

***An investigation into conceptual reality : a thesis submitted in
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Introduction.

The disciplines of Philosophy and Religious Studies contain a great deal of literature pertaining to the nature of reality, religious belief and God. This literature may be broadly divided into two categories, namely the rational or reasonable and the non-rational or unreasonable. Both these categories, as well as the variables within these categories are often responded to as if they are self-evident entities that exist in and by themselves; for example: religious constructs, political institutions, nation states, cultural institutions and the contents of the electronic media. My purpose in this thesis is to argue that all these investigative frameworks and conceptual belief systems effectively follow a certain dynamic.

I am arguing that this dynamic only occurs through the absence of God, which enables us to express our conceptual belief systems, as a function of our interdependent societies. The result of this is our continual creation of our own religion(s) and culture(s). Therefore, on the most elementary level I am arguing that the humanists¹ are correct, and that our physical existence is 'all there is.' Therefore this thesis is a-theistic, although my definition of a-theism does not fall within the commonly accepted framework.

Simultaneously, in what I admit is, on the face of it, a paradoxical position; I am also arguing that the metaphysical philosophers, theologians and mystics are correct. A rich tapestry of belief systems exist in a diverse variety of cultures and historical contexts, and have done so in varying degrees for several thousand years. The variables of these belief systems are certainly real, so long as we focus our intention on them. That is, these variables effectively act as tools that we utilise to create our conceptual reality; we express them as a function of us and these variables have no independent existence. Our aesthetic² appetite reflects this behaviour today, with our appreciation of art, literature and music.

From this position, (if I allow our aesthetic creations the same currency as our religious creations,) this thesis engages with what appears to be two opposing arguments. That is, the question emerges of whether we exist purely on the physical

¹ I will discuss humanism in detail, later.

² I will deal with aestheticism in detail, later.

level, or whether there is another reality outside of our physical context, with one or many God(s) watching and sometimes ordering this physical context?

My argument, (using a modified version of the Hegelian dialectic) is that both these positions are valid, if reality is broken into two orders. Within the context of this argument, 'first-order' reality is physical and nothing else. There are no external Gods, no non-physical truth, falsity, and no reference points. Only our physical context exists; this includes us, other living organisms and the physical consequences of our intentions within our physical context.

In contrast to this, 'second-order' reality contains all of our conceptual reality. All of our laws, religions, cultures and languages are contained here. All of these variables are functions of us. We reference our physical context to project our intention both back onto it and into conceptual space, for the continual purpose of external referencing. These conceptual variables have traditionally been interdependently validated, and when validation caused conflicting intentions, the motivated physical consequences of these conflicting intentions occurred in war and genocide. That is, communities will in(ter)dependently discuss and validate concepts and motivations; the consequence of which will be played out in physical reality.

This is evidenced in the manner in which we continually blur the boundaries between our physical and conceptual realities. Due to our technological evolution, we construct our cultures outside of (and in many cases in opposition to) our physical context; our conceptual systems are continually recycled, due to our primary concern with the variables of our belief systems, and not the method they operate in. In this thesis, I am investigating the method and dynamic our belief systems follow, and for this purpose I have categorised this thesis into four chapters.

Firstly, I engage with the philosophical and theological arguments to outline the manner in which we form our conceptual reality. I then expand these arguments in the context of religious experience, where I argue that all religious experience is simply an attempt to fulfil our desire for singularity.

Secondly, having argued for the complete absence of any external existent divinity, I examine the nihilism that I argue is 'first-order' non-physical reality, or divine space. I then outline my argument for an inverted form of kenosis; that is, the method with

which we 'empty' our conceptual selves into the absence. I then argue for an inversion of traditional arguments (such as Heidegger's) for 'Being'.

Thirdly, having established the manner in which our conceptual reality occurs, I will demonstrate how we have become lost within the variables of these belief systems, and become devoid of reference points. I argue that we exist within a nexus, and that our current communication system dislocates us from our context, effectively transforming our ontology in a schizophrenic one.

In the fourth chapter, I will demonstrate how a pluralist society could operate, (to lessen the damaging physical consequences of our conceptual realities); within a divine space that is the absence of God. I argue for the benefits of liminality, and show the dangers of homogenising a liminal or charismatic conceptual reality. I then draw an analogy between this type of pluralistic society and the manner in which both biological entities, and ecosystems operate.

Finally, I conclude by reducing my argument back to the method and dynamic of our conceptual belief systems, which may only function within the 'complete absence' of any non-physical 'first-order' reality.

Chapter One.

In the first chapter of this thesis, I will engage a selection of philosophical and theological arguments regarding God and our conceptual reality. This selection makes absolutely no claims to be exhaustive, and assumes no hierarchical position. This will become apparent as my argument progresses.

Most of the philosophical writing pertaining to concepts of God are rational and refer to arguments such as Anselm's or Thomas Aquinas' cosmological argument, Kalam's ontological argument, or Paley's teleological argument for the existence of god.³ These hypotheses refer primarily to our observable physical reality. While some of these arguments allow for God, they do not argue that an experience of God is validation for God's existence.

Within Religious Studies there is a mixture of rational and non-rational (or theological) writing, particularly within the post-Christian context. William James⁴ has traditionally been a primary source for investigating religious experience and has been supported by the likes of Aldous Huxley⁵ to argue for the objective validity of religious experience. More recently, others such as Robert H. Sharf argue, "the term experience cannot make ostensible a *something that exists in the world*.... To put it another way, all attempts to signify "inner experience" are destined to remain "well-meaning squirms that get us nowhere."⁶

Hans Penner has outlined two primary theories of religion within modern Religious Studies: "The first holds that religion... is rational and false.... entailing prepositional attitudes whose significance is not unique, special, or distinct from ordinary, natural language, thought, and action."⁷ The "second.... claims that religion is *not* rational.... [and] neither true or false.... Nevertheless... religion is rich in symbolic significance."⁸

³ <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/rossuk/existenc.htm>

⁴ *The varieties of religious experience: a study in human nature: being the Gifford lectures on natural religion delivered at Edinburgh in 1901-1902.*

⁵ In the introduction to *The Perennial Philosophy*, Huxley quotes "'Practice," in the words of William James, "may change our theoretical horizon, and this is a twofold way" it may lead to new worlds and secure new powers. Knowledge we could never attain, remaining what we are, may be attainable in consequences of higher powers and a higher life, which we may morally achieve.'" P viii.

⁶ Sharf, Robert. H. Experience. in Taylor, Mark C. ed. *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*. P113-114.

⁷ Penner. Hans. H. "You don't read a myth for information." In Frankenberry, N. (ed.) *Radical interpretation in Religion*. p 153.

⁸ *Ibid.* p 154.

I must state now that I agree entirely with Penner's argument, which bears describing in more detail.

My position, while agreeing entirely with Penner's argument, is that his claims need more detailed analysis and critique, which is what I propose in this thesis.

Penner references Victor Turner⁹ and Maurice Bloch¹⁰ to argue that ritual language and meaning has an inverse variation to normal language and meaning.¹¹

I want to argue that this is because ritual language has no physical representation (and thus is synchronic) and no objective/ external reality; instead, having an inter-subjectively interpreted reality. For all intents and purposes it does not exist and describes nothing that exists, inverting normal language that describes 'real' existents be they 'first-order' or 'second-order'.

Penner argues "that if we want to understand the meaning of the language of religion, myth, and ritual, we must take it literally"¹² and I would add, that by necessity we must accept its 'second-order' nature. If the 'language of religion' is to be taken literally, then obviously it must be (both diachronic and) contained within language. Therefore, it must have a physical referent (hence it must be dualistic) and cannot be singular. That is, there must be some conceptual method for referring to it, and hence it can only be a contextually specific human creation.

While people may use 'second-order' conceptual creation to overlay or imbue a particular 'first-order' physical location with 'sacrality', this sacrality would not exist without the intensive focus of the conceptual creators of religious language. The only objectively comparable fact is the fact of its reality, with hagiographical details utilized purely to amplify intentional focus. God(s), martyrs and (super) heroes are easier to believe in and feel supported by if they are super-human; if they are saints then they are more than 'normally human'.

Penner uses the Theravada Buddhist tradition as an example of "an Indian production if ever there was one, with (the Buddha displaying) all the marks of a

⁹ In particular (on P 155 of this work), Turner's *The Forest of Symbols*, where ritual is defined as "prescribed formal behavior(sic) for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers." p 19.

¹⁰ (On p 155-156 of this work) Bloch's "Symbol, Song, Dance and Features of Articulation" in *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie* 15 (1974) p 56 states "we can say that logic depends on the flexibility of the features of articulation in language and if there is no such flexibility there can be no argument, no logic, no explanation, and in one sense of the word no semantics."

¹¹ Penner, Hans. H. "You don't read a myth for information." In Frankenberry, N. *Radical interpretation in Religion*. p 156

¹² Ibid. p 157.

superhuman being, comparable to what we find in the myths of Moses, Jesus, Krishna, and Muhammad.”¹³ The exact variable details are peripheral to the central mythic meaning, which may be exaggerated as required in order to create a suitably inspiring external reference/meaning, primarily to motivate physical consequences /actions. Therefore the physical reality of religious claims is conceptually unimportant, hence the observably reality is ignored, which I believes leads us into romantic interpretations of religion, dislocated from their context.

If the basis of these ‘Romantic’ interpretations of religion is non-rational¹⁴ this presents a twofold question. The first questions how religion justifies itself as mimetic of objectively non-existent happenings? While this is subjectively irrelevant, it is certainly pertinent when we remember that all religions, as functions of humanity, are firmly planted in a physical context.

Of far greater difficulty (using Christianity for a test case) is the question asked by Penner of whether:

the Bible (is) false or an “ingenious lie” from cover to cover?... Trapped by the evidence of their own scientific research, the Romantics produced a revolution whose effects persist in our time. Rather than face the stark conclusion of their own scientific practice, they placed religion outside the domain of rationality, raising it to a “higher” level of meaning, a symbolic value “beyond” truth and falsity.¹⁵

I argue that if the Romantics had faced their own conclusion (that religious claims cannot be empirically validated), religious institutions may have been allowed far greater freedom and far less bloodshed could have resulted. Without the priority of finding a recourse to absolute truth and hence a path to hegemonic power, religious institutions could have concentrated further on religious expressions as our human function, and less on the respective goals of our religious traditions. For while the Romantics solved their own problem with a short-term solution, they did nothing for the continuing investigation of religious practice and this solution may explain the continued imperialist attitude to other non-rational religious practices we continue to consume.

¹³ Ibid. p 159.

¹⁴ Here Penner refers to Jonathon Z. Smith’s *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* and Levi-Strauss’s *The Savage Mind* in order to illustrate the twofold problem the Romantics faced in formulating a religious theory. p 161-162.

¹⁵ Ibid. p 162-163.

As Penner states: “The test of religion, therefore, was not “is it true to nature?” but “is it true to itself?”.... God as creator is the original poet. The world is God’s poem. Religion and art are a second creation, a second nature, a “heterocosm.””¹⁶ If I may insert my interpretation of God here, that ‘God’ is the name for a nihilistic non-existent ‘first-order’ sacred space, then my thesis perfectly supports this theory. Our ‘second nature’ ‘heterocosm’ allows us to subjectively create and interpret the lack of ‘first-order’ divine existents, and to interpret our physical world and the forces within it.

Penner supports “the basic definition of religion that Tylor, Spiro, and Lawson, among others, have defended:”¹⁷ This contains three criteria:

Religion is a communal system of propositional attitudes and practices related to superhuman agents.

A myth is a story with a beginning, middle, and end which was or is transmitted orally about the deeds of superhuman agents.

*Ritual is a system of communal actions consisting of both verbal and non-verbal interactions with a superhuman agent or agents.*¹⁸ (Italics in quotation)

Penner concludes by stating that once we can understand the difference “between sentence meaning and sentence use... between language and speech, the synchronic and the diachronic... We will also understand that the best explanation of the meaning of religion begins by taking its sentences literally.”¹⁹

However, if one applies the Hegelian dialectic to this concept, I believe a more useable conclusion arises. If the meaning of a sentence is to be taken literally with no objective truth or falsity, then two poles arise. One, the synchronic, occurring simultaneously, illustrates the subjective nature of experience. I am arguing that this is the connection between two people, using language as a common frame of reference, distinct from any context. This is a difficult argument to make, since we cannot speak of it due to its singular nature, that is, its lack of referent with its contextual dislocation. I must reiterate that the people involved are certainly still contextual, but that the subjective connection made, is not.

¹⁶ Ibid. p 163.

¹⁷ Ibid. p 168-169.

¹⁸ Ibid. p 169.

¹⁹ Ibid. p 170.

That is, the 'subjective connection' has occurred within 'language as a common frame of reference'; yet this connection bears no relation to the content of the language. I am arguing that this connection occurs within physical 'first-order' reality and is a function of our biological selves. In an aesthetic manner, I am arguing that the connection occurs in the same way as other animals have nonverbal communication. However, since we have become dislocated from our physical context, we utilise language to accomplish this same function. As I have stated previously this is a very difficult argument to make, and as such is supposition. However this thesis proceeds from the supposition that it appears to be a valid argument, and at the very least one worth investigating in detail.

