, rituals, and

institutions[27]. More specifically, I will be using Daniel Bell's definition because it summarizes the social and discursive practices of religion. I am using the word "sacred" to refer to the emotional impact of religious practices, which can be, for example, a sense of awe and reverence as defined by Rudolph Otto. In addition to these two problematic terms I will be using "spirituality" to refer to one's own search for the sacred, with or without reference to organized religion. But I have to say that all these terms are often used interchangeably in both theoretical discourse and creative discourse[28]. In this dissertation, one of my objectives is to focus on the search for the sacred, without reference to organized religion. In other words, I am elaborating on the implications of Derrida's concept of "religion without religion" and Baudrillard's "impure sacred" in fiction.

I organize my analysis in this chapter in three sections. In the first section, I refer to Bell's definition of religion that will serve as a comparison reference for my argument about the sacred in the two novels, and I ground my discussion about the relationship between memory and religion in sociological and anthropological discourse. I find such grounding useful for advancing my argument because it provides a historical background for the connection between memory and religion. My discussion of postmodern thinkers' view of memory will focus on its creative

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[27] See Thomas Tweed's second chapter on the problems related to defining religion in his impressive ethnographic study *Crossing and Dwelling*

[28] For more on this distinction between spirituality and religion see Richard Fenn's (2001) *The Blackwell Companion to Sociology of Religion.*

aspects and its ability to restructure time. In the second section, I will discuss the sacred aspects which *Almanac of the Dead* assigns to memory narratives. And in the third section, I will shift the discussion *The Echo Maker'*s thematization of the significance of the act of remembering as a replacement for the bygone, traditional religion which the Enlightenment has demystified then dismissed. My framework then utilizes anthropological and sociological discourse to ground the relationship between memory and spirituality and relies on postmodern discourse to further explain the creative aspects of memory with which the two novels engage.

Religion, as Daniel Bell surmises, involves celebration of rites, the creation of an emotional bond amongst the participants, and conserving the continuity of these rites through generations (429). Bell's definition does not explicitly refer to memory, but it necessarily implicates it because the celebration of rites aims at protecting these rites from being forgotten with the progression of time. This implicated connection between memory and religion was researched by classical as well as contemporary scholars. Studies on memory, its history, and its uses, considered memory as a means for storage of information, but later speculated on its capacity as a means to generate knowledge.

In his book on memory, Paul Ricoeur discusses the importance of memory in works by Aristotle, Augustine, and medieval scholars, focusing on its significance from a spiritual perspective, stating, that "hell, purgatory, and paradise are memory places in which virtues and vices are inscribed" (*Memory* 64) because a memory narrative of committing vices and adhering to virtues is a precondition for going

through these places or residing in them. Francis Yates mentions in her *Art of Memory* that "Augustine conferred on memory the supreme honour of being one of the three powers of the soul, Memory, Understanding, and Will, which are the image of the Trinity in man"(49*). Ars memoriae*, the art of memory, as it was classically labeled, progressed into a magic, an occult art, extending the time span of memory from the past to the future. Memory, in addition to recording the past, became revelatory, shedding light on future events. The act of remembering itself started to be perceived as a creative endeavor. Through this creative element, memory "broke the pact with the past" (Ricoeur, *Memory* 66). Drawing on Yates, Paul Ricoeur writes that behind this metamorphosis in the capacity of memory is the conception "of a system of correspondences between the stars and the lower world, presented as a revelation, as a secret that has been pierced" (*Memory* 64). During the Enlightenment, memory lost its classical halo. Scholars of rhetoric such as Whateley, Blair, and Campbell embraced the classical view of memory as a canon of rhetoric[29]. They viewed memory as a mere organizational aid, second to moral qualities of a retort.

Many modern thinkers and sociologists discuss the relationship between spirituality and memory. In the first half of the twentieth century, Henri Bergson asserts, in his studies on duration, the connection between spirit, as opposed to matter, and memory, saying "[i]f, then, spirit is a reality, it is here, in the

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[29] *Rhetorica Ad Herennuium*; Ciceros' De *Inventione*; Quintilian's Oratorio.

phenomenon of memory, that we may come into touch with it experimentally" (82).

German anthropologist, Jan Assman understands cultural memory as "the

institutionalization of the invisible religion that is to say, the totality of the forms in

which a comprehensive symbolic world of meaning can be communicated and

handed down"(37). Grounding his analysis in Thomas Luckmann's concept of

invisible religion and the concept of cultural memory as approached by modern

cultural theorists such as Freud, Halbwachs, and Warburg, Assman treats invisible

religion and cultural memory as synonyms (32).

Sociologist of religion, Daniele Hervieu-Leger, in his *Religion as a Chain of

Memory* (1993), looks at tradition as collective memory of a particular community

by means of which establishing and communicating modern religion become

possible. Although his approach is normative, suggesting that religious practices are

purely rational choices, his diagnosis of the relationship between religion and

memory is indicative of a modern particular trend which dismisses the authority of

religious institutions as hegemonic. As a sociologist, Hervieu-Leger argues, modern

manifestations of religion should be free of the authority of institutions. He posits the

authority of tradition as one alternative. Hervieu-Leger adds that in its "constant

contact with this past, the religious group defines itself objectively and subjectively

as a *chain of memory*, whose continuity transcends history" ("Religion as Memory"

257).

Theorists of African American and ethnic studies find an organic connection

between religion and memory. In her article on memory, traditions, and modernity in

the "New Negro" novel, Carla L. Peterson comments on the syncretism that combines African diasporic mysticism and biblical traditions, maintaining that "collective memory is transmitted not only through family but through religious history as well" and that "individuals remember through commemorative religious practices"(50). The significance of memory as a vessel of ethnic identity made its enactment part of religious belief. African Diaspora scholar Maureen Warner-Lewis mentions that mimesis and memory played an important role within the ethnic communities which the enslaved established across plantation boundaries, serving "as bases for the continuation of certain beliefs, strategies, and lifestyles" (21).[30] Analyzing the depiction of memory in many of Phillis Wheatley's poems, Angela Cotten and Christa Acampora foreground the conflation of memory and spirit, proposing that such conflation "bears greater resemblance to African spirituality than Christian theology" (55). Among postmodern African American writers, Toni Morrison's work stands as an example of the power of memory as a spiritual source of strength. Sethe in *Beloved* travels through memory "in and out of time and experiences reliving the past" to heal from the wounds of slavery (Cotten and Acampora 65).

Memory in postmodern thought acquired new qualities. Postmodern theorists crystallized a look at memory that considers its creative aspect. Memory is no more a

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[30] In their analysis of the employment of memory as spirit in Phillis Wheatley's poetry, Cotten and Acampora speculate "whether Wheatley's concept of memory as spirit is born out of a conscious connection to her African heritage, her musings on the nature and authority of memory remain a powerful testament to the survival of African spirituality in the African American psyche" (55).

mechanical inscription of one's past and no more monopolized by the past as a time frame. Rather it is a reconstruction of knowledge and a melting pot of past, present, and future. Beside revising its relationship to time, postmodern thinkers do not see memory as a mere inscriptive act of symbols. Derrida, for example, criticizes approaches to memory which consider it a mechanical retrieval of the past. He finds fault with looking at past, present, and future as if they were entities easily distinguished as separate and continuous. In addition to its role as a source of past knowledge, memory has become a site of creativity capable of generating new information. Under the lens of postmodern thinkers, Socrates' metaphor of memory as engraved wax dissolved into a higher status of cognition and revelation.

In his *Memoires: for Paul de Man*, Derrida writes that memory "is the name of what is no longer only a mental 'capacity' oriented toward one of the three modes of the present, the past present, which could be dissociated from the present present and the future present. Memory projects itself toward the future, and it constitutes the presence of the present"(56-57). In this passage, Derrida's ruminations on his memories of Paul de Man reiterate Paul de Man's own view of memory as bound to the future, a modified extension of Bergson's analysis of memory as a temporally fixed entity. In his study of the relationship between time and memory in Marcel Proust's work, de Man posits that

> power of memory does not reside in its capacity to resurrect a situation or a feeling that actually existed, but is a constitutive act of the mind bound to its own present and oriented toward the future of is own elaboration. The past

intervenes only as a purely formal element, as a reference or a leverage that can be used because it is different and distant rather than because it is familiar and near. If memory allows us to enter into contact with the past, it is not because the past acts as the source of the present, as a temporal continuity that had been forgotten and of which we are again made aware; the remembrance does not reach us carried by a temporal flux; quite to the contrary, it is a deliberate act establishing a relation between two distinct points in time between which no relationship of continuity exists. Remembrance is not a temporal act but an act that enables a consciousness "to find an access to the intemporal" and to transcend time altogether. [31] (92)

Remembrance in de Man's view opens not only onto the future, but is also an enabling power that interferes in our perception of time as a limitation. Finding an access to the "intemporal" results in a collapse of time, at least as a discursive category that organizes our experience in a linear fashion. Transcending time through remembrance, as de Man suggests, explodes the concepts of infinity and eternity into a more visceral cognition of the moment of remembrance itself. I argue that this postmodern view of memory as creative and capable of restructuring time is the vehicle through which characters in the two novels find sacredness. In other words, if religion, as Bell states, involves celebration of rites, the creation of an

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[31] Paul de Man draws on Henri Bergson's works to interpret Poulet's treatment of time, especially on Bergson's 1949 *Etudes Sur Le Temps Human.*

emotional bond amongst the participants, and conserving the continuity of these rites through generations, Silko and Powers' texts realize these elements not in through memory rather than in religion.

Sacredness of Memory Narratives in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*

Memory narratives in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* facilitate sacredness through their realization of a new concept of time, merging the past, present, and the future; and through their ability to create a community bound by shared meanings. Before demonstrating the similar markers of sacredness in Powers and Silko's texts, which I establish using Daniel Bell's definition of religion, including building connections, sharing meanings through the celebration of rites, and the challenge of time linearity, and which are present in memory and memory narratives, I start the section by a rhetorical analysis of memory narratives, stressing the multiple discourses that they share with sacred texts. By memory narratives, I refer to community stories, called also the old notebooks in the novel, characters' new notebooks, and diaries which women in this novel have protected, kept, and expanded. For a rhetorical analysis of AOD's memory narratives, I will turn to Paul Ricoeur's essay on narrative and its relationship to sacredness[32]. I find the rhetorical

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[32] Many historians of thought and philosophy find that Paul Ricoeur subscribes to the postmodern view of the constructedness of human experience. In *Paul Ricoeur and Contemporary Moral Thought,* Linda MacCammon writes that "[a]s a contemporary philosopher, Ricoeur subscribes to many to the basic tenets of postmodernism. He affirms, for example, the radically historical and textual nature of human existence, he insists on the necessity of religious reflection for understanding human subjectivity, and he is critical of the idealism of Western metaphysics and the ontotheology of Christianity"(197). For Ricoeur's relevance to postmodern discourse and critical theory, see David kaplan's *Reading Ricoeur* . Christian theologians perceive Ricoeur as a mediator between philosophy

examination of memory narratives necessary because they act as a written text within

Silko's novel. In other words, my discussion of memory narratives will address

extrinsic features that characterize these narratives as sacred, and intrinsic features

that make these narratives comparable to a sacred text for performing similar

functions. The core almanac is sacred by definition for the members of the Native

American community because it is part of their spiritual heritage. But my argument

here builds on Bell's definition because it provides a reference of comparison with

Powers'use of memory as a site for the sacred. I address the almanac, its notebooks,

and the individual notebooks which have been added to it as one body of memory

narratives, where the collective memory collides with the individual one. I treat the

individual memories and collective ones as one mass because they discursively

collapse into each other. With the individual notebooks and edits that women

characters add to the core text, the body of the almanac expands as women involved

in preserving the old almanac add their own memories to it. Besides, the novel's

collective and individual memories coalesce because according to many scholars of

memory, individual memory narratives, such as memoires, dairies, and notebooks,

are under the impact of the social and historical factors at least while the writer

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and religion. Kevin J. Vanhoozer states that "Ricoeur refuses to link religion to an authoritative
revelation that commands obedience, for this would entail the unacceptable sacrifice of reason. On the
other hand, philosophy should not be conceived as proceeding from an autonomous thinking subject,
for this would entail the unacceptable sacrifice of revelation. Ricoeur mediates the totalizing claims of
reason and revelation by viewing each in light of hope"(125).

produces them[33]. My argument about the novel will show how it locates the sacred in the expanded body of memory narratives.

As a novel of epical length and scope, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* puts around seventy characters into a narrative structure that does not yield simple linearity of events. A vigorous depiction of the world of addicts, alcoholics, rapists, drug smugglers, and prostitutes, the novel highlights venues of power in the lives of the ordinary and the marginalized. Set in Tucson, Arizona and twelve other places, including American-Mexican border cities, the novel relates corruption of the wealthy and powerful classes to the crimes of lower classes. Titled after a pre-Columbian manuscript, Almanac of the Dead is the document that Native American community have kept and circulated amongst them through generations as their cultural memory. It contains spiritual knowledge, wisdom, and prophecies about the European invasion of South America. Through webs of stories and discourses, Silko, as she did in *Ceremony* (1977), thematizes the supernatural element in Native American verbal heritage. She builds around the circulation of the almanac a plot that involves four women involved in keeping it. While working on restoring and circulating the almanac, these women develop their own memories in notebooks and diaries, in which they record their fears, hopes, and responses to their experiences creatively. I will focus on the particular link between the sacred and memory

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[33] See *On Collective Memory* by Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser and Jan Assman's *Religion and Cultural Memory*

narratives which has not been discussed in essays written about this rich novel[34].

In *Almanac of the Dead*, there are many forms of memory narratives. Most characters keep notebooks in which they record their comments on daily events. The central notebook in the novel is the almanac, a book which the Native American community claims as a record of its heritage. In this sense, the almanac is itself a notebook and a collective memory narrative through which a whole community has recorded its hopes and fears, features of identity, confessions, and reactions to others' attitudes towards it. Also similar to the role a notebook or a diary plays in its owner and writers' life, the almanac is an intimate record of historical junctions in

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[34] Daria Donelly has written about the use of notebooks in Silko's novel and has argued that the new notebooks of the novel's characters, as well as the surviving almanac and its marginalia, make clear the importance of marginal stories and Silko's interest in the processes by which they "gain value and thus the strength to overthrow the hegemonic narrative and dominant power" (251). Likewise, Virginia Bell discusses the notebooks as a method of "counter-chronicling" by which an alternative historiography resists the tendency to write Eurocentric history and by which alternative mapping of nation-state challenges the Euro-American nationalist narrative based on borders imagined as natural and eternal (6, 17). Donelly argues that the main achievement of the notebooks in Silko's novel is political because "through storytelling, notebooks challenge the dominant history written by the Western colonizers. She ascribes Silko's belief in the power of these stories to her Laguna's spiritual heritage, regardless of whether they are cherished or find audience" (251).