The other pole, the diachronic, occurs in a linear manner and allows a subject's history to develop within rational language; it may be empirically validated. There is not the connection (say between two people in a verbal discourse) and there may be a plethora of interpretations, all of which will be subjectively true. However, with its connection to context it may be inter-subjectively investigated.

I also argue that while the diachronic may occur within empirical constraints it contains no more truth or falsity than the synchronic. Neither can claim a superior position, yet the diachronic may be constrained and ordered for transmission to others. Any 'meanings', intentional or otherwise, are thus passed along. While one may empirically validate the existence of the message, the details of it are no more verifiable than those of the synchronic message.

That is, if we compare and contrast the synchronic and the diachronic for practical purposes; we find their meaning equally subjective. Wayne Proudfoot, suggests a perceptual judgement of subjective religiosity, arguing "that an experience is religious only if the interpreter understands it in those terms or if the agent does so herself."²⁰ It is most important to emphasise that these experiences are certainly *not* hoaxes. Rather they are the fulfilment of deep-rooted desires, for connection, for singularity or non-duality. These experiences do not rise from the why/how of these desires, but are rather an expression of them. That is, one has to express these desires in the same context as the religious experience in order to enjoy the religious experience. If

²⁰ Godlove. Terry. F. "Saving Belief." In Frankenberry, N. (ed.) *Radical interpretation in Religion*. p 20.

one is hostile to the desire it seems extremely unlikely that one will experience the expression of it.

While there can be no objective method for investigating this argument, once the dynamics of the Laing's nexus²¹ and religious belief in general are understood, it appears to be valid. Thomas Lawson argues in a similar vein, "people's intuitive knowledge of agents and their actions... undergirds religious concepts about culturally postulated superhuman agents."²² When these 'superhuman agents' are viewed through a Feuerbachian²³ filter, this 'intuitive knowledge' *has* to be humanly projected consciousness.

Cognitive scientists Justin Barrett and Frank Keil suggest, "people systematically *misremember* the properties of gods."²⁴ This activity is then transmitted (or projected) to others hence the wide variety of attributes each god may display, even within the same context. "When required to remember certain features of the stories that they had been told, the subjects misremembered the properties of the gods in an anthropomorphic direction. Such anthropomorphic representations are standard fare across religious systems."²⁵

That these transformations do not reduce the efficacy of the god(s) cannot be over emphasised. The misremembered qualities (or properties) act in the same manner as the original qualities, yet they are (in *some* cases) completely different. "Religious concepts are.... around because they are more likely to be acquired than other variants."²⁶ That is, the contextual belief creates and maintains the god(s) and all derivations of the god(s); since all such things are by nature 'second-order', the variables simply fit within the context of the expressed desires.

Cognitive anthropologist, Harvey Whitehouse, argues that frequent activation of a religious notion, or mnemonic instillation through (McCauley and Lawson's term of)

²¹ I will discuss the nexus in detail, later.

²² Lawson, Thomas. E. "On interpreting the world religiously." In Frankenberry, N. (ed.) *Radical interpretation in Religion*. p 117.

²³ Feuerbach argues that "when religion – consciousness of God – is designated as the self-consciousness of man... ignorance of it is fundamental to the peculiar nature of religion." Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*. p 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.* p 119-120.

²⁶ Functional Origins of Religious Concepts: Ontological and Strategic Selection in Evolved Minds †
Pascal Boyer: http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/bec/papers/boyer_religious_concepts.htm

'sensory pageantry' is required for it to take root in a religious system.²⁷ Whitehouse also argues that emotional stimulation is critical if one is to remember a set of religious practices.²⁸ Hence it would seem no coincidence that drugs and ecstatic ritualistic experiences such as chanting creeds, have gone hand in hand with religious practice for a very long time.

It must be emphasised that 'psychedelic agents' are by no means the only (or safest) method to experience and express religious desires. "In many cultures other methods are used: fasting (water and food); flagellation and self-torture; sensory deprivation; breathing exercises and yogic meditation; and ritual dancing and drumming."²⁹ All these have a similar effect on our function by altering our perceptive filters, and while they may not be as appealing as the immediate access provided by 'chemical stimulation', they will instead allow us to express religious desires, yet without the long term damaging effects of 'psychedelic agents'. I will engage non-chemical 'altered perception' later in this thesis with regards to socially constructed liminality and crisis.

For the present, instead of adding my voice to one of these very well supported arguments, I intend to take another perspective. The primary thrust of my argument is that, regardless of context, a certain creational dynamic is constant, when investigated with an eye for (sub)conscious religious conceptual creation. This is not a reductionist critique of the variables of the creational dynamic but rather an investigation into the method this dynamic operates in. The variables are as unimportant as the contexts. This may sound contradictory and epistemologically weak, but since our language creates our non-physical reality, this non-physical reality is (as Wittgenstein elucidates) entirely contextual.

Creational dynamic.

Therefore the philosophical foundation for this argument is essentially a reductionist version of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, with the view that:

Objects are simple (P.T.L.P. 2.02).... [and] make up the substance of the world.
That is why they cannot be composite (P.T.L.P. 2.021).... The substance of the

²⁷ Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The Essence of Christianity*. p 125.

²⁸ Ibid. p 126.

²⁹ Harner. Michael. J. (ed.) *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*. From introduction by Harner. p xii.

world *can* only determine a *form*, and not any material properties. For it is only by means of propositions that material properties are represented – only by the configuration of objects that they are produced. (P.T.L.P. 2.0231)³⁰

These simple objects have ‘no kind of composition’ and are empirically unobservable. What is more they are permanent and unchanging. The only change possible is the myriad of combinations they are able to form, combinations which may also cease to exist.³¹ Within this argument, truth becomes a faith claim, as does the argument itself; since any attempt to describe either brings us to a tautology. If our language (and consequently our reality) creates/interprets our truth through ‘simple objects that have ‘no kind of composition’’, then the only referential point we have for truth is the concept of truth itself, making it the previously mentioned tautology.

These ‘simple objects’ are our most basic elements of reality, since they are indivisible and therefore nothing can comprise them. They can ‘only determine a form’ in order to represent material reality, in the form of contingent combinations all which remain unobservable.

As Norman Malcolm states:

A possible configuration (of simple objects) is a possible state of affairs (in the world); an actual configuration is an actual state of affairs.... The *Tractatus* employs the metaphor of a space surrounding an object as an image of the object’s possible combinations with other objects. ‘Each thing, as it were, in a space of possible states of affairs. [*This space I can imagine empty, but I cannot imagine the thing without the space, omitted in Malcolm*]’ (*T*, 2.013).³²

As Wittgenstein has shown, if all objects can be reduced to ‘simple objects with no form’, then neither the synchronic or the diachronic have any preferential claim for hierarchical validation. All that has occurred within the diachronic is that a snapshot of the synchronic has been observed and connected to context, and thus to historical narrative, usually through the use of printed media.

Therefore the ‘space’ assumes prior importance to the ‘object’, even though both have ‘no kind of composition’, for we could not observe the object without the space. While the concepts and variables may be contradictory, the same dynamic applies. It

³⁰ Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Prototractatus: An early version of Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. p 47.

³¹ Malcolm, Norman. *Wittgenstein: A religious point of view?* p 29.

³² *Ibid.* p 30.

is the interpretation (of our physical context or previously created concepts), and the subsequent creation and projection of our new non-physical created concepts that is in action here. When this argument is applied to monotheistic religious truth, we can see the maintenance of the respective institutions. I will argue that the only truth we may experience is contained within the physical laws of cause and effect and will demonstrate that our entire conceptual reality (including our inter-subjective interpretations of objectivity and truth) is contextually created within our language.

It must be noted at the outset that the theological and revelatory claims of various religions are outside the context of this thesis. There is no objective method to determining the validity of competing claims, and as will become clear, if the subject(s)/object(s) of such claims bear any reality; it is impossible to speak of them. That is, as I will illustrate further, for a claim to be revelatory, it must refer to God or the divine.

Yet, in order for that to occur, we require a real world reference for language to use in explanation. This therefore relegates God to our dualistic world, and it is no longer divine if the language is used in a literal manner and expectation. Yet I am not negating the existence of God. I am merely arguing that if such an entity exists, we may not speak of it. With this in mind, I will investigate some monotheistic claims, in an attempt to show the similarity these theological claims bear to the institutional structure(s) making them. I will concentrate on the practical method of religious belief and illustrate what I argue is an underlying dynamic.

Charles Guigon helps in this task, with an understanding of what Heidegger calls "*the hermeneutic circle*". Guigon argues:

it is only because life has this circular structure that things can show up as counting in determinate ways.... The claim is that truth as correspondence, through which entities are "un-covered" or "dis-covered" in specific ways, is made possible by a prior "dis-closing" that opens a space in which anything at all can show up as such and such.³³

So if we treat the 'objects' or 'truths' as elements of language (since language allows us to discuss our individual realities), then without the 'space' they would be unable to form any 'configurations', or have the potential to form future 'configurations'.

³³ Guigon, Charles. "Truth in Interpretation: A Hermeneutic Approach." in Krausz, Michael. (ed.) *Is there a single right interpretation?* p 270.

Therefore, these objects with 'no kind of composition' engage in possible or actual configurations respectively, within a metaphorical space to allow for further possibilities. Consequently the 'objects', the possible or actual configurations, and the 'space' are all unobservable. This unobservable 'space' is the necessary condition for the reality of all unobservable 'objects' within it.

Norman Malcolm furthers this argument by stating that with "the conception of *all* objects, we are conceiving of the *totality* of the possible states of affairs... 'the form of the world'. It consists of every possible state of affairs.... The possibilities that *exist* are facts. The possibilities that do not exist are still possibilities."³⁴ Therefore our facts bear 'no kind of composition' and are unobservable. Consequently, I am arguing that 'the form of the world', being the '*totality* of the possible states of affairs', also bears 'no kind of composition' and is unobservable.

Richard Rorty (in subscribing to a form of Prometheanism³⁵) appears to support this from a slightly different perspective, arguing, "that there are lots of descriptions of the world. Some more useful and some less, but none that match the way the world independently is."³⁶ Obviously Rorty and Wittgenstein are speaking of two conceptually separate worlds, a difference that is worth expanding. Rorty's world is the physical context in which we exist. It is impossible to 'independently describe' this world; the best we can do is to attempt a 'useful description'.

So, although we physically exist in this world, we can only glimpse its (and consequently our) existence independently of our conceptual framework. However, this (and our) physical existence would still occur with or without the reality of Wittgenstein's world. The only difference is that we would have no means to discuss it, and arguably no understanding of it since we would be within the context, stripped of our self-reflexivity, due to our lack of language.

Wittgenstein speaks of unobservable 'objects' combining in actual or possible possibilities, with 'the form of the world' being the '*totality* of the possible states of affairs'. Therefore the world of Wittgenstein's reality is contained completely within

³⁴ Malcolm, Norman. *Wittgenstein: A religious point of view?* p 30.

³⁵ Rorty claims that "Prometheanism is not a matter of claiming superior causal power. It is a claim about authority rather than about power – namely, the claim that the non-human things that have power over us (vultures, comets, and the like) have no authority over us." in Krausz, Michael. (ed.) *Is there a single right interpretation?* p 131.

³⁶ Rorty, Richard. "Response to Kate Soper." In Krausz, Michael (ed.) *Is there a single right interpretation?* p 131.

language, with anything outside of this context being both non-existent and unreal since it is not possible to form a possible or actual possibility.

Investigative categories for the 'world'.

Arguments regarding the nature of the world split people into two broad categories, with the structuralists/materialists and behaviourists on one side and the holists, dualists and holistic dualists on the other. Acknowledging the importance of accurate terminology (in order to understand the exact specifications of each position), a quick review of each definition is appropriate.

Behaviourism has three primary claims, which it perceives as offering the complete truth.³⁷ Following the discipline of psychology (interpreted in this context as the science of behaviour and not the mind), behaviourists argue that “(t)he sources of behaviour are external (in the environment), not internal (in the mind).

In the course of theory development in psychology, if, somehow, mental terms or concepts are deployed in describing or explaining behavior [sic] then either (a) these terms or concepts should be eliminated and replaced by behavioral [sic] terms, or (b) they can and should be translated or paraphrased into behavioral [sic] concepts.”³⁸

Materialism offers a rather blunt view as to what actually exists.³⁹ It should be noted here, that I base my ‘first-order’ reality squarely within the materialist context.

Basically “materialism is an *ontological*, or a *metaphysical* view.... the view that everything that exists is extended in space, that nothing nonspatial exists.”⁴⁰ While materialism allows for temporal extension, [that is, for something to exist over time but not in space] it simultaneously acknowledges that when speaking of “*physical* space or *physical* extension.... the threat of conceptual circularity is transparent.”⁴¹

Therefore, even if a materialist would strongly oppose me, materialism fits my argument perfectly within the context of this thesis. There is one proviso within this position; namely that, I will exchange the term “existence” for the term “reality” when speaking of persistence over time while not in space.

³⁷ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/behaviorism/>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ <http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~philos/MindDict/materialism.html>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

At this point I should make clear I also argue that the holist, dualist and holistic dualist positions fit within the context of my 'second-order' reality, even though they too may strongly oppose this assertion. I will clarify this argument with the conclusion of these positions.

A comparison should be made here to Descartes' distinction between physical body (that he suggested should be studied by the methods of natural science) and the mind/soul (to be studied by introspection).⁴² The two subsequent major philosophical schools; structuralists and behaviourists, respectively believed that consciousness should be analysed into basic elements, or attributed exclusively to behaviour, denying the mind completely.⁴³

If the Hegelian dialectic is applied once again, we have the structuralists (analysing the basic elements of mind) and the behaviourists (denying the mind completely and attributing consciousness to behaviour) in opposing positions. If we apply the 'first-order' and 'second-order' classification, we have two dimensions to this synthesis.

'First-order' reality must favour the behaviourists, for there can be no empirical validation of mind. We can measure biochemical variations in the brain, but are no more able to quantify consciousness than we are able to quantify god(s).

'Second-order' reality obviously favours the structuralists, but I am arguing that it is a mistake to attempt to quantify these qualities. Aspects of mind may be investigated through introspection, as Descartes suggested and certain patterns are sure to emerge, yet these patterns are still empirically non-existent.

Holism is argued as the thesis that the state of the whole is more than the sum of its parts, while also being inseparable from its parts.⁴⁴ Therefore the relation between the whole and its parts needs clarification.

The Holist Philosopher, Keith Ward attempts to clarify this, with his concept of a person as analogous to a soul that "has the ability to 'stand outside physical processes that generate it, and of which it is a part.'"⁴⁵ Ward adds, "it is only when

⁴² Capra, Fritjof. *The turning point: science, society, and the rising culture*. p 166.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/physics-holism/>

⁴⁵ Ward, Keith. *In Defence of the Soul*. p 31 Quoting Ward 142ff.

perception is conceived of in terms of a purely mental or intellectual phenomena, that the whole of the human being's conscious or mental life comes to be seen as possibly played out within some inner sphere."⁴⁶

If this is the case, then it must strengthen my argument that we create meaning from our perceptual interpretations. I argue further that our subjective experiences of the deit(y)(ies) are created within this internal sphere in symbiosis (or modified Hegelian dialectic) with our external contextual reality. Yet even as our experience occurs within this internal sphere, it projects out into conceptual reality and onto physical reality. While this subjective experience may be either synchronic or diachronic, that is, singular or dualistic, it is only the diachronic experience that we may speak of. Therefore, within the context of this thesis, language claims contain the whole of our observable conceptual experience. The meaning we create in this experience is subjectively real, and others may experience this meaning consciously or subconsciously.

Ward suggests adopting a phenomenological approach to the soul⁴⁷ since it acts in processes that transcend strict physical realisation. This concept contradicts the behaviourists, who "deny the idea that there is something inner, behind behaviour, since, for them, the mind lies in behaviour."⁴⁸

Dualism separates our internal and external spheres, and provides a context for the discussion of observations and claims. Dualism (at least within Abrahamic Monotheism) also allows a hierarchical schema with God at the peak, and us beneath. It is important to note that dualistic claims are no more valid than any other categorical claims, for even if we are able to separate inner and outer spheres, our validity is achieved interdependently within our internal spheres. Thus our value judgements can still be flawed.

Gillian McCulloch gives an example of 'flawed judgements' by describing the 'true' created contexts (and the associated 'first-order' physical consequences) that occurred because Aquinas followed Aristotle's 'faulty biology' (in thinking females were defective males⁴⁹). Consequently Aquinas reasoned that the women's

⁴⁶ Ibid. p 33.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p 34.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ McCulloch, Gillian. *The deconstruction of dualism in theology*. p 17.

'defective' natures caused defective reasoning. Therefore "the continued association of matter with impurity, chaos and disorder meant that Aristotle devalued the body in relation to the mind, while Plato did likewise in relation to the soul."⁵⁰ Consequently Plato's conceptual devaluation of the physical body required women to live as second-class citizens due to their procreative abilities and their connection to physical reality instead of the 'superior' spiritual reality.

The subsequent "biblical theme expressing female submission to male headship"⁵¹ dogmatised this concept and paved the way for a patriarchal social structure. While recognising the obvious resultant social problems from this phenomenon, McCulloch argues, "dualism does not necessarily entail patriarchy.... [and] need not function oppressively... [or] lend support to a sexist, racist, or anti-environmental ideology."⁵²

While this is obviously correct, the fact remains that while dualism 'need not' act in this way, in many cases it 'does' function oppressively. My primary argument is against the creation of a 'second-order' external deity to allow and in many cases require a fundamentalist reading of this dualism. These dogmatised concepts are given as 'truth' when they are nothing more than fictions.

An example of this dualism in action occurs within "(e)soteric cosmologies that reckon with a hierarchically structured set of spiritually evolved beings.... If a God is invoked, he/she/it is often presented in the most abstract of terms, perhaps as the Ground of Being.... Between this shadowy deity and humans stand a variety of beings."⁵³ For the purposes of my argument, the 'variety of beings' is a collective function of us, forming a pluralistic interdependent universe, within the dualistic investigative framework. This is borne out if we return to a Feuerbachian perspective.

I am arguing that we are the shadowy deity, the projected subconscious reflection of ourselves (or aspects of ourselves) as 'Other'. The 'variety of beings' reflects our qualitative desires, and are worshipped and idolised as paths to, and characteristics of this 'Other'. Joining with the (projected) 'Other' dislocates us from our context, as aspects of our conscious become connected to our projection.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid. p 21.

⁵² Ibid. p 22.

⁵³ Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p 14.

This 'joining with our projected 'Other'' has historically implied a "Gnosticizing conception of the self."⁵⁴ It is common to posit that we have within us a spiritual or higher self... sharply distinguished from the ego... our personality whilst in a state of ordinary consciousness."⁵⁵ Traditionally (surrounding Plotinus, Clement and Origen) Gnosis allowed a privileged few to access 'direct spiritual understanding', "thereby allowing access to the inner meaning of a religious tradition...in which material existence is condemned as irredeemably dark and evil in contrast to a spiritual realm of purity, goodness and light. *Gnosis*, then, is the means to release oneself from the bondage of matter to a state of beatitude."⁵⁶

If one accepts dualism (and therefore Gnosis) as a function of reasoning, then surely reasoning must have created dualism. Fontaine outlines two aspects of dualism, horizontal and vertical, within the context of gnosis:

(M)etaphysical dualism... is essentially different from and opposed to the nether, material world, the cosmos. This is horizontal dualism. Next there is anthropological dualism, one between the elect, the chosen, the redeemed, the Gnostic pneumatics, and the hylics, the matter people, who will not be saved, this is a vertical dualism, but only present in the nether world.⁵⁷

While these forms of dualism are useful tools for investigating (both existent and non-existent) conceptual frameworks, it should not be forgotten that the entire context is fictional as are the debates on its existence. Since language contains our whole conceptual reality, and language is dualistic (that is, we need a common frame of reference of two or more examples to discuss theories, or else we end up with a collection of un-provable tautologies,) any claims outside our dualistic context are non-sense.

Yet dualistic claims are still observable projections and nothing more. The only reality these dualisms enjoy is that which we provide. Once we grasp the dualistic "fact that in practice icons are... found with indices or symbols.... [we see that] what is

⁵⁴ It is footnoted that *Gnosticizing* is not to be understood as a synonym of *Gnostic*, in the historic sense... but in a more general meaning, as a complex of ideas...that flourished around the Eastern Mediterranean during the first centuries CE.

⁵⁵ Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p 55.

⁵⁶ Batchelor, Stephen. *The Awakening Of The West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture*. p 28.

⁵⁷ Fontaine, P.F.M. *The light and the dark : a cultural history of dualism*. p xxxv-xxvi.

important semiotically is the manner in which the sign functions for the interpreter.”⁵⁸ Therefore the interpreter must interpret/create a semiotic function in their internal universe, which is inter-subjectively interpreted/created, reproduced and/or imagined within communal contexts. Thus dualism provides the context for this inter-subjective validation, which is still ‘second-order’.

For without this ‘semiotic function’, the sign has no meaning, and simply “is”. There appear to be two methods for assigning meaning to a sign. The first, “(r)eproductive imagination might be correlated with “imitation,” while productive imagination might be linked with “creativity.””⁵⁹

Holistic Dualism argues that since the sign cannot be separated into its functions, (being the ‘signifying’ and ‘signified’ aspects,) it has a dual or complementary nature.⁶⁰ If we are to understand the symbolic function of the sign, then we need more symbols with ‘inseparable functions’ in order to understand it.⁶¹ The problem here is that this also arguably sets us up for a continuous cycle of tautology. That is, we cannot delve into any the nature of the sign in any great depth, and must instead rely on other signs for comparison. This problem means that we can never investigate any of our signs, (even the ones used for comparison), which leaves us with the previously mentioned tautology. However, “we can [still] understand that a *concept* is in fact a highly *dynamic* and *holistic* property.”⁶²

The dualistic debate therefore centres on the need for some type of ‘bridge’ between the internal and external world, which is required to investigate the inseparable nature of what is perceived as separated aspects of the sign, or in this case the human. “While in dualism this divide is held to be an ontological fact, in materialism it is a methodological fact.”⁶³

The need for this ‘bridge between the inner and outer world’ shows the limited nature of our language and thus our reality. It must be reiterated that only our understanding of reality is limited, for (even if much of our reality is our projected intention) this reality occurs with or without our understanding. The lack of agreement within this

⁵⁸ Ibid. p 53.

⁵⁹ Desmond, William. *Art, Origins, Otherness*. p 67.

⁶⁰ <http://nats-www.informatik.uni-hamburg.de/~joseph/dis/dis/node31.html>

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ McCulloch, Gillian. *The deconstruction of dualism in theology*. p 29.

debate illustrates our perspectival interpretation of our context and ourselves. The primary problem appears to be the importance of existent variables for epistemological analysis. However, if, as the Holist argues ‘the whole is more than the sum of its parts’ then this ‘wholeness’ is comprised of both existent and non-existent variables (from a ‘first-order’ perspective).

Therefore, by applying a modified version of the Hegelian dialectic to synthesise a workable conceptual schema, I suggest a thesis comprising of behaviourism and materialism/structuralism and an antithesis of dualism, holism and holistic dualism. The thesis (of behaviourism and materialism/structuralism) argues that only physical entities exist and that all behavioural sources lie in the external world. The antithesis (of dualism, holism and holistic dualism) argues that the whole is more than the sum of its parts and those concepts bear a dualistic relationship between signifier and signified⁶⁴. Therefore the synthesis of these two positions must combine to form a new position and I am arguing for my proposed synthesis to achieve this while simultaneously leaving each position intact.

The materialistic argument that only physical things exist is perfectly functional when one considers that non-physical things do not exist. Things do not need to exist in order to be real, as we are able to (collectively) project our consciousness (or conceptual reality) into the space left by the absence of physical existence. Emily Brady follows a ‘loosely Kantian’ model to support this argument and suggests, “the aesthetic response to natural objects begins with perceptual exploration of the aesthetic object.”⁶⁵ Without our ‘perceptual exploration’, the ‘aesthetic object’ would simply “be”, thus it is our projection of consciousness for the purposes of interpretation that allows this aesthetic appreciation and aesthetic reality. This “perceptual attentiveness is ultimately linked to imagination.... [which] encourages a variety of possible perceptual perspectives on a single natural object or a set of objects, thereby expanding and enriching appreciation.”⁶⁶

To distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate imaginings, Brady “suggest[s] two guidelines: the first is disinterestedness; while the second is characterized by comparing imagination to a virtue.... Disinterestedness checks any thoughts or

⁶⁴ I will advance the relationship between signifier and signified elsewhere in this thesis. Suffice it to say that I am arguing against the existence of such a relationship but for the reality of it.

⁶⁵ Brady, Emily. “Imagination and the Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature.” In Carlson, Allen & Berleant, Arnold. (eds.) *The aesthetics of natural environments*. p 160.

⁶⁶ Ibid. p 161.

imaginings that stray from an aesthetic focus.... “Imagining well” involves spotting aesthetic potential, having a sense of what to look for, and knowing when to clip the wings of imagination.”⁶⁷

If this argument is applied to a religious context, it illustrates my argument for the non-existence of divinity, or more precisely for divine non-existence. Without this ‘divine non-existence’ (since our religious constructs do not exist) these religious constructs would have no reality, for they require space if we are to project their conceptual reality.

The conceptual spatial requirements of religious belief are also apparent within the field of aesthetics, since “(n)o set of criteria can adequately spell out what makes for good art”⁶⁸. This same method is used by religious texts to direct “imagining well” to the contextually correct location and to ‘clip the wings of imagination’ when they stray too far from it. This focus is important and “it is no accident that religious zealots often destroy the worship places of their opponents.”⁶⁹

Yet tradition initiated and maintains this dependence, through the appropriate primary texts with humanity following it (within our respective contexts). The obvious alternative I am suggesting is an internally initiated experience contained within the ‘absence of everything’. This alternative dynamic operates following the same method, but people are consciously engaged in the practice instead of following a fictional ‘truth’. As we evolve, we realise that what we took as objective truth is purely subjective fiction. We realise that it is only first order a-theism that allows us to be gods and goddesses, enjoying ‘second-order’ powers of creation.