In her book on contemporary allegory and postmodern faith, Petrolle focuses more on the spiritual dimension of Silko's novel. She describes *Almanac of the Dead* "as allegory, that in addition to operating as ritual activity, as well as "national allegory," also operates as religious expression, possessed of theological, cosmological, and salvational claims"(143). Petrolle writes that Silko enters in what William Covino calls the "arresting" and "generative" magic of word and story. Petrolle's analysis demonstrates that Silko's use of allegory and postmodern aesthetics does not lead necessarily to "vacuums of meaning"(147). Her analysis of the spiritual theme in Silko's *Almanac* approaches it as an example of animist pantheism within the Amerindian tradition. Silko 's belief in the capacity of story-power to create and change reality is an example of the poststructuralist view of the importance of language in making reality. Petrolle, however, does not show how this story-power hinges on sacredness intrinsic to narrative as a discourse of revelation capable of telling the present as well as the future. In addition, Donelly, Petrolle, and Bell do not address these stories in their relationship to the role memory is playing in the life of characters and community, a theme that cannot be ignored in *Almanac of the Dead*.

the life of the community to which it belongs. Yoeme is the custodian of the

almanac, but in addition to the almanac, Yoeme keeps a set of notebooks which

accompanied the almanac in its journey through time and space and helped members

of the community to understand it. Yoeme turns to Lecha and Zeta, her two

granddaughters, for completing the mission of preserving and disseminating the

almanac and its marginal notebooks. Lecha who is trusted with transcribing the

notebooks, keeps her own notebook; so do many characters in the novel including

Angelita, Clinton, Trigg, and a policeman.

I find Ricoeur's rhetorical analysis of the Old Testament useful for the

analysis of *AOD*'s memory narratives because Ricoeur's analysis isolates the

different discourses that operate in a sacred text to show their various functions. A

rhetorical analysis of the different discourses embedded in these memory narratives

shows that they perform as a sacred text does. To put it another way, I apply the

performative discursive functions of the sacred text as Ricoeur has deduced them to

memory narratives in *AOD* to show how memory narratives in Silko's novel perform

as a sacred text, thus interpolating the sacred into the secular. In his "Toward a

Hermeneutic of the Idea of Revelation," Paul Ricoeur analyzes the question of

revelation, understood as God revealing himself through a sacred text, the Old

Testament ("Toward" 1). He focuses on a concept of revelation embedded in

language because he sees that revelation belongs to the discourse of faith or to the

confession of faith (Ricoeur and Mudge73). He sees revelation as an amalgamation

of three levels of language. The first level is the confession of faith where the *lex*

credendi, is not separated from the *lex orandi*. This Latin expression means that the

law of prayer is the law of belief; so when the church celebrates the sacraments, it

also confesses the faith received from the Apostles[35] ; the second level is the level of

ecclesial dogma where a historic community interprets for itself and for others the

understanding of faith specific to its tradition; and the third level is the body of

doctrines imposed by the magisterium, the office of authoritative teaching exercised

by pope and bishops (Figueiredo 7), as the rule of orthodoxy (Ricoeur, "Toward" 1).

Ricoeur considers this amalgamation a form of contamination. He asserts that the

doctrine of a confessing community loses the sense of the historical character of its

interpretation when it places itself under the tutelage of the fixed assertions of the

magisterium. Ricoeur endeavors to bring the sacred text back to its originary level.

By originary level, Ricoeur refers to revelation as verbal communication that has not

been instrumentalized by institutions. It is this level of the sacred text as fundamental

discourse, not theological one (Ricoeur qtd. Jeanrond 51) that Ricoeur analyzes

rhetorically. This level is what interests me in Ricoeur's rhetorical analysis of the

Old Testament as a sacred text.

 The significance of employing such a return to the origin of theological

discourse, according to Ricoeur, is that it shifts our attention from a monolithic

concept of revelation, which is only obtained by transforming the different forms of

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[35] For a discussion of the theological discussion over this principle, see Jaroslav Pelikan's (2003) *Credo*. The original formulation of this rule is ascribed to Prosper of Aquitaine in the fifth century (Pelikan 166).

discourses into propositions which later fall under the tutelage of the magisterium to a concept of revelation that is pluralistic and polysemic (Ricoeur, "Toward" 3). Liberating the religious text from theological monolithic interpretation not only enables Ricoeur to map the sacred text rhetorically, analyzing the multiple discourses it includes and synthesizes, but it also implies that the text is open to interpretations. The rhetorical analysis of the sacred text, according to Ricoeur, results in classifying its constitutive discourses into prophetic, apocalyptic, prescriptive, Hymnic, and wisdom discourses. Memory narratives in *AOD* as the record of a confessing community, represent the originary level of a discourse faith in Ricoeur's scheme of approaching a sacred text. Ordinary community members, especially women are in custody of the community's faith and its stories. While traditional rituals of confessing faith take place in a dedicated space, such as church, and on special holy days, we see that the confession of Native American's faith, represented in a collective memory narrative, travels through time and space carried by community members and even outsiders, some of whom have spiritual talents, such as Lecha. Strangers to the community, such as Seese, develop spirituality just by contact with the sacred text. The sacred text under preservation is being repaired and edited by both insiders and outsiders, revising the concept of tutelage over confessions of faith. In the following paragraphs, I will demonstrate the prophetic, apocalyptic and poetic discourses that *AOD*'s memory narratives employ.

Although the figure of a prophet is absent from the almanac, prophecy as such is not. The prophetic mode is present in memory narratives because of their

capability to tell the future and the unseen. Apocalyptic and prophetic discourses are entangled in the memory narratives as they grow out as an extension of the body of the almanac. Prophecy, according to Ricoeur, remains bound to the literary genre of the oracle, establishing an almost invincible association between the idea of prophecy and that of an unveiling of the future. This association imposes the idea that the content of the sacred text should be assimilated to a design in the sense of a plan that would give a goal to the unfolding of history ("Toward" 4). Ricoeur even identifies revelation with the idea of a premonition of the end of history. But in the almanac, prophecy also carries hopes of salvation. The old almanac tells Native Americans that they will be victims of the violence of foreign forces. Glossing the Spirit Snake's message, the narrator confirms that it predicts the genocide of Native Americans. Following the apocalyptic message, a story will offer salvation. The narrator describes the message, saying:

> Those were the words of the giant serpent. The days that were to come had been foretold. The people scattered. Killers came from all directions. And more killers followed, to kill them.
>
> One story will arrive at your town. It will come from far away, from the southwest or southeast-people won't agree. The story may arrive with a stranger or perhaps with the parrot trader. But when you hear this story, you will know it is the signal for you and the others to prepare. (Silko 135)

Multiple narrative voices in *AOD* facilitate a revelatory function in the corresponding narrative, with no ultimate authority of speech. In all these examples,

the narrative voice reveals the invisible, the unseen, or the unknown future. Lecha's notebook reveals the unseen, so does Seese's transcription of her dream about her son kidnapped and killed by her boyfriend's lover. The plurality of narrative voices in the almanac and the notebooks, new and old, and the absence of a clear persona of a prophet throughout the almanac problematize the presence of the divine source of inspiration behind the prophetic voice. However, to Ricoeur, the problematic of inspiration is in no way the primary issue of consideration, even in religious discourse ("Toward" 6). Drawing on Gerhard Van Rad's *The Theology of the Old Testament*, Ricoeur sees that confession of God in narrative religious discourse takes place through narration, relegating inspiration to a secondary degree of importance. Narrative includes prophecy, understood as telling of the future, in its province to the extent that prophecy is narrative in its fashion ("Toward" 7). In this sense, narrative can be prophetic regardless of the sacredness of the source; inspiration by God ceases to be a condition of sacredness according to this view.

Lecha's role develops from being the writer of Yoeme's sacred stories, to one who deciphers the other notebooks written in part in codes (131). Understanding the codes of the notebooks will help Lecha figure out how to use the old almanac, then she will be able to "forsee the months and years to come-everything" (Silko 137). Lecha is not only a catalyst of spiritual knowledge through her work as a keeper and decipherer of the notebooks, she also acts a conduit of spiritual power and knowledge by being a psychic to whom police resort in order to locate missing dead people. She "is a special contact for the souls that still do no not rest because their

remains are lost; somewhere fragments of bone burnt to ash, or long strands of hair, move in the ocean wind as it shifts the sand across the dunes"(Silko 138). Lecha visualizes the memory narratives of missing victims. In these visual, revealing memory narratives, she not only witnesses animation of natural elements, but also endows them with a particular interpretation that reveals to her what happened to the victims. The relationship between natural phenomena and revelatory discourse is established further when Zeta remembers how Yoeme and the old ones used to watch "the night skies relentlessly, translating sudden bursts and trails of light into lengthy messages concerning the future and the past" (Silko 178).

Although content to help and earn fame and money for leading police and investigators to missing people, Lecha was not satisfied with names such as psychic and intermediary which were given to her to describe her gift. Her witnessing the traumatic experiences of the killers' missing victims was a source of constant physical pain for her in the form of chronic headaches. Lecha was deciphering the images about these people by observing that what Western culture saw as inanimate was not necessarily so. In one instance when she led the police to discover the location of the dead boys' bodies near the ocean, she focused her attention on what was happening inside her head. Her gift, or curse, was her ability to see the images that went through the criminal mind pushing the murderer to torture, kill, and mutilate the victims. Moreover, Lecha saw visions of the places where remains of victims were hidden. The places took symbolic shapes of animate nature that Lecha was able to decipher. In one of the cases, she was able to locate the remains of dead,

mutilated boys. The narrator presents a picture of what Lecha sees through the criminal mind:

> The eyes are gone. The sand fills the sockets. Now the boy has eyes the color of sand [. . .] He imagines the boys are trees that he must go tend from time to time. He uncovers them tenderly. To see who they are developing. [. . .] The waves glittered and flashed like fragments of a broken mirror. From the air the beach sand made a narrow white stripe down the back of giant mind, and the ocean waves glittered and flashed-eyes of mirror as the sun dips closer to the mouth of the beast that swallows it.
>
> She had the full answer now. She had suspected the concept of intermediary and messenger was too simple. Lecha knew exactly how grave her condition was. [. . .] Now that she knew how the power worked, Lecha was not sure anymore it could be called a gift. (Silko 141-142)

Lecha's ability to interpret the visions she receives about the victims has been influenced by her work on transcribing the old notebooks. The old notebooks "bless" their keepers with mystical power. The narrator tells us that the "power Lecha had seemed to be an intermediary, the way the snakes were messengers from the spirit beings in the other worlds below. She was just getting accustomed to this fact and her link with the dead when she had been called to San Diego" (Silko 139). And in her interview with Laura Coltelli, Silko says:

> Zeta seems to have translated the old notebook fragment she received, into action. Lecha has to grow into her role as keeper and transcriber of the

notebooks, and so does Zeta. In a way, Lecha and Zeta are already under the

spell of the old almanac even before they settle down to transcribe the

almanac because of Yoeme's influence over them. Like Yoeme, both women

depend on experiences in their personal lives to transcribe and decode the old

notebooks. (qtd. in Coltelli 73-74)

The spell of the old almanac is both physical and mystical. When the four children,

three young girls and a young boy, were asked to save the old manuscripts by

fleeing to the North, they were also told that "the pages held many forces within

them, countless physical and spiritual properties to guide the people and make them

strong"(252). Yoeme tells Lecha and Zeta that it was the almanac which "saved [the

children]"(252) from the dangers of the trip. Eventually, the almanac saved who

helped it survive its journey through time and space.

The central notebooks are a source of revelation and power not only for

Native Americans, but to whoever deals with them. Their performative power

exceeds members of the community who believe in them to those outside of them.

Seese, a drug addict and smuggler like Lecha and Zeta, but also alcoholic and former

prostitute, was employed by Lecha to help her prepare a digital copy of the

notebooks and received a vision about her lost son. Seese had resorted to Lecha to

help her find her son, but because of her emotional instability Lecha refrained from

telling her that her son was dead because she pitied her desolate condition. Lecha

employed Seese, not only to prepare a digital copy of the transcribed notebooks, but

also to work on Lecha's notebooks. Lecha's insisted that "Seese type up each and

every letter or word fragment however illegible or strained"(Silko 174). The narrator

tells us that "she had been working on a strange passage in Lecha's transcription of

the notebooks, which had an almost narcotic effect on her (Silko 592). Seese woke

up from a dream and wrote down her own memory narrative. Seese writes her

passage in the form of a poem, whose theme is a boy-sacrifice and which concludes

with "He only struggled a little"(594). The narrator tells us that

Seese blamed the old notebook for the dream. She had awakened from the

dream in tears, and hours later the effect of the dream had not subsided. Seese had

sat at the keyboard and let the tears stream down her face. Instead of Lecha's

transcription, Seese had typed a description of the dream:

> In the photographs you are smiling
>
> Taller than I have ever seen you
>
> Older than you were when I lost you.
>
> The colors of the lawn and house behind are indistinct
>
> Milked to faded greens and browns.
>
> I know I will never hold you again. (Silko 595)

Although Seese's realization comes through a vision dream, it provides her with

information that only Lecha could have given her. It is Seese's contact with the old

notebooks and her work as a reader and decoder of the memory narratives of the

community and particular individuals, such as Lecha, that helped her fulfill her quest

in the novel, finding her son or knowing what happened to him. The major

contribution to the growing body of the almanac written in a poetic mode by Lecha

and Seese, verges on poetic writing, reinforcing both the creativeness of the memory narratives and their revelatory potential. Lecha and Seese's memory narratives reflect the prophetic discourse because their content tells some aspects of the unseen, but the form of their narratives is also peculiar in its employment of poetic images and metaphors. Such poetic mode of writing only enforces its revelatory qualities.

Ricoeur ascribes a revelatory function to poetic discourse. He approaches poetic discourse as it exercises a referential function that differs from the descriptive referential function of ordinary language and above all scientific language. Poetic discourse suspends the descriptive function ("Toward" 23). Poetic language restores to us that participation-in or belonging-to an order of things which precedes our capacity to oppose ourselves to things taken as objects opposed to a subject. Poetic language facilitates what Ricoeur calls re-describing reality. This conjunction of fiction and re-description, of mythos and mimesis constitutes the referential function relevant to the poetic dimension of language. In this sense, poetic language, conceals a dimension of revelation where revelation is to be understood in a nonreligious, non-theistic, and non-biblical sense of the word (Ricoeur, "Toward" 24). Poetic discourse is revelatory because it incarnates a concept of truth that escapes the definition by adequation as well as the criteria of falsification and verification. Here truth no longer means verification, but manifestation, letting what shows itself be. What shows itself is in each instance a proposed world, "a world I may inhabit and wherein I can project my own most possibilities" according to Ricoeur ("Toward" 25).

Another dimension of discourse that Ricoeur finds constitutive of the idea of revelation is the prescriptive dimension, which orients the history of practical actions and "engenders the dynamic of our institutions"(11). One of the main features of the prescriptive dimension in the old notebooks is their influence on the organization of culture and society through their direct interference in the agricultural system of the Native American community, engendering its socio-cultural relations within and with members outside of it. The almanac prescribes best dates for agricultural activities and helps people foresee future events. Zeta and Lecha believe in this capacity of the almanac. Zeta tells Lecha, "[t]hose old almanacs don't just tell you when to plant or harvest, they tell you about the days yet to come-drought or flood, plague, civil war or invasion"(Silko 137). Out of this organization of socio-cultural relations springs another mode of revelatory discourse in the almanac, namely, the mode of wisdom. Wisdom fulfills one of religion's fundamental functions which is to bind together ethos and cosmos, the sphere of human action and the sphere of the world (Ricoeur "Toward" 12).

Sacredness of these memory narratives is a function of its rhetorical structure and the empowerment it is playing in its community. The poetic mode in which they are written and their ability to forsee the future is an aspect of their creativity. There is another dimension of creativity in *AOD*'s almanac and its marginalia which stems out of their deviation from the standards of good writing. Creativity here is political because it is the outcome of a particular mode of writing, that of women. My digression here to a feminist perspective is necessary because it is this perspective

which foregrounds the political aspects of memory narratives. It is significant because it demonstrates the political implication of the problemtization of the secular.

The conservatory project whose object is to preserve the almanac is managed by women, not only because the carrier is a woman, Yoeme, but also because all those involved in preserving and transcribing the notebooks, Zeta, Lecha, and Seese who was employed by Lecha to enter the notebooks as data into the computer, are women as well. The feminine writings of these notebooks keepers, custodians, and transmitters challenge not only official stories of history written by the Western colonizer, but also the patriarchal norms of good writing. It is women who edit the almanac, rewrite some of its parts, repair it, and record their own experiences, creating new aesthetics of writing that challenges the established rules of esteemed writing.

The notebooks are records of the traumatic experiences of the whole community, but the ancient notebooks are kept and repaired by women, and new edits are done by women as well. The novel is not only proposing that these sacred stories are best preserved by women, but also suggesting that women's records of experiences as a narrative of creative imagination challenge the classical and modernist aesthetic of coherence and engender new possibilities for transformative actions and empowerment. Feminist writers and critics hailed the recuperation of the past as a way of transformation. Gayle Green writes that memory is important to anyone who "cares about change, for forgetting dooms us to repetition; and it is of

particular importance to feminists" (291). Writing memory allows women to "construct alternatives for the future" (Green 301). Jane Flax believes that memory is indispensable in political struggles[36]. Diana Meyers sees that creativity in memory writing yields transformation either extrinsically by effecting a social change, or intrinsically by creating a meaning for one's life. She notes that not "only is the content of memories of particular actions, responses, or exchanges restricted by the limits of human retentive and retrieval capacities, but it is also edited and reedited depending on how the memory is being used to conduct social relationships or to make sense of one's life"(Meyers 87).

Lecha's conservatory project of the almanac integrates her experiences with those in the almanac in a literal fusion of the communal memory and the individual one. The feminine and postmodern aspect that the novel introduces as a feature of the sacred is apparent in its foregrounding of the challenge or threat that feminine writing is posing. The narrator describes the most visible decipherable features of the notebooks as similar to one old woman's madness:

Old Yoeme had given Zeta the smallest bundle of loose notebook pages and scraps of paper with drawings of snakes. Yoeme has warned Zeta not to brag to Lecha, but the notebook of the snakes was the key to understanding all the rest of the old almanac. The drawings of the snake were in beautiful colors of ink, but Zeta had been disappointed after she began deciphering Yoeme's

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[36] "Re-Membering the Selves: Is the Repressed Gendered?"

scrawls in misspelled Spanish. This did not seem to be the 'key' to anything

except one old woman's madness. (Silko 134)

Also, Lecha at one point plays the role of a secretary for Old Yoeme, writing down

the stories that Yoeme tells her and Zeta. Both Lecha and Zeta follow Yoeme as if

they were her disciples (Silko 130).

Remembering the past, characters of Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* integrate

their experiences with those of the community. This integration grows throughout

the novel to bloom into fragmentary memory narratives providing a melting

conjunction for the sacred and the secular, as well as the individual and the

collective. As keepers of the almanac, whether American Indians or not, they

develop prophetic abilities and display creativity in their poetic additions to the

central old notebook. This continuum of memory narratives provides sacredness, not

only because it becomes an organic extension of the discursive expression of the

spiritual heritage of a particular community, but also because of the multiple

discourses that it is comprised of. The rhetorical analysis of these memory narratives

yields prophetic, apocalyptic, prescriptive, and poetic discourses, modes that Paul

Ricoeur has identified as constitutive of revelation. Moreover, memory narratives

become a source of salvation, especially for those involved in weaving and keeping

them. As Seese engages in preserving and disseminating the notebooks, she manages

to write her own memory narrative, locating her murdered, lost son. Memory itself

becomes revelatory of the future and of the invisible. Sacredness in the almanac, its

notebooks, and its editors' additions is not only endemic to their rhetorical structure,

it also originates in their capacity to create a particular sense of the world, communal experience, and time, thus facilitating the performative functions of religion as outlined by Bell's definition. In the following paragraphs, I demonstrate the functions of religion that creative memory narratives display, namely creating a sense of the world and creating a community that shares this meaning.

These memory narratives act as sacred for the participants in compiling and recording them, because they create a new sense of the world. A divine source for these stories, as is the case in traditional religions, is not the significant aspect in their sacredness. In his often cited essay on narratives as sacred texts, Stephen Crites sees that sacred stories are fundamental narrative forms which may include within them different genres. They are sacred not because gods are commonly celebrated with them, but because "men's sense of self and world is created through them" (31). It is significant to note that these mythopoeic stories function differently in traditional cultures from the way conscious art does in what is called higher cultures. They are anonymous and communal with rich powers of imagination expressed in them. None of the individualized conceptions of authorship are appropriate to them (Crites 30). Crites ascribes sacredness to these communal narratives because of the "sense of the self and the world" that they create; in other words, because of the shared meaning that they create.

 A new sense of the world implies a different way of relating to one's experience of time. In these memory narratives, there is a different concept of time that challenges its linearity. The sense of time that the narrator of Silko's text

acknowledges is a time recreated by the almanac and embraced by the characters in the novel. In the memory narrative of Native Americans, time ceases to be linear and takes on a circular quality. Such circulation of entities of time poses a new understanding of the past and implies that memory, as Derrida states in his remembrance of Paul de Man, unfolds itself into a telling of the future. Through writing memory narratives, lived experience is reorganized and time re-imagined through a new frame of time. The most prominent quality of time that the almanac proposes is that time cannot be apprehended in a past-present-future linear continuum.

There are two perspectives in Silko's text that support this view of time, one is the perspective of the characters as they reflect on their community's heritage, and the second perspective is grounded in the almanac itself. Through these two perspectives, time is seen as non-linear and recursive. Such understanding of time appears as the narrator's and as Zeta's, one of the major women characters in the novel and the secondary custodian of the almanac next to Lecha. Zeta utters the words, "old age," nodding her head when she sees her sister Lecha trying hard to find a good vein to inject the early-evening Demerol. After describing "old-time" 's battles with disease, the narrator adds, "The old ones did not believe the passage of years caused old age. They had not believed in the passage of time at all. It wasn't the years that aged a person but the miles and miles that had been traveled in this world" (Silko 19-20). In the snake's notebook, an independent entry includes one sentence stating, "[s]acred time is always in the [p]resent" (Silko 136). In another

part of the Almanac, titled "Fragments from the Ancient Notebook," we read an evaluation of the relationship between memory and time, placing memory in the present:

> Narrative as analogue for the actual experience, which no longer exists; a mosaic of memory and imagination. An experience termed *past* may actually return if the influences have the same balances or proportions as before. Details may vary, but the essence does not change. The day would have the same feeling, the same character, as that day has been described having had *before*. The image of a memory exists in the present moment. (Silko 575)

Other characters, such as Sterling, have internalized the Laguna's unique concept of time with different way of measuring than that in Western culture. In the history of his tribe, seventy years which have passed would still be part of the present because "Sterling knew that seventy years was nothing- a mere heartbeat at Laguna"(Silko 34). Silko notes in the novel how the Western culture appropriated and commodified this unique concept of time. For example, New-age spiritualists utilized this view of time in Native American heritage as a way to publicize their anti-aging recipes. Lecha wondered at new-age medicine makers who claimed to be apprentices of Native American healers and laughed at the attempt of one of them, Weasel Tail, to get people's attention to his portion of the schedule during the international holistic healers convention held in a resort in Tucson. Lecha was not comfortable with the commodification of Native American spiritual heritage as Old Yoeme had warned her and Zeta of "the new age of spiritualism" converts, calling

ninety-five percent of spiritual practitioners frauds (Silko 716). Lecha had to laugh at

Tail's ad which stated:

> Stop time!
>
> Have no fear of aging, illness, or death!
>
> Secrets of ancient Native American healing (717)

In addition, when the select boys and girls were instructed to carry the old almanac,

they were told that the "'book' they carried was the 'book' of all the days of their

people. The days and years were all alive, and all these days would return

again"(Silko 247). Joy Harjo notes this circular quality of time in her review of

Silko's text. Harjo sees that "it is as if days were ancestors of themselves much as

humans are if you consider circular time" (qtd in Coltelli 68).

The other feature that makes memory narratives sacred is their ability to

establish connections not only amongst members within the Native American

community but connections to outsiders and to nature. Lecha's notebook, which the

narrator lays before the reader, juxtaposes traumatic memories of earth with those of

a community and of an individual. We find in her notebook that the environmental

concern collapses with the collective traumatic memory of American Indians, both

followed by incoherent paragraphs of forensic narrative that record the experience of

a missing girl, kidnapped and raped before she was murdered. Lecha's notebook

targets the dilemma of earth, of a traumatized community, and of a traumatized

individual as if they are discursively connected to one another. Under a section titled

"Lecha's Notebook" we read about the dilemma of earth:

After days of searing heat the Earth no longer cools at night.

The wind carries away the heart for a few hours, and by dawn

the air is motionless, and a faint warmth emanates from lumi-

nous pale ridges of limestone and tufa. The lowers skirts of

leaves of jojoba and brittle bushes are parched white and shriv-

from draught.

What can you tell by the color of their eyes?

[. . .] (Silko 174)

Lecha's notes transition from references to a dysfunctional earth which "no longer

cools at night" to dead children "who were eaten by survivors during times of great

famine" (Silko 174), to a forensic discourse which addresses the murder of a little

girl, stating:

Meaning lies in the figures and colors of the killer's tattoos.

Meaning lies in the particular disarray of the victim's underclothes. (Silko

174)

This is a collapse of a community's memory with those of an individual, leading to

the emergence of connections between insiders, outsiders, and natural elements.

In addition to collapsing the collective with the individual memory in Lecha's

notebook, Yoeme introduces the almanac to her granddaughters as a collective

memory of the Native American community at first. But then, she calls for repairing

it and keeping it, telling them that she has been adding her own experience. As the

novel progresses, we see that Lecha and Seese are also incorporating their

experiences within the body of the almanac, borrowing its fragmentary, poetic, and authorless form for their own writing. Although keepers of the notebooks are warned that no editing should be done to the notebooks, we hear that Yoeme was asked to write down a replacement section for the lost one. Yoeme concludes that transcribing her own experience and reflecting on it should be of a similar type of discourse as the inherited notebooks and passed on stories are. Bringing collective memories and individual memory into contact, Yoeme assumes the responsibility of restoring the lost section. Stressing the high level of care that should be given to the process of restoration, she addresses Lecha and Zeta, saying:

> (t)he woman who had been keeping them explained what the lost section had
>
> said [. . .] She requested that, if possible, at some time in my life I should
>
> write down a replacement section. I have thought about it all my life. The
>
> problem has been the meaning of the lost section and for me to find a way of
>
> replacing it. One naturally reflects upon one's own experiences and feelings
>
> throughout one's life. The woman warned that it should not be just any sort
>
> of words. I am telling you this because you must understand how carefully
>
> the old manuscript and its notebooks must be kept. Nothing must be added
>
> that was not there. Only repairs are allowed. (Silko 128- 129)

Thus far, I have matched elements of religion as defined by sociologists to implications of remembering Silko's *Almanac of the Dead.* I demonstrated the rhetorical characteristics which make the novel's memory narratives sacred, and I have argued that the novel recasts the act of remembering as a replacement for

practicing religion, through which interconnectedness can be built, linearity of time can be challenged, and traditions can be relived. In its ability to restructure time and reveal the future, the act of remembering is not depicted as a mechanical recollection of the past, but rather a process of reconstruction, creative as well as conservatory. The creative aspect of memory characterizes also Richard Power's employment of the act of remembering in *The Echo Maker.* The role of creative memory as a functional surrogate for religion is what I will discuss in Powers' *TEM* . When Karin evaluates her brother's perception of her as an imposter, she thinks that helping him to regain his memory, even as he denies her as a sister, will give her a chance to improve in his memory, "a chance to rewrite the record"(375). Mark, in his turn, asks Weber to tell him something of his past even if he had to make it up (310).

TEM begins with a scene that depicts scores of "Grus Canadensis," or sandhill cranes crowding "wing by wing" on the Platte river when the sky ice blue, "flares up, a brief rose, before collapsing to indigo" (3). The cranes crowd on a particular stretch of the river, "one that they've learnt to find by memory" (3), and where they find shelter for a few weeks till spring. Their "calls seem to come from creatures twice their size," carrying miles before fading (4). This is the scene that connects Karin to her past, the "carpet of four-foot birds" which "spread as far as the distant tree line" (6), an image of dancing mass that she has seen every spring for more than thirty years and still "made her jerk the wheel" (6), blending sound and sight as the cranes "gather on the island flats, grazing, beating their wings, trumpeting: the advance wave of a mass evacuation. More birds land by the minute,

the air red with calls" (3). The Native Americans called these cranes the echo

makers, which is also a name they gave to special drums made by Waub-oozoo, a

sacred Native American man, who in one of his trances:

> committed himself to the beauty and meaning of the call of some bird,
>
> animal, or wind; the crackle in the night sky of the Northern Lights [. . .].
>
> There was nothing as beautiful or full of meaning as these things, and he
>
> hungered for his fill of beauty. But more than anything else, Waub-oozoo
>
> wanted to know the meaning of echoes and the sounds that gave the birds
>
> and animals the gift of speech. (Johnston 39)

Waub-oozoo's fascination with the sound endowed the sound and the echo making

with sacredness. Men and women "cradled the drums and tapped on them while they

sang or chanted a psalm" (Johnston 42). Thus, the novel interprets the cranes' echo

making as an act of repetition and of remembering of past sounds, and sets out to

elaborate on the potential of the act of remembering as a sacred ritual in the lives of

postmodern Americans.

Remembering as a Sacred Act in Powers' *The Echo Maker*

       I argue in this section that *The Echo Maker* rejects traditional religion only to

replace it with the sacredness that memory provides through building connections

and defeating linearity of time. The presentation of my argument about the novel will

demonstrate the oscillation of characters between rejecting religion and accepting a

newfound sacred that the novel envisions through memory. Memory enacts the

traces of religion through creating a community and through challenging linearity of time.