Brent Plate illustrates this “intimate entanglement between ‘function’ and structure”⁷⁰ with his investigation into the aesthetics of Walter Benjamin, who argues that:

(p)eople across various cultures may share the physiological capacity for vision....In other words, aesthetics are... always a combination of the *aesthetica naturalis* and the *aesthetica artificialis*, the senses and their

⁶⁷ Ibid. p 165-166.

⁶⁸ Brown, Frank, Burch. *Good taste, bad taste, and Christian taste: aesthetics in religious life*. p 157.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p 211.

⁷⁰ Plate, Brent. *Walter Benjamin, religion and aesthetics: rethinking religion through the arts*. p 137.

cultural construction, including (perhaps especially so) the role that art and architecture play.⁷¹

The only reducible constant is the occurrence of meaning; the variables are as diverse as their contextual religions and cultures. A practical example of this ‘constructed contextual belief’ is the science of cartography, where “(w)e avoid the literal in making maps because to do otherwise would not be to *represent* at all but to *replicate*.”⁷² If replication were used in map reading, then we could not overlay any of our contextual data. This represented data achieves verification “by *fitting* representations to reality.”⁷³

Consequently there may be (with further exploration/ settlement) a wide variety of maps (showing details from geology to weather and even traffic volume) for the same geographical location depending on the requirements of the user, which are validated accordingly.⁷⁴ This contextual validation affirms my reasoning for separating reality into the two categories, ‘first-order’ and ‘second-order’, which I will outline with a return to Rorty and Wittgenstein.

‘First-order’ and ‘second-order’ reality.

The world Richard Rorty speaks of is ‘first order’ since it contains all of our ‘natural’⁷⁵ physical reality, including our physical selves and our empirically observable existence, independent of ourselves. Yet we are part of this physical context, even if we may only glimpse the true nature of this context and consequently our true nature. The only method we have of collectively investigating this reality is (‘second-order’) language; therefore language contains our collective observable reality. If something cannot be described, then it does not exist from our perspective, which is all we have to work with: “Inquiry and justification are activities we language-users cannot help engaging in; we do not need a goal called ‘truth’ to help us do so, any more than our digestive organs need a goal called health to set them to work.”⁷⁶

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Gaddis, John Lewis. *The landscape of history: how historians map the past*. p 32.

⁷³ Ibid. p 34.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ I am not implying any sacrality to the term natural, but using it purely to illustrate that it was not created by humanity. Humanly created physical objects are both ‘first-order’ and ‘second-order’, since the materials used in construction are ‘first-order’, but the completed object is ‘second-order’ owing to its human input.

⁷⁶ Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and social hope*. p 37-38.

Any truth will be no more than a conceptual by-product of our existence, for if all our non-physical concepts are created fictions (taken as fact) then so is 'truth'. Rorty argued that we cannot speak of a "connection between justification and truth"⁷⁷ since *"the only point in contrasting the true with the merely justified is to contrast a possible future with the actual present."*(Italics in quote)⁷⁸ Even when this action is undertaken it is still provisional truth, yet is given as permanent truth by those who espouse it. Our whole existence is a fluidly created fiction, with the only (non-physical) meaning existing within a 'second-order' context.

The world Wittgenstein refers to is 'second-order' and contains our conceptual creations, hence it is a purely human realm⁷⁹ utilising our self-reflexivity to shape our world. To clarify, I am arguing that all non-physical 'second-order' reality is entirely dependent on human consciousness, and that all physical 'first-order' consequences (such as our technological⁸⁰ achievements,) are interdependent on us due to the reciprocal relationship between the physical nature of the raw materials that our concepts require, and our concepts. That is, these physical consequences of our creative intention (or 'first-order' consequences of our 'second-order' reality) have their own physical existence, but their function is interdependent on us.

If we were not self-reflexive, there would be no physical consequences of our creative intention. To clarify, I mean by this that while we can argue that our base physical desires are an expression of our intention, they, like us, occur within our physical context. That is, they are not framed in ignorance or opposition to our physical context.

As I have argued, (following Wittgenstein) our language determines our reality and since all religious entities (or ultimate truths) are maintained within (oral or textual) language; they are human creations, responses in an effort to fulfil the human desire for singularity. For example, if we play a semantic game, we can see that our reality is dislocated from our physical context, and only maintained within our language.

⁷⁷ Ibid. p 38-39.

⁷⁸ Ibid. p 39.

⁷⁹ While it is possible other inhabitants of this or other worlds may possess self-reflexivity it is irrelevant to this thesis. My interest is religious praxis and the creation of our gods, societies and cultures.

⁸⁰ I define technology as any means by which humanity has altered our context through the use of tools, no matter how rudimentary they may be. The scale of this use is unimportant, for once the practice is implemented we appear to evolve exponentially, as history has shown.

Laing's semantic example accurately outlines this argument. "The sky is blue and blue is *not* sky"⁸¹, allows for existence and non-existence to both enjoy linguistic reality. "'Is' describes ('first-order') 'Being' and 'non-Being', or existence and non-existence perfectly. While 'is' is the qualifying necessity for all existents (and non-existents), none of these existents can independently qualify 'is'."⁸²

Yet obviously, as Rorty would (seem) to argue, both the sky and the colour blue exist independently of us, and we may only interpret them through language, forming our referential base. Semantically then, "'(i)s' as no-thing, is that whereby all things are. And the condition of the possibility of anything being at all, is that it is in relation to that which it is not."⁸³ The interconnectedness of existents and non-existents (both independent of and dependent on our language) is important. Without "that which it is not" we could not project "that which it is", even though this "is" remains simply a human projection.

So, without "'is' as no-thing" there could be no relationality between 'first-order' physical existents, and no relationality between 'second-order' non-existents. In a religious sense then, "(t)he experience of being the actual medium for a continual process of creation takes one... into the very mystery of that continual flip of nonbeing into being...when one makes the transition from being afraid of nothing, to the realisation that there is nothing to fear."⁸⁴

The only possible non-physical aspects of fear are created in the mind of the experiencer and projected into "that which it is not"; therefore while these aspects are real they do not exist. There can be nothing (non-physical and) external to fear and once people become aware of this; they must consciously choose the emotional state of fear if they are to 'be' scared. This seems an unlikely and non-productive choice. The same dynamic operates whether the contextual hegemony is one of realisation or one of fear. "We seem to need to share a communal meaning to human existence, to give with others a common sense to the world, to maintain a *consensus*."⁸⁵

⁸¹ Laing, R.D. *The politics of experience*. p 35-36.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p 36.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p 65.

While it is pointless to argue against an external God, since it is impossible to support the argument within language and thus reach a '*consensus*', what is possible is to show that all qualities attached to religious traditions are human creations. I am arguing that it is only with the 'complete absence' of any quantitative divinity that this is possible. While this is a nihilistic concept, I argue that this absence equals a form of negative divinity. That is, the absence of any divinity allows our conceptual creations.

Gianni Vattimo argues that "the [metaphysical] non-existence of God.... in no sense gives way to a more profound and reliable truth; it gives way to a play of interpretations that is presented philosophically, in its turn, as no more than an interpretation."⁸⁶ That this 'interpretation' is accepted as 'truth' is precisely my point. We condition ourselves (through our projected external referencing) to believe and consequently accept these 'fables' and various religious and philosophical interpretations as 'truth'. Effectively we are projecting our contextual conceptual myths into the 'complete absence', to self-express our desires as a function of our selves. This self-expression is realised through our conceptual projections and observed through the physical consequences of these projections.

Nietzsche, who supported this idea argued "that what we call the 'world' is not a reality which is independent of our own historical schemes, but rather a game of interpretations.... because the very limits between the subject and object have become opaque."⁸⁷ Further to this, I am arguing that while the 'world' is located within our historical context, what most of us perceive of, as 'our world', is completely dislocated. I will pursue this argument in detail in the section on the information stream. Consequently my argument is for a reality that is externally referenced (both micro and macro cosmically); i.e. individually, provincially, ethnically⁸⁸, societally, glocally or globally (with any amount of conceptual interdependence).

This externally referenced reality is then internally justified⁸⁹ interdependently of the communal context (through contextual language). Edwina Taborsky expands this argument by "understanding that life is experienced within two realities, that of the

⁸⁶ Vattimo, Gianni. *Beyond Interpretation*. p 7.

⁸⁷ Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. p 2. (Introduction by Luca D'Isanto.)

⁸⁸ This may be either existentially biologically or non-existentially conceptually. For the purposes of this argument there is no difference.

⁸⁹ I must reiterate again that there is very little internal justification within our society, owing our schizophrenic ontology.

individual and that of the group.... Individual reality (IR)...exists only in current time.... [and] (g)roup reality (GR)...is made up of the pattern of social norms.”⁹⁰ Therefore, reality is individually interpreted/created and communally validated, to a varying degree. That is, some contexts allow rather less individual interpretation/creation than others.

This argument, which relies on the philosophies of Thomas Aquinas and Charles Peirce suggests that from our human perspective, “‘things’ are the immediate sensual experience, ‘intellect’ or ‘passive intellect’ is the individual conception, and ‘sense’ or ‘active/agent intellect’ is that group logic that moves between the two and unites them.”⁹¹ Richard Rorty appears to agree with this level of interdependence and argues that “a believer who is (unlike a child or a psychotic) a fully fledged member of her community will always be able to produce justification for most of her beliefs, justification which meets the demands of that community.”⁹² If we approach theological claims with this in mind, we see that certain details appear important. As Martin Jaffe illustrates:

elective monotheism[‘s]... structure[s] must be distilled from the mythic narratives and liturgical life that shape these communities’ historical identities.... The unique Creator of the world discloses his love and will in a unique moment of self-disclosure to a unique human community.... [and] the community embarks on a collective endeavor [sic] of obedient response to the Creator’s love and will.⁹³

Since we have to distil monotheistic structure from “mythic narratives and liturgical life” (even if Jaffe is not saying the self-disclosure itself is mythic), this ‘self-disclosure’ effectively becomes ours (making us unique) within the mythic context of revelation, since (as both the theologian and the philosopher must agree) no language can contain such a disclosure. Therefore all historical revelation becomes the community’s (contextually unique) responses to this mythic ‘self-disclosure’ (which serves to fulfil our desire for ‘self-disclosure’), hence the respective institution maintains its (unique) position, by allowing the continued ‘transmission’ of ‘revelation’ only by the reading of its specific historical responses (or desire fulfilment).

⁹⁰ Taborsky, Edwina. *The Textual Society*. p 3.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* p 5.

⁹² Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and social hope*. p 37.

⁹³ Jaffe, Martin. S. “One God, One Revelation, One People: On the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Dec 2001. Vol. 69. No 4. p 760.

In many cases (such as monotheistic truth) these may be oppositional conceptual belief systems. For example the God of Christianity and the God of Islam are both claimed to be the one true God. Within Christianity, God created the heavens and the earth, sending his only Son (fully human and fully divine) to save humanity. Within Islam there is “no God but God”⁹⁴, and all non-believers are in error. While these belief systems are oppositional in nature the manner in which these systems evolve and act is constant, that is, they follow the same dynamic. It is only the variables that alter.

I must reinforce that it is not the conceptual systems that are constant, but rather the fact that these systems continue to be real, through the inverted ‘self disclosure’ (or an inverted kenosis⁹⁵) creating a construct to satisfy the contextual belief of the participants. Even if some monotheism’s (such as Islam) subjectively oppose this claim, it is still my subjective argument for the dynamic of religious belief. A return to Jaffe illustrates this further. “Cosmologically, the Creator’s self-disclosure spans the distance between heaven, the abode of the Creator, and earth, the domain of his created beings. It unites, that is, various cosmological domains into a single order under the Creator”⁹⁶ supporting the hierarchical structuring of the monotheistic framework.

By attaching categorical qualities to the Creator and physical qualities to spiritual locations, the ‘unique community’ creates the concept of distance between heaven (the abode of the Creator) and earth (the abode of the ‘unique community’). This hierarchical structure is replicated as the ‘unique community’, which assumes a hierarchical position in relation to the other communities, while certain members of the ‘unique community’ assume a ‘hierarchically unique position’, namely as clergy.

One possible consequence of the removal of hierarchical power structures is the “(l)iberation from domination....by rich over poor, powerful over weak... both within society and between nations.”⁹⁷ That this hierarchical attitude is finally being exposed is gratifying. However, like any *tabula rasa* the opportunity is now even more present for hierarchical manipulation, since there is no fixed record of domination. Thus

⁹⁴ The witness to faith (*shahada*) consists of repeating the two phrases “There is no god but God,” *la ilah illa ‘llah*, and “Muhammad is the messenger of God,” *Muhammad rasul Allah*. Rippin, Andrew. *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices. Second edition.* p 98.

⁹⁵ I will expand this term later in this thesis.

⁹⁶ Jaffe, Martin. S. “One God, One Revelation, One People: On the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion.* Dec 2001. Vol. 69. No 4. p 761.

⁹⁷ Harman, Willis W. *Creative work: the constructive role of business in transforming society.* p 75.

unless we are aware of the dynamic, we may not notice the manipulation of the variables.

The (very generalised) current societal structure defines the mainstream's domination over marginalized elements (through either ethnicity/culture or religion), either within or between societies as 'normal'.⁹⁸ Willis Harman denoted two areas of change,⁹⁹ namely in our perception of the natural world (or 'first-order' physical reality) and within the ('second-order') societally or institutionally 'normal' motivation for us to pollute and destroy this natural habitat.¹⁰⁰ This is another prime example of 'second-order' ignorance of 'first-order' consequences. The question remains whether intuitive awareness of the hierarchical fictions that condition our lives is enough; since awareness and acting out of awareness to alter these fictions are two different things.