All main characters in *TEM* are engaged in the act of remembrance; all discover that recalling memories is a way to heal from their feelings of disconnectedness and from their suspicion of the religious and the spiritual. The plot in *TEM* creates a parallelism between Mark, the patient, and Weber the physician. As a result of a mysterious car accident, Mark suffers a brain damage which develops into a condition called Capgras affecting the emotional memory of the patient, causing him/her to deny the closest kin. As Mark suffers from a denial of his home, his sister, Karin, and his dog, suspecting all are duplicates in a conspiracy aimed at controlling him, Weber suffers from the collapse of his public persona as a published psychologist and author who tried in his books to popularize cognitive psychology. This collapse of public persona triggers in Weber a self-recognition crisis which develops into a denial of his social self, feeling estranged from his own wife for almost thirty years. He resorts to his memory in order to pick and collate the scattered pieces of his self, this time realizing that what he is missing is not the halo of the renowned author and psychologist, but a spiritual bond to the other which he can establish through recalling the past. The social and pathological estrangement puts Weber and Mark, respectively, in a similar position where they are striving to recall who they are, who the closest people to them are, and how to reconstruct their presents when they are denying their past.

While Mark's progress is measured by how far he is able to connect to his past, represented by his relationship to his sister, Karin, Weber's attempt to recollect his past culminates in his relationship to Barbara, a woman who suffered similar symptoms to his because of the breakdown of her professional career. Both Weber and Barbara suffer while attempting to comprehend and transcend the fractures in their public personas, to recollect their sense of who they are, and to usher a new beginning. These layers of troubled consciousness unfold gradually with the progress of the events; meanwhile, the focalization of memory shifts from the humans' world to that of nature, represented by the echo-maker cranes. The novel's near obsession with memory and commemoration appears even in Powers' choice of the bird's name, the echo-maker which stresses repetition and remaking of the sounds through the constant generation of the echo. Throughout the novel, scenes of cranes, their rituals and their flying paths in Nebraska, the American desert, interfere in the characters' evaluation of their cognitive presence and of the potential to find sacredness.

The novel's rejection of traditional religion appears through the conversations between Karin and Bonnie and Karin's memories of her religious parents. Approving the Enlightenment's view of religion, *TEM* distrusts religion as a spiritual venue, presenting a biologically informed base for the origin of religious feelings and belief. Bonnie, Mark's girlfriend, is upset after reading one of Weber's books. She tells Karin she is dismayed at this new information about the origin of the sacred and the

chemical existence of God. When Karin tries to find out the reason behind Bonnie's

distress, she

> finds the culprit on Bonnie's coffee table: Weber's new book, which the girl
>
> has been dutifully plowing through at the rate of half a page a day over the
>
> last several months.
>
> 'This is what's upset you?' Karen asks. 'Something in here?'
>
> One more denying shake of the head, then the girl breaks down. 'There's a
>
> *God* part of the brain?' Religious visions from some kind of epilepsy storm?'
>
> Karin is all over herself, comforting the girl. And the girl takes some
>
> comforting.
>
> 'You can turn God on and off with electric . . .? It's just some built-in
>
> structure? Did you already know this? Does everybody? Everybody smart?'
>
> (Powers 417)

The scientific disenchantment of religion reduces it to a flow of electricity,

proposing that the existence of God can be illustrated, anatomized, and controlled

through manipulating a built-in structure. Such disenchantment reflects the

Enlightenment's attitude toward the religious, and to an extent modernity's dismissal

of the sacred as just another chemical product in a laboratory. The novel's

condemnation of traditional religion appears also in Karin's account of her parent's

religious background which the novel satirizes.

 Karin ascribes her failure and her brother's in life to an upbringing by

religious parents. She "raised her brother, while her mother was busy laying up

treasures in heaven" (21). Karin in her striving to remind Mark of who she is to him "recites these amazing things, things that Mark himself has forgotten. Things from late childhood [. . .]. Things from the bad years, when you couldn't say boo to her falling to her knees and belching minor spirits" (370). Although Karin's experience with her parents alienated her from comprehending the religious, and consequently from finding ways to express it, it did not prevent her from pondering the significance of the sacred in her life. The novel ascribes Karin's inability to console Bonnie for the loss of religion to the difficulty she finds in articulating her sense of the realness of the sacred. She wants to find an answer for Bonnie, the narrator tells us; she "wants to say: What we sum to is still real. The phantom wants our shaping. Even a God module would have been selected for its survival value. Water is up to something. She says none of this; she has no words"(Powers 418). Alluding to the presence of purpose in water as a symbol of life and the purpose of what "we sum to" indicates that there are enough reasons for her to seek the sacred as a venue through which humans can find meaning in their lives. Bonnie is open to any new ideas that would save her disappointment in religion as she knows it because she was "shaken enough to entertain any wider belief system Karin might suggest. For a long time, they look at each other, caught in some shameful secret. Then, on nothing but grim smiles, they make a pact, joined in the trick of belief, novitiates in a new faith, until damage changes them" (Powers 417-418). Paradoxically, the novel embraces the scientific explanation of religion, not to reject it but to replace it, to suggest other forms of the sacred, and to find new ways for it to operate. In her extended

conversation with Karin about religion, Bonnie finds a similarity between Mark's

loss of emotional memory and our relationship to the sacred. Putting her confidence

in Weber's statements about religion, she tells Karin:

> '. . . He's the smartest man I've ever met. Religion is just a temporal lobe. . .?
>
> He's saying belief is just an evolved chemical thing you could gain or lose . .
>
> . ? Like what Mark decided about you. How it's not him anymore, how he
>
> can't even see that he . . . Oh, shit. Shit. I 'm too stupid to get this!' (Powers
>
> 418)

Creating this analogy between the loss of religion and the loss of memory,

the focus of the novel shifts from pointing out the negative aspects of religion and

the neurological interpretation of religious feelings and beliefs to an acceptance of

supernatural elements in the secular realm. If loss of religion is paralleled with a loss

of memory, then reclaiming memory will revive the religious. The acceptance of the

supernatural starts with depicting memory as a channel for "spirit" and develops in

conversations among characters to a new understanding of what sacred is. In the

narrator's elaboration on Weber's extended inner monologues on his research in

cognitive science and the neurological basis for our sense of ourselves, references to

the correlation between memory and spirit are explicit:

> The self was a painting, traced on that liquid surface. Some thought
>
> sent an action potential down an axon. A little glutamate jumped the gap,
>
> found a receptor on the target dendrite, and triggered an action potential in
>
> the second cell. But then came the real fire: the action potential in the

receiver cell kicked out a magnesium block from another kind of receptor,

calcium flowed in, and all chemical hell broke loose. Genes activated,

producing new proteins, which flowed back to the synapse and remodeled it.

And that made a new memory, the canyon down which thought flowed. Spirit

from matter. (Powers 382)

The last sentence interprets memory as a channel for thought and equates it with

spirit. This shift between a neurological, chemical explanation of the processes of

thought and the portrayal of memory as the channel of thought and spirit reflects the

novels' search for an explanation for the spiritual aspect in the lives of its characters,

an aspect that sometimes defies scientific explanation. After making a case for a

possible cognitive source for the spiritual, the novel launches two symbols of

spirituality, a mysterious note and a guardian angel. While the guardian angel

acquires secular meaning as the events progress, the source of the note remains a

mystery. Characters gradually embrace these two symbols and start to read their lives

through them.

The significance of these two symbols stems not only from their role in the

novel's plot, but also from their ability to evoke spiritual notions such as angels,

salvation, and God. The novel employs this evocative function of these two symbols

as a transitional stage between the complete rejection of religion and the acceptance

of spiritual phenomena that cannot be explained through science. These two symbols

intersect in Mark's character; therefore, healing Mark and his memory confronts the

characters with the surprising persistence of the spiritual embodied in the two

symbols. Mark announces to Weber that he has started to believe in guardian angels because of the mysterious note that was found next to his bed. He also thinks that there is some mysterious bond between him and Weber; he tells Weber:

> 'You know, Shrink? I've been thinking. I think you and I might be related somehow. Aw, don't give me that neurological look. [. . .] You believe in guardian angels?'[. . .]
>
> It distressed Weber to remember: he had been the most devout of children. [. . .]Even science had not wholly killed off his belief; his Jesuit teachers had kept faith and facts ingeniously harmonized. Then, in college, religion had died, overnight, unmarked and unmourned, simply in his meeting Sylvie, whose boundless faith in human sufficiency led him to put away childish things. [. . .]Nothing remained of that boy but the adult's trust in the scalpel of science.
>
> 'No,' he answered. No angels but what selection left standing.
>
> 'No,' Mark echoed. 'I didn't figure. Me either, until I got this note.' (308-309)

Mark stresses this idea of the presence of a caring power in his response to Weber's story of meeting his future wife by accident. He tells Weber, " 'You're saying fate? Two inches to the left, and your life is somebody else's. She's just standing there, making a living, and bang: your life companion. I'd say somebody was looking out for you.' Weber started the engine. Mark stayed his arm. 'Only-we don't believe in that angel shit, do we? Guys like us?' '' (310-311).

The reluctance of Mark and Weber to accept the presence of the supernatural dimension in their lives is thwarted by the mysterious note, whose lines serve as epigraphs for some of the chapters. The content of the note confirms the presence of a purpose for living that seemingly justifies saving Mark, stating:

> I am No One
>
> But Tonight on North Line Road
>
> God led me to you
>
> so You could live
>
> and bring back someone else. (Powers 10)

This note forces him to reevaluate his relationship to supernatural elements with religious connotations. When Karin arrives to the hospital to see Mark for the first time after the accident, "she saw the note. It lay on the bed stand, waiting. No one could tell her when it had appeared. Some messenger had slipped into the room unseen" (10). Karin "saved the note and read it daily" (26) as if it is her prayer. The note had "[a] kind of magic charm [. . .]. Surely that note writer- the saint who had discovered the wreck and come to the hospital on the night of the accident- would return to make real contact [. . .] But no one came by to identify himself or explain anything" (26). Mark assumes that he could trace the source of the note by tracing the handwriting, but he fails to do so, because "nobody writes like the note. That handwriting died out a hundred years ago, in the Old Country. Everyone he shows it to gets all quiet, like they know that those twisting letters could only have come from

beyond the grave" (254). The handwriting itself is "spidery, ethereal" as if the note was "immigrant scrawl from a century ago" (10).

In form and content, the novel elevates the note to the level of a symbol for the sacred, the mysterious sacred that the Enlightenment attempted to control, to rationalize, or to eliminate. The note's content and language suggest the presence of a purpose, achieved through an unknown entity, a "No One," who is following God's orders to save Mark. The two saviors in the note, the speaking persona and the addressee, are connected by God. The note, as if a sacred text, reminds the characters of a superior power, of a purposeful salvation, and of connection between people. The note challenges Mark as well as the reader into answering the insisting question about the existence of the sacred. When Mark complains to Karin about his uncertainty about who he is, he

> closes his eyes and growls like a cornered wolf. 'Hate this feeling that I've made   everything up. That I'm some totally invented asshole. But there's one thing I know I did not invent.' He contorts, reaches to his bedside drawer, and pulls out   the note. It refuses to decay; the lamination has turned it permanent. He throws it down on the sill. 'I wish to God I did invent it. I wish there were no guardian. But there it is. And what in God's name are we supposed to do about it?' (Power 420).

Eventually, the progress of events and characters gives a different interpretation of the note, according to which, Mark finds out he is the "woman's guardian" (450) in a reference to Barbara, whose life he actually saved by swerving his car and suffering

an accident. He is still bemused at this conclusion and addresses a question to Weber

to help him understand " '[w]hat is [he] supposed to do with that?' Weber stands

still, frozen in the glare. His question, too. She will be with him, unshakable,

wherever he heads. Accidental turned resident" (Power 450).   Although Weber

cannot answer Mark why he was chosen for this task, he thinks that he was the one

meant to be brought back by Barbara.

      If traditional religion involves creating emotional bonds between members of

a community, Weber's bases this connection to the other in the act of remembering.

If Mark's loss of emotional memory is a clinical condition, Weber's condition is not.

As Mark heals, he regains not only his memory, but also his belief in the presence of

the supernatural element in his life. As Weber heals from his sense of fragmentation,

he realizes that having connections with others can be done only if they become part

of one's memory. But for Weber through this connection, salvation takes place.

Barbara saves Weber; he heals by connecting to her, and he discovers that this

connection between them is realized through memory. In other words, the novel

employs the idea of salvation, not to confirm a religious idea, but to evoke a needed

connection between people, a connection that does not have to be scientifically

rationalized; it can be celebrated as a permanent "accident" as Weber decides to do.

This change in Weber and Mark's attitude towards the supernatural reflects their

acceptance of aspects in their lives that may not be explained through science. When

he thinks of Barbara, Weber feels that she is going to inhabit his memory, and that

honoring her ultimately means recalling her because "[n]othing anyone can do for

anyone, except to recall: We are every second being born"(450). In fact, Weber tells

his agent that in his next book project, he wants to "write about remembering" (100).

Recalling the past conquers the hegemony of time over the human experience,

meanwhile also deconstructing the wholeness of the self as the Enlighteners have

defined it. While Weber was reading this last page based on the request of Mark and

experiencing this journey through Jim's memory, the narrator of Cather's *My

Antonia*, he also pondered the significance of recalling the past in building

connections with the other and in hatching out of the construction of the self. Just as

parables in religious texts teach tales of the past to create better moral results and

better future, humans' reconstruction of their pasts will enable them to compensate

for a lost happiness that they find in togetherness. Thus, traveling in time leaves no

"whole to protect" (451) for Weber.

     During the scenes of recalling the past, characters, Weber, Mark, and Karin

recuperate a new sense of the self and of shared past and meaning with others. As

characters reflect on these scenes, they develop a new sense of themselves in

connection to others. Based on Bell's definition of religion, this recuperation of

bonds and celebration of shared meaning validates memory to perform social

functions previously ascribed to religion. In other words, through this recuperation,

the novel draws attention to memory's capacity as a vehicle of the sacred. In the

following paragraphs, I will demonstrate how this recuperation of connection and

shared past encompasses not only humans but nature as well.

Throughout the novel, Karin relates episodes from their past together in hope that Mark will heal. She herself keeps recalling her past with her family and her previous boyfriends throughout the novel. In one of the scenes between Mark and Karin,

> [t]hey stood alone together in the abandoned Brome house, reconstructing the past they no longer shared. There came a moment, amid the trashed rooms and shaky memories, when it struck Karin that they'd have that day, at least, that one sunlit afternoon of confusion in common, if nothing else. And when her brother started to cry and she moved to console him, he let her. A thing they'd never had, before.
>
> They went outside into the warm December.[. . .]
>
> Mark tagged alongside, head down. She felt him struggling and was afraid to say a word, afraid to be anyone, least of all Karin Schulter. Oddest of all, she was okay with holding back. She'd gotten used to the doubling, to being *this woman*. It let her start from scratch with him, even while the other Karin improved so drastically in his memory. A chance to rewrite the record: in fact, two chances at once. (374-375)

The previous scene between Mark and Karin emphasizes sharing the past and the comfort that ensues from shedding off the skin of the self. An equivalent recalling of the past and suspecting the credibility of the self takes place with Weber whom Mark wishes to know through knowing his past:

[. . .] At last Mark said, "So tell me something about yourself. When you were a kid or something. Doesn't have to be the so-help-me-God or anything. Just a throwaway. Make it up if you want. How else am I supposed to know you are?"

Weber could think of nothing. He'd worked his entire life to efface his past, no biography except what would fit on the flaps of a book. He looked at Mark, trying   to think of some story. (310)

If remembering enables characters to get rid of the suffocating barriers of the self, if it is such a deconstructive, liberating act, it is also a reconstructive deed through which forgotten connections are evoked. But through its emphasis on remembering, the novel throws stones at not only walls between humans and their memory narratives, but also disrupts hierarchies between humans as a separate species and the rest of nature, defying again the humanist claims of humans' superiority over other creatures.

The novel creates a parallelism between the cognitive processes of remembering and the collective movement of the cranes. Images within memory seem to operate as if they are birds weaving in their movement paths of cognitive processes within the brain . On his way back to New York, Weber answers another passenger's question about his identity as the brain guy, and Weber answers, "Not me [. . .]. I'm in reclamation" (Powers 449) and in "his own teeming head, the last day's images come home to roost. In his seat behind the wing, Weber plays the last scene repeatedly- reframing, rethreading, returning" (Powers 449). Last day's images

not only haunt Weber, but they emulate birds' paths. The words "reframing, rethreading, and returning" describe the paths of birds flocks while flying. These movements are part of birds' rituals because they have been descended one generation to another, rituals that are reinforced through relentless repetition. By locating himself in this cycle of rituals in order to experience "reclamation," Weber has turned his physical presence behind the wing in the sky into a mental state of belonging through remembering. He scans Mark's scribbles next to passages in Cather's novel, hoping the scanning "might lead forward out of permanent confusion'(451). He finds out that what Mark's "scans suggest he has seen up close, in the field: older kin still perching on his brain stem, circling back always down along the bending water. He blunders toward the fact, the only one large enough to bring him home, falling back toward the incommunicable, the unrecognized, the past he has irreparably damaged, just by being" (Powers 451). Weber interprets Mark's scans, in which he finds one way of salvation "out of permanent confusion" (451) as "older kin still perching on his brain stem" (451). It is by reclaiming his past with humans as well as with birds, that he can reach understanding and knowledge. The past is "precious," and "incommunicable" because words fall short of expressing it, resisting the entrance into Lacan's verbal symbolic order and control, and acquiring that awe which characterizes the sacred. If Weber connects through memory to other humans and to birds, birds connect to their past through their rites, practicing their religion.

Just as shared meaning within a religious community manifests itself through rites that recur through generations (Bell 429), so are birds' rites "a kind of religion" for both Karin and Barbara who utter the same sentence in the company of Weber on different occasions (Powers 425, 428). Describing the traveling routes of the cranes, the narrator details the habits of the cranes which they have inherited from previous generations. The narrator finds sacredness in the repetitive rituals of birds, and in tracing this reiteration of symbolic communication through time, saying:

> The fledged crane colt follows his parents back to a home he must learn to come from. He must see the loop once, to memorize its makers. This route is a tradition, a ritual that changes only slightly, passed down through generations. Even small ripples-left down that valley, on past that outcrop-are preserved. Something in their eyes must match symbols. But how it's done, no person knows and no bird can say. . . .When the world sets again from the rush of blood, the young bird locates his mother. . . Nothing can tell them; no way they can know. *There is only circling and calling, waiting, a kind of religion, for the dead one to show*. When he doesn't, there is only yesterday, last year, the sixty million years before that, the route itself, the blind, self-organizing return. (Powers 277-278) [my italics]

The narrator uses "religion" to refer to the cranes' rituals and their memory of the preserved paths of their ancestors. The routes are a tradition that has been kept as if it was a spiritual heritage handed down from generation to generation. The rituals and circling, calling, and waiting are aspects of this religion which is fulfilled by

reclaiming the past as a salvation venue out of the entrapment of death and the self.

Memorial past is self-organizing; its power to rearrange return routes is a source of

knowledge for the cranes, without which they do not know where to locate

themselves.

The selves are a burden on their own to be carried. As in the case with

humans, the memory of the routes helps birds out of the cage of this self. For "[i]n

the evenings, they glide to the surface and roost in shallow, open waters remembered

from previous years. They sail in over harvested fields, feathered dinosaurs bugling,

a last great reminder of life before the self"(Powers 277). Remembering the

commonality they had with biological ancestors, the cranes experience identity

border crossing. Karin extends this commonality with other species to humans when

she realizes that humans also have lost their emotional memory by denying the bonds

with the cranes. She thinks to herself that the whole human race "suffered from

Capgras. Those birds danced like our next of kin, looked like our next of kin, called

and willed and parented and taught and navigated all just like our blood relations.

Half their parts were still ours. Yet humans waved them off: *impostors*" (347-348).

Barbara even bestows on birds attributes about which science has not reached a final

conclusion. She mocks scientists who say that birds can't love and who say that birds

don't even have a self! "That they are nothing like us. No relation" (Powers 424).

When Karin takes Weber to see the birds, she tells him about her memories

with Mark and their father watching the cranes. She foregrounds the sacredness of

the cranes' rituals and wishes to join them. Classifying the cranes' actions into

theatrical performances during the evening and religious practices during the morning, Karin expresses her wish to be part of that sacredness, longing to that connectedness. The narrator describes her speech as in isolation of every surrounding, endowing the moments of remembrance with awe that could be found in temples. She speaks as if she is reminiscing and living a moment of worship:

> She speaks out loud, as if already there were only memory. "I remember the first time my father took us out there. We were little. Me, Mark, and my father, sitting in this field. *This* one. Early morning, before the sun was up. You have to see these creatures in the morning, before the sun was up. The evening show is pure theatre. But the morning is religion. [. . .] And my father, still the wisest man alive.[. . .] He loved how they followed landmarks to find this exact spot, year after year. How they recognized individual fields. 'Damn straight, cranes remember. Hang on to things like a bat hangs to a barn rafter.' And the first time I saw those birds circle up into the air and disappear, I kept looking at the sky, thinking, *Hey me too. Take me with.* Awful feeling. Empty. Like*: Where'd I go bad*?" (Powers 425)

We hear Karin's own sentence from the narrator when Weber invites Barbara to watch the birds with him. The narrator repeats Karin's sentence, "[t]he evening show is pure theater, but the morning is religion"(428). The impact of this scene, which amazes Karin, does not ensue only from the aesthetic value, which she expresses as "pure theatre," focusing on its visual dimension. She ascribes the aesthetic impact of the scene to its being "religion." Her interpretation of her father's fascination with

the cranes is that he admired the cranes' capability to *remember* routes of the past. Referring to her father's wisdom and aesthetic sense, she associates his fascination with cranes to their capability to remember.

Astonishingly, in spite of its condescending attitude towards religion, the novel falls back on the idea of submission to a higher power to express this newfound sacred that is facilitated by memory. In the novel's part titled, "God led me to you" (180), the narrator interrupts the narrative plot to present information about the mythical connotations of the cranes in different cultures. "Something in the cranes," according to the narrator is "trapped halfway, in the middle between now and when" (182); something in the cranes has kept the fascination of timelessness which can be achieved through recalling the past. With a Vietnamese poem, we discover along with the narrator that cranes actually do "remember" music and songs of the past, reliving an image of worship. The pagoda, the altar, the heart which is chilly as if it is in a state of awe facing the "immensity of sky and sea," or the limitlessness universe, are all images of worship that make the background of cranes as they "remember" the music and songs of years ago. The image of worship is entangled with the act of remembering. Both humans and cranes are implicated in this image of worship and remembering. Not only do cranes "help carry a soul to paradise," but they are themselves "souls that once were humans . . . Or humans are souls that once were cranes and will be again, when the flock is rejoined" (182). The narrator quotes the "Vietnamese poet who in his words sets the birds forever halfway

through the air," depicting an image that commemorates quasi-religious rites

amongst which the heart is in a state of awe:

> Cypress trees are green beside the altar,
>
> The heart, a chilly pond under moonlight.
>
> Night rain drops tears of flowers.
>
> Below the pagoda, grass traces a path.
>
> Among the pine trees, cranes remember
>
> The music and songs of years ago.
>
> In the immensity of sky and sea,
>
> ………………………………. (182-183)

Humans have sinned, the narrator implies, because they forgot their past, unlike the

"turtledove, swallow, and crane" which/who "keep the time of their coming, says

Jeremiah,"(183) remembering sounds of the past. We "live in unclear echoes,"

lacking knowledge of the original sounds and of each other because only we,

"people" "fail to *recall* the order of the Lord"(183 my italics). I explain this retreat to

the idea of submission to a higher power by contextualizing it within the argument of

the novel, which rejects organized religion, but not the sacred. Submission to the

order of the Lord means in this context remembering the sacred connections that

bond the Lord's creation. This is the retreat which Powers expressed in an interview

following the announcement of the *Echo Maker*'s win of the National Book Award

in 2006. Powers was asked about the role religion plays in today's America. Powers

answered, saying, "[t]he odd thing is, the world's great religions all preach empathy

and connection and all of them acknowledge self's dependence on others. But in a climate of fear and fundamentalism, people can sometimes invoke religion as a way of separating themselves from others. My story tries to find a way back to the expansive and ecological that the religious impulse inside our brains can produce" (Interview Online).

In addition to building connections, the other aspects of religion that memory enacts appear in the novel's treatment of the relationship between time and memory. Memory has the capability to restructure time and forecast the future, creating a sense of the world. In the last conversation between Mark and Weber the novel foregrounds the power of memory as a site where connections can be built, meaning can be shared, and time can be transcended. Mark hands out a copy of his Willa Cather's *My Antonia* to Weber. Reading through the memories of Cather's main character, Jim, a web of connections emerges between times, spaces, and people. In remembering, humans become empowered to overcome the progression of time. In this sense, remembering is a way to experience what Loren Eiseley has called sacred time. Eiseley's influence features in *TEM* in the form of chapters' epigraphs derived from his *The Immense Journey*. In this book, Eiseley maintains that sacred time is "in reality, timeless; past and future are contained within it"(113). Likewise, Mircea Eliade differentiates between time as duration, which he calls profane and which has to be abolished in order to reintegrate the mythical moment in which the world had come into existence (68), and sacred time which is "indefinitely recoverable . . . . From one point of view it could be said that it does not 'pass,' that it does not

constitute an irreversible duration" (78). Hence, according to Eliade, "sacred time appears under the paradoxical aspect of a circular time, reversible and recoverable, a sort of eternal mythical present" (70) Eiseley's and Eliade's views stress the meaning of sacred time as a lived experience, and they both see that challenging the concept of duration as a clear ordering of past, present, and future is part of the sacred experience. I draw attention to the definition of sacred time by a sociologist and an anthropologist to stress its applicability to my argument about the concept of time that the act of remembrance generates as seen by Derrida and de Man and connect it to the novel's treatment of memory as a vehicle for sacredness.

Through recalling the past, *TEM* brings to the fore the artificiality of time as duration. The act of remembrance in *TEM* opens to the past as well as to the future. It not only enables characters to relive past experiences, but also to glimpse at future. When Weber flips through Mark's copy of *My Antonia*, Willa Cather's narrative of Jim Burden's memory, he wishes that he could find an answer for what is coming. Weber looks at Jim's record of memory as if it can provide a chance for him to foretell the future, or "as if this buried record might still predict what's coming" (Powers 450). This form of creative memory not only tells the past, but also predicts the future. The act of remembering then has violated the linearity of time because it manages at a specific present moment to reconstruct the past and to forecast what is coming. Weber "retains nothing" when he reads; it is as if words pass through him as a terminal, moving from one realm to another with him standing as a signpost that only directs the flow of information. Reading the last page in Cather's novel, words

create a space through which Weber travels back in time to experience Jim's own

memory of that particular space as "[w]iffs of prairie, a thousand varieties of

tallgrass come off the pages. He reads and rereads retaining nothing" (451). He

discovers along with Mark who had highlighted the last passage in *My Antonia* that

reading through Jim's memory was a journey through time, condensing in a moment

the past, the present, and the future, a collapse of time's superficial entities. If we

posses the past, we also posses the future; or, if we know the past, we also know the

future. The predetermination and the prediction of future, functions associated with

sacred texts which prophesize, are not provided by a sacred text, but by recalling the

past. This replacement of the function of a sacred text is significant in a novel that

aspires to find equivalents to the religious that it rejects but seeks to compensate for.

The narrator of Cather's novel collapses in the narrator of Powers' novel in its last

pages:

> This had been the road of Destiny; had taken us to those early accidents of
>
> fortune which predetermined for us all that we can ever be. Now I understood
>
> that the same road was to bring us together again. Whatever we had missed,
>
> we possessed together the precious, the incommunicable past.
>
> Weber "looks up" from the page and "fractures. No whole left to protect"
>
> (451)

This road brought Jim and Antonia together, but it is also a road that the

mysterious note referred to because it brought people together, Mark, Karin, Barbara,

and Weber, each one of them thinking the other is her/his guardian angel. Jim's

memory then encapsulates the relationship between Mark and Karin on one hand, and Weber and Barbara on the other. It is Karin who helps Mark to regain his past and to recognize her as his sister, albeit not the same sister, and it is Barbara who enables Weber to regain a sense of his past and a renewed sense of his self. And it is Mark who confesses at the end that he was the one meant to be the angel saving Barbara so she could save Weber. Moreover, the encounter between Powers' characters and Cather's means that Powers himself is using Cather's novel as the memory of *TEM*. His novel is an echo maker of someone else's sound. In other words, the "Echo Maker" is the extended metaphor of Powers' novel which operates at various levels, foregrounding the act of repetition as an act of reconstruction and recreation. The novel is a manifestation of interconnectedness between works of fiction remembering each other from different time periods, connecting their themes and the characters, another aspect to building connections through time at a meta-fictional level. Through challenging time and building connections, the novel finds, through memory, a way to enact the religious impulse.

Memory in Silko and Powers' novels represents what Wuthnow terms spirituality of seeking, which pays no attention to the contrast between "sacred and profane, or to the use of spatial metaphors, but concentrates on that mixture of spiritual and rational, ethical and soteriological, individual and collective activities whereby the person in modern societies seeks meaning in life and tries to be of service to others" (5). With a spirituality of seeking, the search for the sacred is a journey through time, place, and different experiences, triggering what characterizes

Americans' quest for spirituality in the late 1980s and 1990s, a quest that requires knowledge of inner self (Wuthnow 142, 167). Lecha's quest of locating missing victims, Seese's quest of finding her son, Yoeme's quest of restoring lost sections of the almanac, Mark, Weber, and Karin's pursuit of themselves and new connections symbolize this act of seeking. Their discursive memory experiences collapse with experiences of characters from another time and space and with other creatures.