Harman also looks to human community as a context for practical contributory democracy.¹⁰¹ People can no longer live on 'autopilot' and subconsciously externally reference their conceptual lives. They must become aware and responsible for their actions and beliefs, if this is to occur. Thus "intentional living"¹⁰² is of paramount importance, illustrating "the vast potential that our humanity gives us as a birthright – an emphasis which behaviorism(sp), with its more positivistic outlook, tended to ignore."¹⁰³

If we become aware of our conditioning (allowing us the choice of either acceptance or negation) we become aware of our theoretical concepts and the associated consequences. Therefore my argument has a partial grounding in existentialism ("embracing the view that the suffering individual must create meaning in an unknowable, chaotic, and seemingly empty universe"¹⁰⁴), which I use to argue that while not everyone is able to undertake this practice, those that are should provide impetus for those that are not.

Harman infers that historical authority has always been based on "a basically negative view of human nature which assumes that for the stability of society,

⁹⁸ Ibid. p 76.

⁹⁹ Ibid. p 77.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p 83.

¹⁰² Ibid. p 84.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p 85.

¹⁰⁴ <http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/LIT/chap10.htm>

humans need to be controlled by some sort of external authorities.”¹⁰⁵ These external authorities may be installed hierarchically within society, may have an imperialistically hierarchical dominance over other societies, or may be externally religious authoritarian displays of some deific nature. Regardless of the variables within the method, the same dynamic applies.

The acquiescence of the mainstream to those in power (either within society or between societies) has long been evident.¹⁰⁶ While Willis uses ‘fair and ethical’ as a proviso to such subsistence, I would add the word “seem.” If every one of us is acting in some manner and our external (collective) reality differs from our internal reality, I argue that in this hierarchical society the primary attitude is one of gaining and maintaining power. Therefore the ‘mainstream’ is conditioned with suitable propaganda in order to achieve those goals. If this is applied to a religious context, then the clergy assume this hierarchically unique position.

With the removal of ‘this hierarchically unique’ institution, the primary text assumes this position, and the replication acts to strengthen the respective institution through history. That is, the power structure remains, but is referenced against a text, (which can be contextually interpreted in a variety of ways) maintaining the historical continuity of the institution(s). The knowledge that each community may only respond to self-disclosure allows us to see the hierarchical framework as simply a response to our desire for singularity and therefore the unique community as an amplified response. Regardless of whether divine ‘self-disclosure’ actually occurs, language can not describe such a disclosure and thus all revelatory claims are either mythic interpretations or pure creations, depending on the reality or non-reality of the Creator as such. While it may be argued that language may limit ‘self-disclosure’, I must disagree with this position.

To limit something language must occupy the same context, which I have argued against with my argument for our inability to speak of singularity. Therefore, within the context of my argument, all monotheism is effectively humanism, since it is the history of human responses at a certain point in time.

While this thesis is both reductionist and non-reductionist it is not arguing for a cross-cultural religious experience. There is very little if any cross-cultural common ground

¹⁰⁵ Harman, Willis W. *Creative work: the constructive role of business in transforming society*. p 89.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* p 128.

between the myriad of religious and/or mystical experiences present today. Rather, what occur are syncretic responses and readings to suit the claim being made. Instead of arguing for a reductive religious experience, I locate my position within the fact¹⁰⁷ of experience, however varied it may be.

Contextual religious claims.

A return to Olav Hammer's study on 'post enlightenment esotericism' is important here, as he deduced the emergence of four categorical approaches when investigating "religious traditions that one does not share".¹⁰⁸ The first is the sceptical approach, the second is the theological, the third is hermeneutical and the fourth is analytic.¹⁰⁹ This is because any real analysis is "entirely dependent on social and historical context. Their claims are human construction and it is therefore relevant to ask how, by whom and for what purposes these claims are produced, legitimized, disseminated and reproduced."¹¹⁰ This is supported with the recurring theme in New Age texts of the existence of a core or true Self. The post modern appropriation of shamanic techniques and the creation of pastiche¹¹¹ interpretations of Indian philosophies are all part of the attempt to bring out that core self behind the veil of the false ego.¹¹² This fits with my argument as another example of 'second-order' creation.

Hammer notes that "it [is] feasible to disembed elements of Indian, Chinese or Native American origin"¹¹³ within the information stream of modern mass communication, "and reembed them in a Western context, thereby giving these elements new functions and new meanings."¹¹⁴ Where previously this action would be limited to neighbouring localities, it is now possible to transpose these concepts into any context.

One 18th Century case study outlining the fluidic modification that practices undergo with contextual shifts is Mesmerism and the changes that it underwent with its transmission to America. Franz Mesmer, an Austrian physician claimed in the 1770's that every illness "is ultimately caused by an imbalance in the animal magnetism that flows through the human body."¹¹⁵ Mesmer's healing rituals focussed on provoking an interpretation of a crisis, which

¹⁰⁷ As I will illustrate later, I take all non-physical 'facts' to be fictional from a 'first-order' perspective.

¹⁰⁸ Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p xiv.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. p xv.

¹¹¹ I will deal with the pastiche nature of society in detail in chapter 3.

¹¹² Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p 11.

¹¹³ Ibid. p 13.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p 56-57.

was then followed by a cure. The success of this practice earned him a great deal of renown together with many disciples, through which the tradition began to evolve.

The first evolution or innovation to Mesmer's practices occurred in 1784, when one disciple, the Marquis de Puységur "surmised that Mesmer's cures were due to an altered state of consciousness, which he called magnetic sleep or somnambulism, and discovered that this state could involve a much wider range of phenomena."¹¹⁶

This 'wider range of phenomena', which included mind reading ability, hearing voices and messages from 'spirit beings', evolved and "formed the core of a proto-spiritualist culture."¹¹⁷

Whether these were the purely subconscious creations of practitioners, or subconscious transmissions between practitioners and 'patients' is to my mind irrelevant. The fact that differing results were available speaks to the subconscious creation or interpretation of individual reality. There was and is no external reality save that projected by humans, a concept that is borne out with contextual shifts in the Mesmerist tradition.

The first contextual shift occurred from Austria into Germany which "was an especially fertile environment for... the more spectacular aspects of mesmerism [that] went hand in hand with a fascination for the supernatural, and led to an interest in "spontaneous" cases of prophetic revelation."¹¹⁸ Thus, with a nod to Feuerbach, the increased expectation and appetite for different phenomena allowed the human consciousness to deliver as required. That is, once the concept (of 'prophetic revelation') was created, it was projected as an inverted kenosis (into the sublime space) and then reabsorbed, a practice still apparent today within the current inter-societal nexus.

By 1836 Mesmerism had reached America, with "(o)ne of the marquis de Puységur's pupils, Charles Poyen (teaching)... literally hundreds of people the techniques of mesmerism."¹¹⁹

While some students followed the traditional methods of practice, others responded to this new contextual shift by transforming "mesmerism into a uniquely American family of religious traditions. One of Poyen's many apprentices... Phineas Parkhurst Quimby... transformed it into an eminently practical recipe for health, happiness and prosperity."¹²⁰

That is, this new physical location transformed Mesmerism into a secular 'practical recipe for health' leaving 'prophetic revelation' behind.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p 57.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p 57-58.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p 58.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

This transformation could only occur within the individualistic climate of early 19th Century America, a climate that bears a strong correlation to the atomised climate of today. This loose interdependence allows for more conceptual fluidity in opposition to static or dogmatic institutionalised structures.

While “(c)onflicting religious claims tend to undermine each religion’s central claim to be a vehicle for expressing ultimate reality”,¹²¹ this is only true from an objective perspective. If we realise these claims as a purely contextual method for achieving a certain subjective ontology, the practical aspects of these claims are true. The qualitative aspects are purely contextual and objectively irrelevant. The experience is of paramount importance and esoteric traditions gain some qualitative authenticity by appropriating elements from currently or previously existing cultures.¹²²

This appropriation follows four distinct historical stages. “First, travel narratives are published.... [Second c]reative spokespersons steeped in the Esoteric tradition...transform them.... (t)hen come the first do-it-yourself books.... [and finally] reinterpretation and change soon transforms the originally exotic text into an organic part of the new context.”¹²³

This illustrates the cyclic nature of consumerism that we (and others) use to create our commodities for our consumption. That is: in the first stage, liminal parties (in this case travel writers (and *not* the hordes of tourists who follow)) externally reference the new experience; in the second stage we consume the new experience and project our ‘dislocated’ representation of it for mass consumption; in the third stage the masses consume and externally reference against this dislocated experience; and finally the experience is homogenised within the mass context.

So to reduce this dynamic, we externally reference, to project, to consume and reference in order to fulfil our immediate desires. However, as Frederick Jameson argues in detail in chapter 3, “only a limited number of combinations are possible”.¹²⁴ We appear to be exhausting our supply of ‘Other’ experiences with our assimilation of them along with their cultural aspects, since (for the most part) we do not enter the original context, but rather modify it for our context and then wonder why it does not work satisfactorily. We are the problem.

¹²¹ Ibid. p 344.

¹²² Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p 158.

¹²³ Ibid. p 159.

¹²⁴ Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” In Foster, Hal. *Postmodern Culture*. p 115.

Hammer shows how we normally apply this dynamic within our context, arguing that “(k)nowledge of social life is used in the conscious construction of self-identity.... In practically every area of life, there are competing theories on how one “should” act and think.”¹²⁵ Within the information stream consumers may desire any simulated social life they wish. No longer is our external referencing limited to our immediate context, forming our identity from the moment we are born; it is now possible to desire and identify with aspects of any society that is deemed suitable.

The important point is whether this suitability is actively chosen or passively accepted. It appears that within the nexus of mass media, the (productively imagined) ‘uniqueness’ of the opportunity initiates our desire. This may then be maintained by controlling the flow of (the reproductively imagined) consumer goods, in this case, ‘spiritual’ paraphernalia such as the “(e)soteric literature [that] abounds in descriptions of how to transform oneself in various ways in order to become a healthier, happier and more spiritual person.”¹²⁶

Within today’s society these ‘descriptions’ usually prescribe the purchase of certain intangible tools purchased from the local New Age supplier. These mass produced ‘spiritual tools’ form a “(v)irtual culture (that) realizes Nietzsche’s vision of a world in which every ostensible transcendental signified is apprehended as a signifier caught in an endless labyrinth of signifiers.... When there is nothing beyond the sign, image is all. Height, depth, and interiority collapse in an infinite play of surfaces. In the midst of this superficiality, nothing remains profound.”¹²⁷

While this reflects the marketed religious paraphernalia of dogmatic religions, we must remember that this paraphernalia remains unnecessary. If the practitioner consciously realised that these tools were superficial and purely for the focus of intention, their purchase would be unnecessary. One could use any tool and construct one’s own religious framework accordingly. We can once again reduce the problem to our ignorance of the dynamic in action and our focus on the variables. That is, we focus on the specific tools and not on the method we use them to inspire in us.

‘Contextualists’ such as Steven T. Katz have suggested, “that every [religious] experience is inevitably structured by and expressed in the symbolism and language of the culture within

¹²⁵ Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p 159.

¹²⁶ Ibid. p 14.

¹²⁷ Taylor, Mark C. *About religion: economies of faith in virtual culture*. p 26.

which the mystic lives.”¹²⁸ This, they argue proves that “a context-free “pure” mystical experience”¹²⁹ is impossible. Conversely ‘*decontextualists*’ such as Robert Forman claim “there are transcultural experiences that are interpreted differently in different cultural settings.”¹³⁰

I am arguing that both are correct, again by utilising the Hegelian dialectic. If the ‘*decontextualist*’ occupies the (nihilistic) ‘first-order’ position, it is this space that allows the projection of the inverted kenosis. From the ‘*contextualist*’ ‘second-order’ position a ‘context free mystical experience’ is impossible, since this experience is a function of humanity and it is impossible to speak of escaping our context.

Therefore the synthesis of these two positions collapses again into one, with both being valid when observed from differing perspectives. The constructive basics of religious experience are “that one presents the narrative of the experiencer as well as his or her framework of interpretation.”¹³¹ If the experience itself is of paramount importance then the ‘trimmings’ are only peripherally important, (providing an experiential context) especially considering the objective non-existence of the religious experience.

When transferred to the textual consumerism of today’s New Age religious practices, “it is particularly important to note that these positive Others, who serve as reference groups in shaping one’s interpretation of experience, can be the physically and temporally distant Others of a printed text.”¹³² Thus one may purchase a connection to these ‘Others’ and the tools to the experience. No longer is faith required in any truly divine sense, just creation and actualisation through intention. The New Age has simply stripped the dynamic out of religious belief and marketed the method to extreme advantage. Therefore, I am arguing that the New Age is the commodified realisation that religion and religious belief are simply acts of production and consumption.

Linda Woodhead is useful here as she takes a different line, and argues that “(a)t the deepest and most general level...New Spirituality/New Age...attacks all forms of dualism... regarding them as disguised hierarchies. Its ideal is ‘connectedness’ or ‘wholeness’, a state where everything is on a level, nothing and no-one is higher than any other, and where ideally

¹²⁸ Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p 344-345.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p 345.

¹³¹ Ibid. p 346.

¹³² Ibid. p 347.

all real differences have been abolished. There can be no God above us, not a tradition which has authority over us.”¹³³

Religious experience as a function of humanity.

Woodhead’s argument is a flawed one, for without dualism there is no means for referencing and discussing either ‘connectedness’ or ‘wholeness’, and we certainly cannot speak of any conceptual ‘Other’, since we have no reference. The consequence of negating dualism is apparent in today’s societal nexus. While there is no problem negating a hierarchical dualism with a ‘God above us’, there is no way to escape contrasting our (individual and collective) internal and external worlds.

We may still assume a holistic position (acknowledging our internal and external spheres), but there is no practical method to describe ‘singularity’ as long as we conduct rational thought. We must accept all liminal cases and religious experience as functions of humanity.

One 20th Century example supporting this theory, that all phenomena are humanly constructed, is the work of Edgar Cayce, who “(a)t the age of six or seven...could sometimes see visions, occasionally talking to relatives who had recently died.”¹³⁴ Cayce is also said to have had an interesting version of a photographic memory, and “could sleep on his school books and acquire a photographic memory of their entire contents”,¹³⁵ a claim that one could best describe as dubious. However it was Cayce’s self-hypnosis experiments that were of most interest. “At the age of twenty-one, Cayce developed a gradual paralysis of the throat which led to the loss of his voice. When doctors were unable to determine the cause of this condition, Cayce attempted to find an alternative treatment and tried hypnosis.”¹³⁶

In 1900 a travelling hypnotist “Hart, the Laugh King” visited Edgar Cayce’s home town “and offered to try an experiment in an attempt to help the young man. In the first session, Hart hypnotized Cayce and.... (t)o the amazement of everyone present, Edgar responded to any question asked of him in a normal voice. However, he would not take a post-hypnotic suggestion, and the laryngitis returned when Hart awakened him.”¹³⁷

¹³³ Woodhead, Linda. “Post-Christian Spiritualities.” In *Religion*. (1993) 23, April. p 174.

¹³⁴ <http://www.edgarcayce.org/edgar-cayce2.html>

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p 66.

¹³⁷ <http://www.edgarcayce.org/edgar-cayce2.html>

Cayce's next step was to put himself to sleep with the aid of another local man Al Layne (who asked the self-hypnotised Cayce questions). Cayce then explained "that the condition could be removed by suggesting to him while in the unconscious state that the blood circulation increase to the affected areas. After Layne made the suggestion, he and Cayce's family watched in amazement as the upper part of Edgar's chest and his throat turned a bright crimson red and the skin became warm to the touch." Twenty minutes later Cayce asked for the suggestion that "the blood circulation return to normal"¹³⁸ before he was woken. "When Cayce finally awakened, he was able to speak normally for the first time in almost a year. The date, March 31, 1901, marked the first time Edgar Cayce would give a psychic reading."¹³⁹

There would appear to be two possibilities to this scenario. The first and most obvious is that Cayce faked the whole thing and was basically fraudulent. This seems rather unlikely given the "approximately one dozen biographies and more than 300 titles that discuss various aspects of this man's life and work."¹⁴⁰ The second is that he subconsciously lost and regained his voice, gaining in the process the tools to interpret and suggest remedies for illnesses, both his and others, in some non-verbal fashion. Supporting this "on file at the Association for Research and Enlightenment, Inc. (A.R.E.)... are copies of more than 14,000 of Edgar Cayce's readings",¹⁴¹ not to mention a website (that provided this information) dedicated to him.

While some of Cayce's details appear hagiographical, (namely that he could sleep with books and remember the contents) it does seem reasonable to argue (within the context of 'second-order' or non-physical reality), that he received his information "from essentially two sources: 1) the subconscious mind of the individual for whom he was giving the reading; and, 2) an etheric source of information, called the "Akashic records," which is apparently some kind of universal database for every thought, word, or deed that has ever transpired in the earth."¹⁴²

This second source is not as improbable as it might seem, even without getting into the creation of fictional or mythic realities. If our religions work by utilizing a nexus of productive (creative) and reproductive (consuming) hegemonies, then on one level every 'productive utterance' simultaneously 'creates' intention, thereby '2)' from the above contains the total sum of '1)'. That is, since our religions are a function of humanity, and (at

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ <http://www.edgarcayce.org/edgar-cayce1.html>

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² <http://www.edgarcayce.org/edgar-cayce2.html>

least within monotheism) are taken as 'truth', then for all intents and purposes they are produced (created) and reproduced (consumed) as such.

The claim that these 'Akashic records' go back to the start of time is quite problematic and I would argue, is evidence of the hagiographical literature that succeeds Cayce. However, in the context of his readings it still seems reasonable. If we follow the same pattern of reference, consume, project and reference, as was previously illustrated in the 'commodified realisation' of the New Age; then a record of utterances could certainly persist for as long as we do.

Cayce did not appear to promote a religious or philosophical framework, given that "people were told that if they could incorporate information into their own religious and belief systems... it could be a useful and positive experience; otherwise they were advised to leave the information alone."¹⁴³ Therefore I find my argument aligned with Cayce, as he appeared to be focusing on the method of intention and ignoring the variables. He offered the tools and did not care what religious context people subscribed to.

It is for this reason that I argue religious experience may not be reduced, but that only the fact of experience may be reduced. While Cayce "claimed no special abilities...[he] was a Christian and read the Bible from cover to cover every year of his life, his work was one that stressed the importance of comparative study among belief systems all over the world."¹⁴⁴ It appears unimportant what context religion was practised in; they all have something to offer, since they are all functions of humanity and therefore our creations. Consequently pluralism ceases to be theoretically problematic (from an objective perspective), and only practically problematic as an expression of humanity's need to conquer the 'Other' and consume it.

Carl Jung's psycho-religious belief system outlined the framework in which both Mesmer and Cayce operated. "Firstly...Jung saw religious experience as experience, not as an unproblematic reflex of a spiritual reality.... Secondly, Jung explored and modified his concepts repeatedly...and often changed his opinion or contradicted himself."¹⁴⁵ This reinforces the fluid dynamic behind 'second-order' religious experience. If this experience is located within the practitioner and the practitioner is moving through time, encountering various geographical and societal contextual shifts, then surely some elements of this experience will be contradictory at various times.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Hammer, Olav. *Claiming Knowledge*. p 69-70.

Unlike texts, humans are not static or fixed in time, although we are presently trapped within the ‘ever-present-present’ of the information stream. This has effectively removed us from our historical context, although we are still very much a part of it. Hammer makes the point that “Jung is prone to seeing the human psyche as the locus of dark destructive forces, a view that is at odds with the generally optimistic outlook of the New Age.”¹⁴⁶

While Hammer is correct, I would suggest that this is due to Jung’s realisation that all phenomena are humanly projected. Therefore, owing to the amount of negative concepts in the world, human nature, the creator of these concepts must be the ‘locus’ of these negative qualities. Furthermore, unlike most ‘New Age ideologies’ Jung was not engaging in rhetoric or manifestos, but rather examining the underlying dynamic.

Instead of various cultural interpretations of a unitary mystical experience, I would suggest that the only universality is the fact of experience. The myriad of pluralistic religious experiences (being a function of humanity) may not be reduced to a cross cultural singular; as language, music and culture may also not be reduced. This is supported by “(p)ractically all the main figures of this historical lineage, from William James to Abraham Maslow and beyond, [who] were convinced that religious experience was primary whereas doctrines and rituals were secondary.”¹⁴⁷

When contextual shifts occur, the characteristics of these experiences also transform but they do not reduce to a singular form. However, the function these experiences perform may be reduced. For instance, whether one is speaking in English, Chinese, or Spanish these languages all perform the function of communication. Therefore they may be reduced to communication, even though the only common ground between the variables is contextually determined. Thus, whether ‘within’, ‘across’ or ‘between’ contexts; even if the variables are completely irreducible, the method in which the variables are expressed may be reduced.

An example of the irreducibility and consequent transformation of even the most traditional concepts is the post-theosophical practice of creating new legends around Jesus Christ. “Some elevated Jesus to the role of the cosmic Christ. Perhaps he is the leader of the Ascended Masters? He might be a cosmic being of light. Or could he be a spiritual being emanating from the Sun?”¹⁴⁸ It seems unlikely that these claims could be further from the dogmatic

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. p 70.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p 72.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. p 142.

Christian position, yet they are just as fulfilling to their believers as the respective traditional Christian constructed beliefs.

However, one example of such positive transformation that illustrates the possible consequences of active awareness is the growing reinterpretation of Christianity. Stewardship is replacing the traditional 'dominion' over creation and a more inter-dependent spirituality is achieving fruition through such New Age (in this case catholic) theologians, as Matthew Fox.¹⁴⁹

Fox calls "for the dismantling of liberal religion and the regrounding of faith in a mystical, prophetic, cosmological worldview – a transformation and renewal... [arguing] Christianity has... succumbed to a patriarchal mindset that has eroded its worship, message, and identity rendering them flat and lifeless."¹⁵⁰ "Fox believes we need to embrace a new cosmology; one that is built on the foundations of modern science but one which also includes a mystical awareness of the interconnectedness of all things."¹⁵¹

With the non-existence¹⁵² of any religious experience and the subjective recollection of existing memories¹⁵³ one may construct a tradition steeped in awe inspiring history, maintaining it to be subjectively true. This is purely the same method monotheistic institutions have used to maintain their hierarchical position in the nature of spirituality until very recently. Fox seems to be arguing for this type of (non-hierarchical) subjective creation, based in a context of interdependence. In the next chapter, I will outline the nihilism, or 'complete absence' that allows the dynamic of religious belief to occur.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. p 78.

¹⁵⁰ Fox, Mathew. *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*. p 7.

¹⁵¹ <http://www.faithnet.org.uk/Theology/cosmicchrist.htm>

¹⁵² Ibid. p 348.

¹⁵³ Ibid. Hammer discusses what passes for esoteric experience and the nature of memory. "(N)ot even my own experiences are accessible to me except through traces...these traces can be my memories of the experience and the stories I have told myself and others about my experiences."

Chapter Two.

In this chapter I will examine the ‘complete absence’ of non-physical ‘first-order’ reality in detail. I am arguing that this nihilistic ‘first-order’ is both kenotic and inversely kenotic by nature. This simultaneous occurrence is purely conceptual, and therefore non-physical, with a conceptual absence occurring in the human creator, as the projection of the creator empties into the nihilistic conceptual space.

An inverted kenosis occurs, through mystical experience, prayer or meditation, namely the feeling of peace one enjoys with the reception of this space. Derrida and Vattimo call this absence the *tertium*. “(I)t is silence, the setting of that which is Other, of all difference, paradox and ambiguity, of the capacity of every term or thought to be turned about into its contrary.”¹⁵⁴

In order to be ‘Other’ the *tertium* must be the absence of all physical reality. Therefore it is perfectly reasonable that terms and thoughts should be ‘turned about into its contrary’. If all thoughts and terms are human creations, then they will fill this ‘Other’ as it simultaneously empties its nothingness into them. “In reality...people are inevitably infiltrated by a *tertium*, which is no thing, no entity, no individual, no presence, but rather the setting that, like every religious experience, *brings together and at the same time separates*.”(Italics in quotation)¹⁵⁵

It is this *tertium* that acts as a form of inverted kenosis. “Once the subject and the world are both susceptible to a plurality of versions, heteronomy is no longer the most distinctive of aesthetic experience”¹⁵⁶; attraction and repulsion can function at the same time, since these are purely functions of language and our consciousness, and as such they fill out the *tertium*.

It must be reiterated that versions of the world are not reducible to a single account, but rather that the method behind the creations of the versions of the world follow the same dynamic. Therefore within both the *tertium* and the modified Hegelian dialectic, both may simultaneously be real. This is both a reductionist and non-reductionist argument, for, as with religious experience, it is not the experience that may be reduced but rather the fact of experience.

I am arguing that one may experience this *tertium* without any ‘second-order’ deific construction, simply with an introspective focus on the absence of any ‘first-order’ deity.

¹⁵⁴ Derrida, Jacques & Vattimo, Gianni. (eds.) *Religion*. p 124.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.* p 125.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p 132.

However, usually our '(sub)consciously projected deities' fill this space with the characteristics we ascribe to them, transforming on a semi-regular basis as our interdependent consciousness evolves. Since these creations are "'communal developments' over a period of time' they reflect our contextual attitudes and desires either supportively or antagonistically.

Traditional theism and atheism.

John Macquarrie adds to this argument by outlining what he sees as the three possible perspectives on concepts of God: the theist, atheist and polytheist. I am arguing that these are all conceptual categories within language, utilised to discuss religious experience and philosophy. Macquarrie is operating from a traditional perspective, so I am suggesting overlaying the three positions he describes, by reducing them back to 'first-order' and 'second-order' reality.

Macquarrie argues "that God-language, even in its earliest usage, arose from the sense of affinity that human beings had with the cosmic forces around them.... a sense of affinity with an environing reality."¹⁵⁷ This makes 'God-language' an internal creation in an effort to bring meaning to experiential physical existence. It is a conceptual 'second-order' creative interpretation of the 'first-order' (physical) environing forces, which possess regenerative and destructive phases, whether seasonal or cataclysmic. This 'God-language' is obviously contained in language, as Jaffe has previously shown; therefore it is a response to experience, which cannot be described.