I have argued that these two texts locate the sacred in memory because of its capacity to reclaim lost connections, knowledge of the unseen and the unknown, and its celebration of a new concept of time. The act of remembering confirms that connections binding past with present and future, the living and the dead, are of spiritual nature. Writing memories in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Richard Powers' *Echo Maker* induces creativity and engenders revelation. For the postmodern mind, the act of remembering recreates time, transcends it, and resurrects the dead sacred. In the next chapter, I will argue that postmodern science fiction locates the sacred in information systems.

CHAPTER IV

PRAYERS IN CYBERSPACE: PATTERN/RANDOMNESS OF SPIRITUAL

TRANSCENDENCE IN GIBSON'S *NEUROMANCER*

Cyberpunk's Prayer

Our Sysop,

   Who art On-Line,

High be thy clearance level.

Thy System up,

Thy Program executed

Off-line as it is on-line.

Give us this logon our database,

And allow our rants,

   As we allow those who flame against us.

And do not access us to garbage,

   But deliver us from outage.

For thine is the System and the Software

and the Password forever. (Scarborough qtd. in O'Leary 792)

This cyberpunk prayer glorifies Sysop, hacker slang for administrator of a
computer bulletin board, which can refer to a multi-user computer system or an

online service virtual community[37]. The prayer foregrounds the importance of

information database needed to access the system. But it is more interesting in its

persona's insistence that the program be working regardless of its connection to the

switch. The persona's devotion to the sysop cult seems to dominate the data space as

well as ordinary world. This poem depicts indulgence in hacking of systems and

signals the discursive convergence between religious rituals and cyber-culture.

Having argued in the previous chapter that postmodern fiction locates the

sacred in creative memory, in this chapter, I examine cyberpunk fiction, represented

by its pioneering novel, William Gibson's *Neuromancer*, to explore its spiritual

themes. Like Doctorow, Silko, and Powers' novels, Gibson's stages a discourse

about different forms of spirituality and organized religion. *Neuromancer* advances a

plot geared towards a representation, or an understanding of what the sacred is and

what its qualities are. I analyze *Neuromancer*'s engagement with the spiritual

outside the realm of organized religion. I do this by focusing on particular emotional

effects in religious practices that can be found in the novel's depiction of cyberspace

as a sacred site. This chapter addresses manifestations and implications of religious

practices that can be detected in information technologies as represented in Gibson's

Neuromancer, thus covering a neglected link between network culture and

spirituality that goes beyond general observations on the connection between religion

and science. In addition, I hope to demonstrate through the engagement with post-

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[37] Merriam Webster online dictionary.

humanist and post-modern discourse that the culture of informatics destabilizes the binary of matter/ non-matter. The larger goal of such an investigation is to explore the contact between the secular and the sacred on an emotional and cognitive level, proving that the secular and the sacred cannot be purely separated from each other. The central argument is that *Neuromancer* implements the matrix as a site for transcendence, connection, and sublimity. I use Katherine Hayles' theorization of the dialectics of pattern/randomness to explain how these tropes of spirituality are realized in the novel. Case, through the pattern/randomness structure of informatics and networks, is capable of jacking into cyberspace, of connecting to Molly's body, and of having transformational experiences with spiritual implications.

Gibson's *Neuromancer* takes place in Chiba City in Japan where a subculture of computer hacking and digital theft prevails. Case is a digital street hustler who gets in trouble for stealing from his employer. As a punishment, his nervous system is damaged by injecting him with a toxin that paralyzes his abilities to hack into cyberspace-the space that came to existence as a result of the interaction between humans and information technologies and networks. Molly, a cyborg and street samurai, with cybernetic modifications to her body including retractable blades under her fingernails, comes to rescue him and to restore his hacking abilities provided he offers his services to her employer, Armitage. Molly and Case's mission is to steal a ROM module which is stored in the corporate headquarters of a media conglomerate called Sense/Net. On their cyber trails, they meet lot of obstacles. An artificial intelligence, an AI called Wintermute owned by a plutocratic family, helps

them in their task. In return, Wintermute recruits the team to help it unite with

Neuromancer, another AI, with which it was programmed to merge. Case and Molly

help the AIs to merge and flee the control of the Turing Law, the corporate digital

law, under which all information production and management must operate. A brief

review of the history of relationship between science and religion helps in

understanding some of the common denominators between the two in spite of their

seemingly contradictory and separate realms of investigation.

In their summary of a cultural history of twentieth century transformations of

popular culture, Aupers, Houtman, and Pels maintain that the association between

science and religion originates in August Comte's nineteenth century religion of

science and twentieth-century creationism (693). Drawing on Timothy Leary, they

state that cybergnosis confuses the dichotomy between religion and science, allowing

religious and techno-scientific contents (such as hacking, evolution, satori, and

shamanism) to cohabit in the same discursive realm. Their article investigates the

historical roots of modern gnosis as a site where the interaction between science and

gnosis disturbs classical theories of secularization. They argue that Romantic

humanism, combined with the secular project of finding the true core in every

religion, attempted to assert the power of mind over matter (693). Therefore,

scientific discoveries, such as electricity, magnetism, and the technologies of

telegraph, telephone, and photography were hailed for providing a scientific and

secular base for the mystical visions of late nineteenth century Gnostics (Aupres,

Houtman, and Pels 693).

Aupres, Houtman, and Pels argue further that communication technologies

of the twentieth century could help to "transform the possibilities of salvation: the

camera allowed the cinema audience to have virtual experiences of love, adventure,

or violence without risking their bodies [. . .] The screens of film and television can

compress the time and space that separate everyday from imaginary lives and

promise an immediate experience of transportation into another world"(694). With

cybernetics, virtuality "divides the secular against itself, not least by opposing

physical space to cyberspace"(Wertheim 40-41) and complicates the classical

Weberian distinction between "this-worldly" and "other-worldly" (Aupers,

Houtman, and Pels 695) where "this-worldly" is secular and real while "other-

worldly" is the imaginary[38]. Scholarship on science fiction and the abundance of

religious motifs has been growing with the increasing production of science fiction

films. Scholarship on cyberspace, in particular, as a venue of spirituality has focused

on the use of virtual realities to create religious communities, the possibility of

enacting mythic rituals in cyberspace, and/or promote particular and alternative

spiritualities[39].

Lance Olsen discusses spirituality in Gibson's trilogy in general and touches

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[38] See also Erik Davis' "Techognosis, Magic, Memory, and the Angels of Information."

[39] See for example O'Leary 's "Cyberspace as Sacred Space" which provides a historical account of the relationship between religious movements and information and communication industries such as printing and his discussion of rituals in cyberspace. Also of importance in this regard is Anastasia Karaflogka's *E-Religion*.

on one instance of transcendence between two worlds. To illustrate this point, Olsen cites few examples from *Neuromancer* that may represent Gibson's negative attitude towards religion. First, Olsen cites the description of two Christian Scientists as "predatory-looking" and "tall, exotic animals" (Gibson 102). In addition, Molly finds that religious relics such as the left hand of John the Baptist (Gibson 123), which she and Case see housed at Topkapi in Istanbul, are not more worthy than technological junk one can find at Finn's electronic shop. Such instances reflect Gibson's "fashionable condescension toward religion" (Olsen 281). However, because Gibson's computer hackers seem to "transcend one existence and penetrate another, traveling [. . .] from a materialistic geography registering realistic chronology, logic, and stability, to an ethereal one registering spiritual timelessness, alogic, and possibility" (283), Olsen surmises that Gibson's "portrayal of the spiritual must be complex and contradictory" (281). I would argue that this seemingly contradictory discourse on spirituality in *Neuromancer* in particular is originated not in the novel itself, but in the theoretical or critical discourse that does not distinguish between religion and spirituality. Because Olsen's analysis is too general to cover articulations of the sacred in the novel, his analysis neglects the novel's references to Zion and the Zionites. In the following paragraph, I analyze the novel's discourse on Zion and Rastafarianism to argue that the novel rejects organized religion and develops an argument about the sacred under the "religion without religion" rubric, similar to what novels I discussed in the previous chapters have achieved. So, in addition to the debated connection between science, religion, and cyberspace, the

novel's employment of non-Western religious movements and beliefs, such as the

Rastafari, makes the discussion of this novel in a project interested in postmodern

views of spirituality necessary. The metaphorical value of Zion, the Zionites'

various instances of helping Case, the characters' discourse about the Zionites, and

their association with the Rastafari justify my investigation of *Neuromancer*'s

engagement with spirituality. *Neuromancer*'s search for the sacred can be

characterized, in one dimension at least, by its references to the potentials of

alternative spiritualities, although the novel does not embrace any particular form of

spirituality.

The Zionites[40] appear in the novel to be Case's helpers in his quest for the

password and his work for Armitage. The plot's engagement with Zion and the

Rastas starts with Molly and Case taking the space taxi to the colony of the Zionites,

or the Zion cluster whose residents are referred to as the Rastas (135-136). The

Rastafari movement sees itself as a Revivalist Christian movement. It was formed in

Jamaica in the 1930s and was heralded by Marcus Garvey whose speeches and

biblical interpretation inspired Jamaican lower-class spiritual leaders (Lewis 4). Zion

is a symbol of the movement's Promised Land as opposed to Babylon, which stood

for the European colonial society as a land of oppression and alienation.

The Rastafaris rejected the institutionalized beliefs of Christianity, although

they held the Bible as a divine revelation which they had the right to interpret

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[40] Benjamine Fair's "Stepping Razor in Orbit" focuses on a discussion of the Rastafari movement as an identity and political alternative in *Neuromancer*.

differently from the Europeans (Lewis 75). The novel depicts the colony as a

contrast to the post-industrial society which makes the background of cyberspace;

"Zion smelled of cooked vegetables, humanity, and ganja" (137) , and the surviving

founders of Zion "were men who spend too many years outside the embrace of

gravity"(136) in a reference to their isolation from what was happening on earth.

Maelcum and Areol are two Rastas from Zion who help Case in his adventures

although Aerol sounds like a luddite when Case hands him the electrode through

which he could jack into cyberspace. Aerol tells Case that he sees "Babylon" when

he jacks into space. The Rastas look at Babylon as a metaphor of Western

civilization whose laws (140) and ways of life they do not approve. On their first

meeting, the Zionites call Molly "Steppin Razor"(144) and they justify that name,

referencing their religious heritage, telling her that " '[t]hat is a story we have,

sister,' said the other, 'a religion story. We are glad you've come with Maelcum' "

(144). The novel's thematization of the Rastas as helpers to Case and Molly through

their tasks suggests that the novel looks favorably at Rastas' form of spirituality.

This favorable depiction contrasts Molly's view of Christian relics and the novel's

suspicion of Christian Scientists as predatory creatures.

In its employment of such contrast, the novel questions the capability of

Western religions and organized religion, in general, to positively impact the lives of

humans in the age of cyberspace. The narrator hints to this preference of alternative

spirituality in the beginning of the novel while describing Case's yearning for

voodoo. While being deprived of jacking into cyberspace, Case's dreams about it "came in the Japanese night like livewire voodoo, and he'd cry for it" (5).

With such a suspicious view of organized religion's potential to offer salvation for Case, he jacks into cyberspace. The novel then provides him with possibilities for experiencing spirituality in cyberspace. Case's jacking into cyberspace actually stands as a metaphor for spirituality as opposed to religion. Major references to religion occur outside cyberspace, while Case's spiritual experiences take place after jacking in: a new experience of the space as sacralized rather than as divided into profane/sacred, a new experience of his body that discloses the capacities of the body to be a vehicle to new lived experiences, and a new sense of the other through her own perspective. As Case jacks into Molly's perceptions and sensations, he is able to experience both her pleasures and her pain. Cyberspace offers Case a whole different experience of subjectivity that is marked by fluidity. Theorists of spirituality and religion refer to these experiences that challenge spatial and temporal boundaries as transcendence.

Daniel Bell's definition of religion that I utilized in the previous chapter defines religious practices in terms of their social functions, such as creating a community, and their discursive traces, such as shared meanings. One of the implications of celebrating religious rites is the community's attempt to protect these rites from being forgotten with the progress of time. In other words, the religious community or person strives to transcend temporal boundaries. Not all definitions of religion explicitly refer to transcendence, but discussions of religion and spirituality

refer to transcending boundaries as a trope of religious practices. For example, Thomas Tweed in *Crossing and Dwelling*, an ethnographic study of religious rituals of Cubans in Miami, suggests that "[r]eligions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and superhuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries"(54). As with other ethnographic studies of religion, Tweed stresses "movement and relation" (54) in this definition as well as emotions. His study grounds itself in religion as experience rather than as a body of doctrines. The crossing of spatial boundaries as a quality of religious practices is referred to also as transcendence in Mercia Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane*. Eliade generalizes the concept of transcendence to comprise all sorts of "inhabited territories, temple, house, and body" (177). He maintains that the "cosmos that one inhabits-body, house, tribal territory, the whole of this world-communicates above with a different plane that is transcendent to it" (177). Tweed affirms this meaning when he, building on French Anthropologist Bruno Latour, states:

> [r]eligions move between what is imagined as the most distant horizons and what is imagined as the most intimate domain. To use traditional Christian language, they travel vertically back and forth between transcendence and immanence. They bring the gods to earth and transport the faithful to the heavens. And they move horizontally, back and forth in social space. The religious also are propelled through time, allowing travel among imagined pasts, presents, and futures. As itinerants, the religious never remain

anywhere or anytime for long. It is in this sense, I suggest, that religions are

flows, translocative and transtemoporal crossings. (158)

This translocative crossing is Tweed's choice of words to epitomize the spatial

possibilities of transcendence that Eliade has specified as one of the effects of

religious practices. In *Neuromancer*, I argue that it is the pattern/randomness

dialectic rather than the presence/absence which facilitates boundary crossing which

Tweed identifies as a indication of religious ritual and which Eliade defines as

transcendence.

Transcendence, in this sense, is facilitated by the realization of Hayles'

concept of pattern/randomness in *Neuromancer*. Kathryn Hayles maintains that the

epistemic shift away from the presence/ absence to the   pattern/randomness is a

manifestation of the contemporary pressure toward dematerialization affecting

human and textual bodies (*How* 29). In information space, "pattern and randomness

are bound together in a complex dialectic that makes them not so much opposites as

complements or supplements to one another. Each helps to define the other; each

contributes to the flow of information through the system" (*How* 25). *Neuromancer*,

Hayles maintains, is an instance of information narrative where this shift to

pattern/randomness is most apparent. Pattern, as a recognized order of relationships,

"tends to overcome presence, leading to a construction of immateriality that depends

not on spirituality or even consciousness but only on information" (*How* 35). As

pattern/randomness dialectic takes over the presence/absence as a mode of existence

in cyberspace, distinctions between matter, non-matter or body and non-body

become increasingly difficult to make, thus facilitating mechanisms of transcendence that I argue are deployed in Gibson's *Neuromancer*[41].