Therefore I am arguing that this 'God-language' is nihilistic from a 'first-order' perspective, since to be language it must be a human creation and thus 'second-order'. It is only through the absence of any ('first-order') quantitative deific entity, that such subjective creation is able to occur. If we ignore or relegate the importance of this dynamic (that of inter-subjective creation) and instead indulge in categorising the comparative subjective relevance of religious schemas, we will remain perpetually trapped within this context; as no attempt is made to elucidate the method behind such created belief structures.

As Macquarrie states:

"Our own self-consciousness is direct awareness of ourselves as such persons."¹⁵⁸ There are limits to such unified control, which indicate

¹⁵⁷ Macquarrie, John, *In search of deity*. p 19-20.

¹⁵⁸ "This account of a living personality requires completion by reference to its objectification in the consequent nature of God. Cf. Part V, Ch. II." Cf. *SA*, pp. 127-145; and "Sense and Certainty" (1952) and "The Epistemological Argument" (1967), *PP*, pp. 60-75....⁶ "See Paul Ricoeur, *Le Conflit des*

dissociation of personality, multiple personalities in successive alternations, and even multiple personalities in joint possession. This last case belongs to the pathology of religion, and in primitive times has been interpreted as demonic possession.”¹⁵⁹

Macquarrie also argues (from a traditional perspective) that “(t)he atheist... acknowledges no such affinity.... [with an] environing reality... [that] belongs to an order of being that is essentially mechanical and sub-personal.”¹⁶⁰ This argument refers to the traditional atheistic opposition to any form of deity. However the environing reality need not be ‘mechanical’ but may certainly be ‘sub-personal’ (allowing subconscious (secular or religious)) creative construction.

We can observe this dynamic currently operating within a societal context, but we must remember that this context is currently hierarchically organised. Where we currently investigate such contexts from a mechanical perspective (since we construct the physical aspects of our societies), we forget that we human (‘second-order’ creators) make the dynamic that allows construction. Therefore we treat ourselves as a product of our own construction, (‘sucking ourselves into ourselves’ and) forgetting that we constructed and consume all these concepts in the first place. This is validated with my argument for the function of the nexus, which I engage in the next chapter.

Returning to my a-theistic argument, I am arguing that this is what allows the space for ‘second-order’ conscious creation and ‘Being’. This feeds into Macquarrie’s third perspective¹⁶¹ “of polytheistic religions, (where) talk of the gods takes the form of mythology.... they take on more definite personal characteristics”¹⁶² effectively reflecting the inter-subjective myriad of personal beliefs. Macquarrie’s work supports my a-theistic argument that both ‘God’ and the ‘world’ do not exist as “an item discoverable within the world. It is not an *a priori* idea, implicit in our recognition of any object. In fact, the logic of

interpretations. Essays d’hermeneutique (Paris: Seuil, 1969) [Eng. Trans. Don Ihde, *The conflict of Interpretations* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1974)]; Hans Georg Gadamer, *Warheit und Methode* 2d ed. (Tubingen: Mohr, 1965) [Eng. Trans. Garrett Barden and John Cumming, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975)].”

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Macquarrie, John, *In search of deity*. p 19-20.

¹⁶¹ I must emphasise here that from the perspective of my thesis, Macquarrie’s second and third perspectives are second order by nature. They are both created concepts, the characteristics of which are irrelevant.

¹⁶² Macquarrie, John, *In search of deity*. p 20.

the concepts “God” and “world” is very similar. Both are inclusive concepts for quite unique realities.”¹⁶³

These realities are purely individual¹⁶⁴ creations in an effort to interpret the external creation of socially constructed collections of these individual concepts. I must reiterate that I am speaking purely of non-physical existents, which opposes Macquarrie, assuming he is claiming for the physical reality of God and the world behind the concepts. I am arguing that our reality, which we take as objectively existent, is nothing more than supported fiction, both collectively and individually. As Laing argues, “(w)e experience the objects of our experience as *there* in the outside world. The source of our experience seems to be outside ourselves.... Persons as embodied beings relate to each other through the medium of space.”¹⁶⁵

So if we remove all our preconceptions and the semi-conscious aspects of our existence, we may consciously relate to each other and our context, bringing the creative experience to fruition on a daily basis. We realise that our experience of ‘Being’ occurs within our ‘internal sphere’ as a ‘second-order’ construct, functioning within the nihilistic space of ‘first-order’ ‘non-Being’.

Arthur Schopenhauer shows us that “the body.... is given in intelligent perception as representation, as an object among objects.... But it is also... denoted by the word *will*.... The act of will and the action of the body are...one and the same thing, though given in two entirely different ways, first quite directly, and then in perception for understanding.”¹⁶⁶ This aligns itself to Macquarrie who argues that the “concept of God is an interpretative concept, meant to give us a way of understanding and relating to reality as a whole.”¹⁶⁷

However any ‘concept of God’ or form of deism is dualistic, since it widens the conceptual gap “between creator and creation to the infinite distance between an absentee God unconcerned about his creation and an entirely autonomous and self regulating universe to which God has no access”.¹⁶⁸ Therefore I agree strongly with Macquarrie, that due to this

¹⁶³ Ibid. p 29.

¹⁶⁴ I am arguing for individual creations, as we all have individual ‘internal worlds’, which interact interdependently within and between societies.

¹⁶⁵ Laing, R.D. *The politics of experience*. p 33.

¹⁶⁶ Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The World as Will and Representation*, translated by E F J Payne. § 18. <http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/schopenh.htm>

¹⁶⁷ Macquarrie, John, *In search of deity*. p 29.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p 35.

perceived separation, any dualism “has a concealed tendency towards deism or even, eventually, atheism”,¹⁶⁹ and hence this thesis is framed in an a-theistic context.

I am arguing that through atheism it is impossible to envisage kenosis as “the indefinite negation of God”¹⁷⁰ for one primary reason. These concepts all hinge on a concept of God (and not a response to God); the scriptures claim to possess God’s revelation, hence something of God’s character, and even the traditional atheistic negation of God must have some concept of what is being negated. Yet as we have seen, any attempt at a qualitative interpretation of a singularity is impossible and ends in tautology.

The Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo is important here, arguing from the context of the Christian gospels, that it is necessary to “consider the meaning of creation and redemption to be kenosis... [therefore] the continuity of God and the world established by classical metaphysics is more authentically ‘kenotic’ than the transcendence attributed to God in naming him ‘the wholly other’.”¹⁷¹

For if God is ‘wholly other’ then it is impossible for God to empty into us, as that removes God’s ‘otherness’ and necessitates a common context, which is lacking. The only possible ‘otherness’ is the absence of us, which becomes clear when interpreted from a Feuerbachian context. We see that “(m)an... projects his being into objectivity,¹⁷² and then again makes himself an object to this projected image of himself thus converted into a subject... [then] (m)an is an object to God.... Thus the religious man virtually retracts the nothingness of human activity, by making his dispositions and actions an object to God.... Thus, in and through God, man has in view himself alone.”¹⁷³

So, if we project our ‘being into objectivity’ and then make ourselves an object of our objectivity, we are effectively emptying into ourselves. This inverted ‘dualistic deism’ is the same dynamic as operates in the nexus, with the exception that within the Christian context we were not divorced from history, whereas we are now trapped in the present. Mike Grimshaw inadvertently outlines a (post) Christian interpretation of this ‘inverted ‘dualistic

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. p 63.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. p 83.

¹⁷² This is footnoted in Feuerbach’s text as: “The religious, the original mode in which man becomes objective to himself, is (as is clearly enough explained in this work) to be distinguished from the mode in which this occurs in reflection and speculation; the latter is voluntary, the former involuntary, necessary – as necessary as art, as speech. With the progress of time, it is true, theology coincides with religion.”

¹⁷³ Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The essence of Christianity*. p 29

deism', arguing that God "occurs in two places: God is both the frame we use to create the view and the view we read and create. That is.... it makes us the liminal site for the creation and the encounter with that which we can call God.... So God is both a way of framing and perceiving."¹⁷⁴

Although this probably differs from Grimshaw's argument, I would further argue that this illustrates God as a function of us, and therefore God also becomes 'trapped in the present' with us. If God is nothing or a non-existent, then from the ('first-order') physical perspective it is wholly other. That is, from the perspective of physical existence, God is an absence of existence, a space to project our 'internal sphere'.

To put that in context it should be remembered that our 'internal sphere' is also (as a function of us) non-existent, when measured by the same criteria.

Yet God is conceived of as 'wholly other' since nothing contains it, nothing is contained by it, and it is not a function of anything save our collective inter-dependent beliefs. Effectively God is 'it', yet this 'it' must be an inversion of the traditional concepts of God, as 'it' has no characteristics. If one accepts God as nothing and accepts an inverted kenosis, these two positions effectively collapse (or empty) into each other in a (physically) non-existent conceptual kenosis. This 'nothing' allows space and as we empty out into this space, a space appears in us, (the negation of the negation) effectively acting as an inverted emptying into us, in an inversion or negation of traditional kenosis. If we apply this same dynamic to our other societal creations, we become aware that we are the only possibility for our own redemption.

Consequently I am arguing that we conceive God as the nothingness of primary non-'Being' that allows us to create, project and interpret 'second-order' 'Being' as required. If God is nothingness and we are 'Being', then we are responsible for the free will we enjoy and by default also our resultant creations, actions and future consequences. To reiterate the previous paragraph, the nothingness occurs in us in the same manner as we empty our creations into the nothingness (or divine space).

"No longer speaking of 'Being' is justified either as the attitude that corresponds best to a 'reality' that excludes it and in which there is no 'Being', or as the recognition of the fulfilment of 'Being' in our culture."¹⁷⁵ To clarify, if we are looking for 'Being' in the form

¹⁷⁴ Grimshaw, Michael. "Seeing through God: Towards an Eco A/Theology." In *Ecotheology*. Vol 6. July 2001 & January 2002. p 198.

¹⁷⁵ Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. p 12.

of an interpretable 'first-order' divine referent, there is only absence, or 'non-Being', yet from a 'second-order' context, we are our own fulfilment and therefore 'Being' is a function of humanity.

So, while 'reality' does not need to exclude 'Being' it does need to include 'non-Being' as 'first-order' context. This fulfils 'Being' in 'the history of our culture' as our culture creates 'Being' through language and our subsequently evolving ontology, that is, we are 'Being' in the Feuerbachian sense:

(I)n religion man necessarily places his nature out of himself, regards his nature as a separate nature; necessarily, because the nature which is the object of theory lies outside of him, because all his conscious existence spends itself in his practical subjectivity. God is his *alter ego*, his other lost half; God is the complement of himself; in God he is the first perfect man.¹⁷⁶

Therefore this 'second-order' 'Being' requires a 'first-order' 'non-Being' for the inverted or negative kenosis to occur. That is, we require the space to project our '*alter ego*'. While 'Being' is relational (both within humanity and as a 'second-order' created concept interdependent of humanity) it is not a retrospective action. Certainly conscious aspects of all cultures utilise hindsight to shape their respective context, but I am not referring to this dynamic here. Instead I am attempting to investigate the (mostly) subconscious dynamic of our conditioned interpretational creation of our reality. As Vattimo notes:

(I)f one thinks... that 'Being' can 'return' to speak to us beyond the oblivion into which it has fallen, or... continues always to elude us just because it transcends the capacity of our intellect and our language... it seems that one continues to identify Being with a being.¹⁷⁷

Therefore we have created 'Being' (as a 'second-order' construct within a 'first-order' nihilistic context) with our language reflecting our ontology and inversely with our ontology reflecting our created 'Being'. We forget that the only life this 'Being' has is the life we give it. This concept is outlined by Vattimo who calls hermeneutics a nihilistic vocation based on "the Heidegger – Gadamer axis"¹⁷⁸, or a language – ontology axis that may be further broken down into a conversation – Being axis. Thus language/discourse/ conversation is both a function and necessity of our ontology. 'Second-order' reality is a function/necessity of our 'first-order' ontology, unless we reject our self-reflexivity and rejoin the animals.

¹⁷⁶ Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The essence of Christianity*. p 195.

¹⁷⁷ Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. p 13.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p 2.

Bataille on immanence.

Georges Bataille brings an interesting perspective to discussions on immanence by showing that unlike humans, animals possess no self-reflexivity and therefore cannot ‘realise’ their contextual position.¹⁷⁹ They simply ‘are’ and their many relative positions make up the environment they survive in. Animals achieve immanence in context specific situations, namely “when one animal eats another.”¹⁸⁰

There is no transcendence between eater and eaten, “nothing that might establish autonomy on one side and dependence on the other.... nothing between them except that quantitative difference.”¹⁸¹ It is only *our* consciousness that allows us the power of imagination¹⁸² to create meaning through interpreting our environment, and consequently to create conceptual transcendence. When envisioning “the universe without man...we can only call up a vision in which we see *nothing*, since the object of this vision is a movement that glides from things that have no meaning by themselves to the world full of meaning implied by man giving each thing his own.”¹⁸³

Without humanity there would be no meaning, physical reality would not alter, and events would just ‘be’. We have created a world that is conceptually dislocated, although completely interdependent with our environment. Whereas a man will celebrate the death of his rival, an animal will not perceive the death of his rival in the same way: “The apathy that the gaze of the animal expresses after the combat is the sign of an existence that is essentially on a level with the world in which it moves like water in water.”¹⁸⁴ That is, it forms an inherent part of the ecosystem, with no self-referential realisation of this.