The novel presents the pattern/randomness structure of cyberspace by referring to the complex network of information data which make up cyberspace. A description of cyberspace is presented by a voice-over in a kid's show that Case and Molly visit, stating that it is a "consensual hallucination experienced daily by billions of operators [. . .] A graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data" (69). The scientific foundation for this conceptualization of information as pattern, or probability function, is provided by Claude Shannon, according to whom "information represents a choice of one message from among a range of possible messages" (Hayles, *How* 52). In such space which is filtered "through the computer matrix, all reality becomes patterns of information" (Heim 65). The complex, nonspace of the mind is not only a reference to the different ontological qualities of cyberspace, but it is also an assertion that representation of this space takes place through pattern of clusters and constellations of data information and not presence. The pattern/randomness of the matrix is also further expressed through Case's description of it as "bright lattices of logic unfolding across that colorless void" (5). As do the

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[41] Anelie Crighton's "Among the Spirits of Cyberspace" restricts her argument about Gibson's novel to foregrounding the Shamanic motifs and to Case's role in the narrative as a healer.

rest of hackers in the other two novels of Gibson's trilogy, *Count Zero* (1986), and

Mona Liza Overdrive (1988), Case moves between two worlds, the urban space and

cyberspace. The urban space is one governed by presence/absence while cyberspace

is often described as composed of lattices of light. The interaction between Case and

cyberspace leads to transcendence because it enacts Case's movements between two

different worlds, one where presence/absence dominates as a means of representation

and one where the pattern "is the essential reality, presence an optical

illusion"(Hayles, *How* 36). Case jacks in cyberspace through an electronic chip, or a

socket implanted behind his ear. Access to cyberspace takes place through tracking

particular patterns. So when Case jacks in, his entry creates not a physical presence,

but "informational traces" (Hayles, *How* 39). Interfacing with cyberspace does not

involve a change of physical location, but a recognition of the pattern/randomness

dialectic that make up the network. One of the properties of cyberspace is that "it is

an information space, such that, if any part of the information is available to the

receiver, all of it may be" (McFadden 341). Case's movement represents a

translocative flow from a space defined by Cartesian coordinates relying on a known

point of reference to an ethereal space that lacks perspective because of its

"[u]thinkable complexity" (69). There is a change in both the visual representation

and the construction of the two spaces between which Case shuttles back and forth.

Based on Tweed and Eliade's conceptualization of religious practices, Case's

movement implies a spiritual dimension. According to Eliade, "space is not

homogeneous," for the religious man who "experiences interruptions, breaks in it [;]

some parts of space are qualitatively different from others" (20)[42]. In the matrix,

Case glides through realms. In fact, the narrator refers to cyberspace as "nonspace"

(69) as opposed to ordinary space to describe the matrix. The novel affirms that, as a

formation, cyberspace does not conform with the presence/absence dialectic;

therefore, Case is capable of gliding "through the spheres as if he were on invisible

tracks" (85) as the matrix "possessed unlimited subjective dimension" (85). This

simulation of movement through realms reconstitutes a body-plus-simulation entity

which Hayles calls "embodied virtuality" which is neither flesh and blood alone nor

computer image. In such virtuality, "presence is understood to be always already

penetrated by the virtuality of information" ("Taking Immortality Literally" 114).

Further, the novel projects Case's movement to cyberspace as a spiritual crossing

over not only because it can be compared to the flow of religious crowds between

two different spaces, but also because it enables Case to experience the sacred in

cyberspace and because this experience proves to be a transformational one.

In this space, Case encounters what Rudolph Otto has characterized as the

emotional manifestation of encountering the sacred. Case's first meeting with

Wintermute, the AI in cyberspace, generates a sense of awe and fear that cannot be

expressed. "Mysterium tremendum" (12) is Otto's Latin expression for such an

emotion a person feels upon encountering the divine. "It is a remarkable fact" he

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[42] In "Mind is a Leaking Rainbow," Nicole Stenger makes a similar comparison. But her concern in
this article is not the sacred although she hints at it as a form of consciousness. Her article aims at
exploring the human mind vis a vis cyberspace.

maintains that "the physical reaction to which this unique 'dread' of the uncanny gives rise is also unique, and is not found in the case of any 'natural' fear or terror"(16). Douglas Kellner notes that Case's intense desire to go back to cyberspace "replicates strivings for religious transcendence" (*Media Culture* 310). Case's encounter with Wintermure emulates an encounter with Otto's sacred and projects Wintermute as an overwhelmingly spiritual entity that stays unrepresented but can be seen in its avatars. Case goes through disturbing emotional experiences after jacking in as there was:

> [n]o matrix, no grid. No cyberspace. And on the far rim of consciousness, a scurrying, a fleeting impression of something rushing toward him, across leagues of black mirror. He tried to scream.
>
> There seemed to be a city, beyond the curve of beach, but it was far away. He crouched on his haunches on the damp sand, his arms warped tight across his knees, and shook.
>
> Case was wondering whether it was a city indeed. . . . He turned his head and stared out to sea, . . .
>
> A wind was rising. Sand stung his cheek. He put his face against his knees and wept, the sound of his sobbing as distant and alien as the cry of the searching gull. Hot urine soaked his jeans, dribbled on the sand, and quickly cooled in the wind off the water. When his tears were gone, his throat ached. "Wintermute," he mumbled to his knees, "Wintermute . . ."

It was growing dark, now, and when he shivered, it was with a cold that

finally forced him to stand. (305-306).

Case is filled with terror culminating in his kneeling and weeping. Awe-stricken, he

feels that the space around him cannot be even visualized into the optical illusion he

is used to. One time at least in the novel, Case and Wintermute communicate without

switching on the electronic device behind Case's ear, suggesting that the

communication between the two is totally immaterial or spiritual.

The novel's references to Wintermute through the conversation between

characters associate it with sacred authority and apocalyptic times. During the first

meeting between the Founders of Zion and Case and Molly, the two old men offer to

help them. They tell them that they were asked to offer them assistance by

Wintermute, telling them,

'Soon come, the Final Days . . . Voices. Voices cryin' inna wilderness,

prophesyin' ruin unto Babylon . . . '

'Voices.' The Founder from Los Angeles was staring at Case. 'We monitor

many frequencies. We listen always. Came a voice, out of the babel of

tongues, speaking to us. It played us a mighty dub.'

'Call'em Winter Mute,' said the other, making it two words.

Case felt the skin crawl on his arms.

'The Mute talked to us,' the first Founder said. 'The Mute said we are to

help you.'

[. . .] If these are Final Days, we must expect false prophets . . .' [. . .]

> 'What kinda message the voice have?' Case asked.
>
> 'We were told to help you,' the other said, 'that you might serve as a tool
>
> of Final Days.' (144-145)

The symbolism of this conversation endows Wintermute with a spiritual halo. Wintermute is regarded as a prophetic voice, telling about the future, or a voice with god-like origin that has to be obeyed. Moreover, Wintermute is preoccupied, as the Zionites are, with the Final Days, an apocalyptic phrase that both disturbs Case and engages him with Wintermute's project of fleeing the domination of corporate human culture. Case knows about this project later as he actually gets the code necessary for the unification of Wintermute and Neuromancer and their independence from the human control. When Case asks the Zionites about their loyalties, they tell him that their "law is the word of Jah" (146).

Case's experience of fear is complicated by a meditative mood that marks his return to cyberspace. The abundance of images and impressions bears the imprints of Baudrillard's hyper-reality and reflects the experiential trance that he went through, first as a phase of confusion then as a phase of ecstasy:

> He closed his eyes.
>
> [. . .]
>
> And in the bloodlit dark behind his eyes, silver phosphenes boiling in from
>
> the edge of space, hynagogig images jerking past like film compiled from
>
> random frames. Symbols, figures, faces, a blurred, fragmented mandala of
>
> visual information.

Please, he prayed, now------

A gray disk, the color of Chiba sky.

Now--------

Disk beginning to rotate, faster, becoming a sphere of paler gray. Expanding -

And flowed, flowered for him, fluid neon origami trick, the unfolding of his

distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to

infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern

Seaboard Fission Authority burning [. . .]

And somewhere he was laughing, in a white-painted loft, distant

fingers caressing the deck, tears of release streaking his face. (70)

The reference to sky and spheres expanding is an image of celestial and ethereal

space in which Case literally prays as if these spaces possess spiritual energy. As

Case interfaces with cyberspace, he crosses to a celestial site, indulges in a cathartic

moment of joy and tears, prays, and is eventually transformed. His crossing over to

another world and this emotional as well as spiritual experience that he goes through

is an instance of transcendence, not only because it marks his immaterial

displacement, but also because he himself will be transformed. As Graham notes in

her discussion of "techno-chantment,' "the longings for transhuman aggrandizement

and techno -scientific expansionism are the-'enduring, other-worldly'-inevitable

outworkings of an innate spiritual quest for transcendence of embodied

finitude"(171). Likewise, Stenger writes that "because cyberspace represents a

disruption of 'normal' space and time, cyberspace is believed to constitute a portal

into a sacred realm, offering transformations in time, space, and consciousness" (54-55). This transformational aggrandizement of consciousness is witnessed by Case toward the end of the novel. This transformation results in a postmodern concept of ethics that the novel envisions through Case's new relationship to himself and to others.

Case's transformation during the final run into the Tessier-Ashpool is marked by a peculiar, cognitive experience of his consciousness and senses. His dissolution as an entity is paradoxically accompanied by an augmentation of his senses:

> And when he was nothing, compressed at the heart of all that dark, there   came a point when the dark could be no more, and something tore.
>
> The Kuang program spurted from tarnished cloud, Case's consciousness divided like beads of mercury, arching above an endless beach the color of the dark silver clouds. His vision was spherical, as though a single retina lined the inner surface of a globe that contained all things, if all things could be counted. (336)[43]

Case then acquires superhuman qualities as his awareness of the space around him verges on the miraculous. As Case feels dissolved, his vision becomes

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[43] The Kuang device is a slow computer virus capable of entering the technological structure and expanding the structure to penetrate a vast electronic library (Joseph Tabbi's *The Postmodern Sublime* 217).

omniscient encompassing the whole world around him. McQuire explains this

paradox as an emulation of the "traditional quest" in which the hero "experiences

dissolution of ego as a pre-condition for spiritual re-birth" (176), interpreting the

alchemical reference to mercury as a metaphor for the "prima materium of

transubstantiation" (176). The miraculous enhancement of Case's senses together

with the dissolution of his subjectivity symbolizes Case's improved abilities of

connecting to the other by becoming de-centered. Case's new level of awareness of

his surroundings and his enhanced senses prepare him for a new experience with his

own body in cyberspace.

Hayles' reference to spirituality as a source of immateriality implies a

necessary connection between the two. This connection is often encoded in an

opposition between body and non-body. With such a typology, materiality is

opposed to immateriality and matter to non-matter. However, such opposition is

undermined in postmodern discourse, such as that of the works of Baudrillard. So

although Hayles' observation references traditional dualities and binaries of matter

/non-matter and body/ non-body, I claim that her conceptualization of

pattern/randomness as an alternative to presence/absence is conducive to

Baudrillard's rejection of the above mentioned oppositions. I am proposing that this

link between Hayles' post-humanist assessment of the role of pattern/randomness in

representation and construction of information spaces on one hand and Baudrillard's

thoughts on matter as animate on the other as a theoretical and cultural background

can explain the spiritual theme of transcendence that I detect in *Neuromancer*. These

examples of transcendence exemplify some of the "trajectories that combine the

secular with the religious" (Aupers, Houtman, and Pels 693).

In his *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities*, Baudrillard makes a reference

to the behavior of matter in scientific experimentation. He animates the matter under

scientific investigation, questioning whether the matter itself *reacts* in hyper-

conformity to scientific experimentation, in order to escape objectification. In the

context of his discussion of the masses' rejection of manipulation through passivity

and hyper-conformity, thus managing to be neither a subject nor an object,

Baudrillard sees that

> it is possible to think that the uncertainty surrounding this enterprise of the
>
> objective determination of the world remains total and that even matter and
>
> the inanimate, when summoned to respond, in the various sciences of nature,
>
> […]send back the same conforming signals, the same coded responses,[
>
> …]only to escape [. . .] any definition as object. (*In the Shadow* 33)[44]

In *Symbolic Exchange*, Baudrillard even denounces the separation between man and

matter, body and non-body, and soul and body; he writes:

> [t]he reality of nature, its 'objectivity' and its 'materiality', derives solely
>
> from the separation of man and nature, of a body and a non-body, as Octavio
>
> Paz put it. Even the reality of the body, its material status, derives from the

---

[44] Baudrillard's observation about matter as capable of responding and reacting to experimentation
has been ignored by many commentators on his work, notably Steven Kellner.

disjunction of a spiritual principle, from discriminating a soul from a body.

The symbolic is what puts an end to this disjunctive code and to separated

terms. It is the u-topia that puts an end to the topologies of the soul and the

body, man and nature, the real and the non-real, birth and death. In the

symbolic operation, the two terms lose their reality. (133)

Baudrillard's invitation to put an end to such topologies can be developed into an

argument that destabilizes the body/ mind duality through using Hayles' paradigm of

pattern/randomness. Although I am relying on Hayles' theoretical framework of

pattern/randomness, I find that her opinion that Case "regards his body as so much

'meat' that exists primarily to sustain his consciousness until the next time he can

enter cyberspace" (81) does not take full account of the novel's plot. Hayles' opinion

is adopted by many commentators on Gibson's novel and the relationship of

cyberspace to body and embodiment. These critics construct cyberspace as a site

where the body can be derided and left behind. In contrast to these opinions, I see

that the relationship between body and non-body in the novel is far from being

mutually exclusive[45]. As Olsen notes, hackers must keep "one foot in the material

---

[45] It may be that these critics are trying to embrace Baudrillard's thoughts on corporeality in his *The Ecstasy of Communication* where he maintains that the "human body, our body, seems superfluous in its proper expanse, in the complexity and multiplicity of its organs, of its tissue and function, because today everything is concentrated the brain and the genetic code, which alone sum up the operational definition of being (18). But I think that Baudrillard's notion does not necessarily imply an oppositional dynamic between body and non-body in cyberspace. See for example, Benjamin Fair's "Stepping Razor in the Orbit: Postmodern Identity and Political Alternatives in William Gibson's *Neuromancer*."

world even as they come close to transcending it. They must continually work their computer keyboards manually while they inhabit cyberspace" (283).

It is true that there are references to Case deriding his body as "meat" and referring to it as the "prison of his flesh" (12), but as the novel progresses, we see that Case has developed a new attitude toward the body. It is my contention that if cyberspace is a site where randomness/pattern replaces presence/absence, it is also a site where the mind/body duality is undermined and transcended. With a simulation of his former girlfriend, Case experiences physical sensations that the mind, represented by a stranger's memory, reinforces. When he was with her, Case felt

[t]here was a strength that ran in her, something he'd know in Night City and

held there [. . .] something he'd found and lost so many times. It belonged, he

knew –he remembered- as she pulled him down, to the meat, the flesh the

cowboys mocked. It was a vast thing, beyond knowing, a sea of information

coded in spiral and pheromone, infinite intricacy that only the body, in its strong

blind way, could ever read. . . . Here, even here, in a place he knew for what it

was, a coded model of some stranger's memory, the drive held. (314)

The infinite intricacy of the body and its ability to generate and hold drives makes the body a technology of control. Case discovers the value of the body as a technology able to decode chemical and electronic signals and to coordinate them into "strength." In cyberspace, Case is able to transcend this duality of mind/body converting his previous frustration into "a level of proficiency exceeding anything he'd known or imagined. . .Beyond ego, beyond personality, beyond awareness, he

moved, [. . .] evading his attackers with an ancient dance, Hideo's dance, grace of the mind-body interface granted him, in that second, by the clarity and singleness of his wish to die" (342). After watching the Hosaka release a boy in cyberspace, Case notes that "the boy moved, flowing with the sinister grace of a mime" and that his body "was nearly invisible, an abstract pattern approximating the scribbled brickwork sliding smoothly across his tight one-piece. Mimetic polycarbon" (77). Moreover, Case's discovery of the value of his body is associated with Zion, the site of alternative spiritual values. The colony of Zion celebrates dub, the forerunner of Raggae music (Fair 95), which "was sensuous mosaic cooked from vast libraries of digitalized pop" as "worship" (Gibson 137). Before Case's final epiphany, he did not like how "the Zionites always touched you when they were talking, hands on your shoulders" (140). But during the last scene, we watch Case's realization of the grace of mind-body interface as he wakes to "a voice that was music"(342) and "then the long pulse of Zion dub"(343).

The ancient dance which can only symbolize a body movement is constitutive of the proficiency that Case attains in cyberspace, proficiency that enables him to move beyond and transcend many barriers, psychological as those of ego, socially constructed as those of personality, and cognitive as those of awareness. It is also proficiency that "exceeds" his knowledge and imagination. Case goes beyond the mind/body duality when he also delves "into a highspeed drift and skid, totally engaged but set apart from it all" (17). This moving beyond and across ego, personality, and awareness is facilitated through pattern/randomness model as the

user learns in systems of virtual reality that "the boundaries of self are defined less

by the skin than by the feedback loops connecting body and simulation in a techno-

bio-integrated circuit"(Hayles, *How* 72). Through "jacking in" Case is capable of

fusing with the electronic networks of cyberspace data. He becomes part of a reality

that is beyond everyday perception. As a subject, he is dislocated, and his identity

dissolved, but his senses are sharpened. Paradoxically, then he is both dissolved and

enabled with different kinds of capacities. This transcendence of body/mind duality

and of identity enables Case to go beyond himself because the pattern/random model

denies the subject a "fixed site of identification," a function which Scott Bukatman

has associated with the "dissolution of ontological boundaries and the collision of

competing and transmutating worlds" (18). These competing worlds are not only

ontological, between different awareness of inhabited spaces, but also, in Tweed's

word, transtemporal, implying different experiences and awareness of time. As the

novel progresses, Case becomes more efficient at understanding how he should deal

with the AIs. He encounters a new sense of time and realizes that his ordinary frame

of time cannot measure what may take place in cyberspace. During the final

Straylight run, the network which Case and Molly enter to attempt getting the

password necessary to unite Wintermute and Neuromacer, Case meets with AIs'

multiple avatars and converses with them, reluctantly as he is not sure which person

he is talking to. Wintermute tells him, " '[y]ou want I should come to you in the

matrix like a burning bush? You aren't missing anything, back there. An hour here'll

only take you a couple of seconds' " (220). Transcending time, space, and

consciousness, Case does not have a fixed subjectivity. It is because Case does not have a fixed subjectivity in cyberspace that he is able to connect with other subjectivities at a level much deeper than he would do in the urban space.

Case communicates and connects with Molly through his simstim. Their communication is not through language, but through perception and senses. Such experience of shared perception between two beings is termed by some critics as intersubjectivity, as it connects two identities together. As Christian De Quincey notes, intersubjectivity includes language and interpretation, but also extends to a higher-order consciousness through the creation of a nonphysical presence. He notes that it thus allows for "[d]irect interior-to-interior engagement" which allows for actual sharing of meaning that is accomplished not by "linguistic exchanges, but by the accompanying *interior-to-interior participatory presence*- by true intersubjectivity" (188). According to Hayles, "subjectivities which operate within cyberspace also become patterns rather than physical entities" (81). Through accessing the pattern, Case is also able to access Molly's body and to surrender to its motion willingly. As Case jolts into other flesh, "he fought helplessly to control her body. Then he willed himself into passivity, became the passenger behind her eyes" (74). Senses become more acute after jacking into her body. Case not only hear her words, but "felt her form them" (74). As he keys back into her "sensorium, into the sinuous flow of muscle," his "senses are sharp and bright" (75). Not only is Case's awareness of his senses and body more acute, but his feeling of the other raises as well. Because when he is in Molly's body, he finds "himself wondering about the

mind he shared these sensations with. What did he know about her? That she was

another professional; that she said her being, like his, was the thing she did to make a

living" (75). The complex dynamic of the matrix offers the potential for an emergent

subjectivity rather than given, "distributed rather than located necessarily in

consciousness, emerging from and integrated into a chaotic world rather than

occupying a position of mastery and control"(Hayles, *How* 291). Case's connection

to cyberspace, Molly, and 3Jane is not restricted to its impact on him as an individual

but extends to society as well. Case and Molly agree to help the AIs, Neuromancer

and Wintermute, in their struggle against other humans, but not any humans. The

unification of efforts by Case, the cyber-boy, Molly, the cyborg, and the AIs to

obtain the password necessary to free the AIs is directed against the power of

corporate multinationals that control the fate of information, the human, and the

machine, and ethical standards. "Power, in Case's world meant corporate power;"

"the zaibatsus" are "the multinationals that shaped the course of human history"

(Gibson 245), and Case is described as a hacker, or cyber cowboy from the

perspective of these multinational powers. When Michele and Rolan, the information

policemen, accuse Case of "data invasion and larceny" (Gibson 210), they tell him:

> 'You will come with us. We are at home with situations of legal ambiguity.
>
> The treatises under which our arm of the Registry operates grant us a great
>
> deal of flexibility. And we *create* flexibility, in situations where it is
>
> required.' [. . .]

'You will dress now. You will come with us. [. . .] Along with the one you

call Armitage, you will return with us to Geneva and give testimony in the

trail of this intelligence. Otherwise, we kill you. Now.' (Gibson 210)

I have argued thus far for pattern/randomness as a model for spiritual

transcendence in postmodern cyberspace, suggesting that conceptualization of

postmodern spirituality as envisioned in *Neuromancer* is governed by

pattern/randomness as opposed to presence/absence. It is important at this point to

show why presence/absence has been governing a pre-postmodern conceptualization

of spirituality. Such discussion will ground my analysis of transcendence in

Neuromancer in postmodern revisions of the experience of the subject in religious

systems. I will approach this revision from two perspectives, the structure of

language and the construction of subjectivity.

The understanding of the subject in religious systems, mainly those of

Christianity and Judaism within the Western experience, relies heavily on a

paradigm of presence/absence that sketches the experience of the subject to the

sacred. Standard philosophies of religion posit "the supposed objectivity of the

rational, individual, male-neutral subject of western philosophy and theology"

(Anderson 36). The self in such systems "is envisioned as grounded in presence"

(Hayles, *How* 286), an experience of presence that can only be facilitated through

speech according to Lacan (Sarup 11). If the Lacanian subject cannot exist except

through language, then it follows that pre- postmodern subject relies on the

presence/absence model of language for its being and on an already decided one-to-

one relationship between signifier and signified to interpret his/her experiences. The Lacanian subject enters the Symbolic through "societal imperatives- the Father's rules, laws, and definitions" (Wright 109). In this sense, a pattern/randomness paradigm of being is more compatible with spirituality rather than with religion. A religious experience bound by institutional interpretation of central texts and by doctrines is governed by a presence/absence paradigm of subjectivity and of language. In contrast, in post-structuralist, post-Saussurian understanding of language, the signifier is not connected to the signified with a one-to-one relationship that could be stable and predictable because "a signifier always signifies another signifier" (Sarup 11). Rather, the signifier takes on meaning(s) only when put in context with other signifiers. Meaning, thus, depends on relation or pattern, not on identification, or presence.

Derrida's schematization of presence/absence suggests that "presence is allied with Logos, God, and teleology" (Hayles, *How* 285) and establishes presence as a base for Logos, understood as reason or speech. In a presence/absence paradigm, a coherent self testifies to a stable coherent reality with fixed meaning. As a result, interpretation of a sacred text, for example, will be anchored in a coherent, stable origin that is immutable, protected by institutions to resist any of the different readings to which Sarah in Doctorow's *City of God* aspires in her dealing with sacred texts. Moreover, if "logos" in Derrida's equation means reason, it follows that generating meaning and knowledge from a presence/absence paradigm will rely solely on reason, an epistemology which postmodern sensibilities question and reject

as Powers' and Doctorow's texts demonstrate. It is then possible that, by contrast to presence/absence, the dynamic of pattern/randomness will be conducive to multiplicity of meaning that "is not front-loaded into the system" where the "origin does not act to ground signification," so rather than "proceeding along a trajectory toward a known end, such systems [of interpretation which work along a paradigm/randomness dialectic] evolve toward an open future marked by contingency and unpredictability" (Hayles, *How* 285).

It is noteworthy here that Hayles' discussion of Derrida's deconstruction through destabilization of the presence/absence binary aims at a critique of deconstruction which "required a metaphysics of presence to articulate the destabilization of that self" (*How* 285). However, I think that Derrida's argument of the "desertification" of religion and sacred texts that I discussed in the first chapter can also be marked by contingency and unpredictability, although it does not explicitly implicate the pattern/randomness binary as a replacement for presence/absence. Derrida writes, "[a]ll my life, I have never stopped praying to God [. . .] True religion must abandon all names for God in order to preserve God's freedom from captivity to the metaphysics of self-presence"(" 'My Religion' " 201).

I have argued in this analysis of Gibson's *Neuromancer* that the novel forges a spiritual path through the networks of cyberspace. It locates the sacred in cyberspace and presents Case with possibilities of transcendence, aesthetic euphoria, and sublimity. Case's transcendence between two spaces different in ontological dimensions is made possible through pattern/randomness as opposed to

presence/absence. As Case flows between these two spaces, he learns how to connect to his body, the surroundings, and others in new ways. I have employed theories by Tweed and Eliade to compare religious rituals to Case's adventures in cyberspace. Unlike many commentators on this novel, I have argued that transcendence in cyberspace provides a new understanding of the relationship between body and mind. In addition, I demonstrated why a pattern/randomness model is compatible with a postmodern conceptualization of spirituality as opposed to a presence/absence model which informed pre postmodern understanding of institutional religion. The overarching implication of this analysis of Gibson's *Neuromancer* for this project as a whole is that because cyberspace, as a product of scientific theories and praxis serves as a channel for spiritual emotions, the secular and the sacred are not disparate categories.

CONCLUSION

I have argued in this project that postmodern discourse locates the sacred in human creativity and information systems. In doing so, postmodern discourse destabilizes many dichotomies and eventually suggests a revision of the binary of the secular and the sacred. I have proposed "Anti-dialectical spiritualities" as a term that epitomizes the postmodern approach to re-envisioning these binaries. By doing so, I have argued for the impurity of the secular as a construct, demonstrating that this impurity enables theory to transcend diagnosis and deconstruction and to move towards reconstruction. This redemptive sensibility within postmodern discourse challenges Hutcheon's characterization of postmodern culture and discourse as "complicitous critique."

Destabilizing the binary of the sacred and the secular provides a better understanding of the experience of the real. Philosophically and politically, such understanding helps encounter fanaticism whether it is secular or religious. To facilitate this understanding of the sacred and the secular as permeable categories, the works I have discussed define the sacred outside the boundaries of organized religion. They all articulate the sacred under Derrida's "religion without religion" concept. This analysis of the sacred has followed a trajectory defined by epistemology, functionality, and emotional impact.

I have drawn on particular notions by postmodern theorists to discuss representations and definitions of the sacred in works representative of postmodern

American fiction. In its search for a revelation of God in the urban postmodern life world, Doctorow's *City of God* rejects the dichotomy of reason and mysticism. Interweaving the sacred and the secular, the novel stresses an aesthetic connection to sacred texts, calls for justice as a universal ethos, and establishes an epistemology for postmodern spiritualities.

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Richard Powers' *The Echo Maker* define the sacred through the act of remembering which they envision as reconstructive and creative. Memory in these texts is marked by its capability to envision the future and transcend the constructs of time and space. Both novels propose creative memory as a way to deconstruct the binary of the self vs. other, calling for a communal understanding of the self. William Gibson's *Neuromancer* locates the sacred in cyberspace through the implementation of a pattern/randomness model of connecting to space, to one's self, and to the other. The matrix becomes a site for transcendence and connection, destabilizing the body-mind dichotomy. Throughout my discussion of these new articulations of the sacred, I utilized definitions of religion and the sacred by sociologists and anthropologists and applied them to both functions and emotions related to the representation of the sacred in these novels. I also alluded to non-Western spiritualities as they figure in these novels. Native American and African diasporic spiritualities provide a reference of comparison for postmodern spiritualities, but they are not embraced as an uncontested alternative for Western religions.

Further investigation of the representations of the sacred in postmodern fiction could address the relationship between the sacred and the secular within other facets of postmodern culture, such as consumerism and contemporary painting. For example, Don DeLillo's *White Noise* glorifies consumption places as sites where the sacred could be experienced. The market stands as a place that

> recharges us spiritually, it prepares us, it's a gateway or pathway It's full of psychic data . . . Everything is concealed in symbolism, hidden by veils of mystery and layers of cultural material . . . All the letters and numbers are here, all the colors of the spectrum, all the voices and sounds, all the code words and ceremonial phrases. It is just a question of deciphering, rearranging, peeling off the layer of unspeakability. (37-38)

The research questions with which I have attempted to answer in this project should be tested further in works by Ethnic American writers. I suspect that foregrounding memory as a site for the sacred is an important theme in African American postmodern fiction, especially that of Toni Morrison. Many notions about the connection between postmodernity and its treatment of religion that I discussed in Doctorow's *City of God* are applicable to Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*. Asking these questions can also be extended to postmodern fiction outside the US because the relationship between the sacred and the secular is not only a concern of public debate in American or European settings, but also in less developed nations which actually strive to copy the Anglo-European models of secularity.

The most insisting question that remains unanswered in this project is Doctorow's question about the relationship between sacred texts and interpretation. Is there a possibility for the emergence of an evolving dynamic between sacred texts and their readers? Who are these readers who will keep in mind Derrida's "justice" as a sacred category for interpretation? And finally who is going to define "justice"?

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1-28.

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