Without us, there would be no subject-object distinctions, I-thou relationships or meaning. With our absence all philosophies, religions, cultures and aesthetic forms would cease. “It is only within the limits of the human that the transcendence of things in relation to consciousness [or of consciousness in relation to things] is manifested.”¹⁸⁵

¹⁷⁹ Bataille, Georges. *Theory of religion*. p 19.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* p 17.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.* p 18.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* p 20.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* p 21.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p 25.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p 23-24.

Therefore one interpretation (of the impermanence and conditionality of life) is that the death of the ego brings transcendence. If immanence is achieved by negating self-reflection (hence killing the ego) then effectively transcendence is also accomplished through the ego's own death. Thus 'voluntary self-sacrifice' does not necessarily mean living one's entire life as a victim, but rather sacrificing all one's desires and realising the 'inter-dependence of all phenomena'.

Without human self-reflexivity, animals appear to accept their position in the greater context. That is, they participate in physical existence, procreate and then die. Perhaps this absence of ego and consequent lack of self-realisation is comparable to the non-duality sought after by eastern mystics, a return to the immanent state, with no subject-object differentiations.

One prime example of subject –object relationships (outside the context of the 'natural world') is the construction of tools. "(T)ools are developed with their end in view, consciousness posits them as objects.... The developed tool is the nascent form of the non-I."¹⁸⁶ The tool has no inherent value, as value is transferred to the task it will complete. This task also has no value, save the importance (and subsequent satisfaction at its completion) we attach to it. Yet we still persist in attaching value to tools, based on our historical usage, our societal age, and our technical and aesthetic appreciation of them. We must remember that these values are only significant for as long as we continue to ascribe them to tools.

Whether the tool fulfils a circular (the stick digs the ground to grow the plant to feed the man to use the stick¹⁸⁷), linear (where a "true end" reintroduces... continuous being, lost in the world like water is lost in water"¹⁸⁸) or no purpose (having value only in itself and "not with a view to something else"¹⁸⁹) is irrelevant. The object is impervious to the subject while still remaining its property.¹⁹⁰

When we apply this concept (especially with regards to linear purpose) to religious contexts, we begin to ascertain the irrelevance of them, as they are our impervious constructed possessions. This adds to my argument for a-theism. The purposes these objects (tools) fulfil are perfectly acceptable and in some cases necessary for our survival, but they should always be remembered to have no inherent meaning save what we allocate them. This helps separate 'first-order' physical and 'second-order' conceptual meanings. It is language that creates and

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. p 27.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. p 28.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. p 29.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

defines subject-object categories¹⁹¹ such as the way “we perceive each appearance – subject...from within and from without at the same time, both as continuity, with respect to ourselves, and as object.”¹⁹²

Bataille draws our attention to the concept of a ‘supreme being’ as a conceptual need to attribute “the virtues of a *thing* “capable of acting, thinking, and speaking” (just as men do)”¹⁹³ to continuous existence. Since our self-reflexivity causes us to operate outside (in many ways) of continuous existence, it seems only valid that we should attempt to “define a value that is greater than any other.”¹⁹⁴ This (within our ‘objectively meaningless’ culture) validates our conceptual schema, while inversely separating us further from continuity.

Bataille continues: “By definition, the supreme being has the highest rank. But all are of the same kind, in which immanence and personality are mingled; all can be *divine* and.... in spite of everything, they basically line up on a plane of equality.”¹⁹⁵ I am arguing that this allows for religious pluralism; for expressions of a ‘supreme being’ are attempts to express awe at life. Yet we effectively fetishise¹⁹⁶ life, by inverting ‘first-order’ reality with our ‘second-order’ lie, a lie that is necessary in order to express our creativity. We crave the “continuity... [that] offered man all the fascination of the sacred world”¹⁹⁷ while manifesting the discontinuity of our conceptually dislocated context.

With every attempt at expression (of the sacred world) we remove ourselves further from it, but only if this expression is taken as ‘first-order’ truth. If we accept the divine space and allow the simultaneously inverting kenosis, we should enjoy far greater fulfilment in our lives. “(T)he supreme oblivion of ‘Being’ ... is thought [of] as presence....in our terms of recognizing the link between the interpretative essence of truth and nihilism.”¹⁹⁸

So if nihilism is ‘first-order’ ‘truth’ in the form of a non-truth then ‘first-order’ ‘Being’ is also a form of ‘non-Being’. The plenitude of perceptible ‘second-order’ forms is subjectively ultimate and true for the interpreter or creator of this ‘Being’. “The divine being is nothing

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p 31.

¹⁹² Ibid. Bataille also footnotes here “*Ourselves*: what existential philosophy calls, after Hegel, *for itself*; the object is termed, in the same vocabulary, *in itself*.”

¹⁹³ Ibid. p 33.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid. p 34.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ I will have more to say on fetish in chapter 3.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. p 35.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

else than the human being, or, rather, the human nature purified, freed from the limits of the individual man, made objective – *i.e.*, contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being.”¹⁹⁹

Since the traditional Christian God is said to be infinite, if this God is nothingness (or a ‘complete absence’) then this absence is also infinite, allowing humanity (as we empty into the absence) the free will to project ourselves (in the form of our conceptual creations) into the nothingness, while treating this projection as external truth. This is an expansion on Ludwig Feuerbach’s argument; Feuerbach articulates:

That each experience of truth is an experience of interpretation is almost a truism in today’s culture.... [and] may be verified or falsified by conformity or otherwise of statements to states of things... made possible by an ‘opening’ that is not itself the object of a description that can be verified or falsified other than by placing it within an opening that is ‘superior’, more original etc.²⁰⁰

Inverted kenosis.

This method for creating our ‘second-order’ societally conditioned reality enhances my argument for an inverted kenosis. As we empty our conceptual reality into the space, that conceptual space simultaneously opens within us (through the absence of the space that the projected concept occupied while within us), until we fill it again by externally referencing against other projected concepts. Thus ‘second-order’ reality empties into the divinely sacred space of the ‘first-order’ (non-existent) conceptual reality, as the space in the ‘first-order’ reality allows some freedom (or coping) from the physical context of the external world. I am arguing that kenosis has traditionally been interpreted incorrectly, and that Feuerbach was correct, that we project our conceptual selves and effectively empty ourselves into what was considered God.

While my argument is just another human projection, and this whole thesis is simply a ‘second-order’ conceptual argument, there remains a strong case for the absence of ‘first-order’ (non-physical) reality. These ‘second-order’ deities are effectively variables that fulfil our practical requirements in experiencing and interpreting ‘first-order’ physical reality. That is, they aid us to gain some meaning from our physical context, and we utilise them for focussing our intention to achieve certain goals. The method used for the creation of these

¹⁹⁹ Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The essence of Christianity*. p 14.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p 5.

deities is the same as that behind all our conceptual (political, cultural and sociological) creations.

If we acknowledge our interdependent creative reality, this consensus, conformity or need for belonging seems less important. If we are 'Being' within a context of 'non-Being' (or emptying into the *tertium*) then our individuality becomes interdependent and we no longer strive for acceptance. That is, if we realise the method of our 'second-order' creative ability and cease attempting to gain approval from some non-existent 'first-order' referent, we realise that our acceptance is inter-dependently communally achieved.

Thomas Altizer provides an interesting case study for the 'second-order' dynamic, arguing (from a western Christian position), that "it is precisely the deepest realization of the Passion of God, a realization of absolute abyss, which finally ends every possible naming of God, an unnaming which is itself a transfiguring movement"²⁰¹ as "(b)oth the 'I' of God and the 'I' of consciousness perish in that abyss."²⁰²

This argument has its roots in the Death of God movement, that this abyss is a consequence of modernity, which removed God from our secular society. Within this context, whether one takes the traditional *imago dei* structure, or inverts it in a Feuerbachian projection is irrelevant, for the identity of both God and the conscious self are transfigured in the singularity of the abyss.

However it is when Altizer's argument is viewed from outside the Christian context that it accurately outlines my thesis. The statement that "(o)nly Christianity knows an ultimate self-negation or self-emptying of the Godhead"²⁰³ since it was "(n)ot until the advent of Christianity... [that] a primordial Godhead manifest[ed] in the West"²⁰⁴ is internally valid for Western Christians.

Since Altizer is writing from within this context, his argument is subjectively true for him and all those who share his beliefs. Yet for those outside the West, or without reference to 'a primordial Godhead' this argument (like my argument) is nothing more than a faith statement. Altizer drifts further into subjectivity with the argument that "[a] distinctively Christian primordial Godhead, as opposed to a Hindu or purely Neoplatonic primordial Godhead, is the

²⁰¹ Altizer, Thomas. *Godhead and the Nothing*. p 139.

²⁰² Ibid. p 140.

²⁰³ Ibid. p 148.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. p 149.

absolutely primordial... which orthodox Christianity knows as the Father and the Creator... [and] in which the Father eternally generates the Son and the Spirit... (T)hus the Father... [has] an absolute sovereignty and transcendence unknown in Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam, or unknown apart from the Christian Trinity.”²⁰⁵

This ‘absolute sovereignty’ imposes its own characteristics on other systems, which have distinctly different cosmologies. For example a Hindu would argue that all Gods exist within *samsara* (the ocean of existence) and that only *Brahman* (or non-duality) exists outside this. Karma operates within all of *samsara* (including the heavens) and thus all Gods are constrained by the rules of the system. Again, this argument is perfectly valid for a Hindu, but drifts into subjectivity when viewed from an external perspective. So subjectively, both the Christian and Hindu are examples of ‘second-order’ constructs and internal validation. While both constructs speak from their respective contexts (complete with self validating arguments) they both speak of singularity, either as the type that dissolves the “I” of both God and the conscious self, or of the non-duality outside *samsara*.

Whether this singularity is experienced in the Christian sense of “an absolute sacrifice (that is necessarily an absolute self-negation”²⁰⁶ or in the Hindu sense of escaping *samsara*, by achieving *moksha*²⁰⁷ is unimportant. I am arguing that both these theoretical constructs are Feuerbachian and functions of humanity. Again I must reiterate that my argument is only subjectively validating (as are the Christian and Hindu arguments), and revolves around what isn’t there; yet it shows the ‘first-order’ reducibility and ‘second-order’ irreducibility of religious experience.

For the Christian “a fully actual Nothing is what can be known as the dead body of God, and... is only made possible by the Crucifixion....a forward and ultimately apocalyptic movement into that absolute omega which is only possible by way of a negation and reversal of absolute alpha....a reversal realizing the Nihil itself”²⁰⁸ and caused by the dissolution of “I”. However, (as Jaffe has pointed out with reference to monotheism) this statement also requires that all talk of God’s ‘passion’ is nothing more than expressions of humanity. For, as

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p 153.

²⁰⁷ **Moksha** or **Mukti** refers, in general, to liberation from the cycle of death and rebirth. In higher Hindu philosophy, it is seen as a transcendence of phenomenal being, of any sense of consciousness of time, space and causation (karma). It is not seen as a soteriological goal in the same sense as in, say, a Christian context, but signifies dissolution of the sense of self, or ego, and the overall breakdown of *nama-roopa* (name-form). It is, in Hinduism, viewed as analogous to Nirvana, though Buddhist thought tends to differ with even the Advaita Vedantist reading of liberation. Jainism also believes in Moksha. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Moksha>.

²⁰⁸ Altizer, Thomas. *Godhead and the Nothing*. p 157.

Wittgenstein has also shown with regard to our linguistic reality, to speak of a singularity becomes nothing more than a tautology, and hence for all practical purposes we return to the position of simulation.

Being and non-Being.

Vattimo furthers this argument, claiming that:

“(n)o longer speaking of Being is justified either as the attitude that corresponds best to a ‘reality’ that excludes it and in which there is no being, or as the recognition of the fulfilment of Being in the history of our culture.”²⁰⁹

However, while ‘reality’ does not need to exclude ‘Being’ it does need to include ‘non-Being’ as primary context. This fulfils ‘Being’ in ‘the history of our culture’ as our culture creates ‘Being’ through language and our subsequent ontology, that is, we are ‘Being’ in the Feuerbachian sense. It should be remembered that this created ‘Being’ is contextually ‘second-order’ within a ‘first-order’ contextual ‘non-Being’

Vattimo continues on this track, suggesting that:

“if one thinks...that ‘Being’ can ‘return’ to speak to us beyond the oblivion into which it has fallen, or... continues always to elude us just because it transcends the capacity of our intellect and our language... it seems that one continues to identify Being with a being.”²¹⁰

Therefore we have created ‘Being’ with our language reflecting our ontology and vice versa. We forget that the only life this ‘Being’ has, is the life we give it. Vattimo concludes this aspect of my argument, arguing that:

“(n)ot for nothing is the supreme oblivion of ‘Being’ that according to which it is thought as presence. It is... a matter of remembering the oblivion; in our terms, of recognizing the link between the interpretative essence of truth and nihilism.”²¹¹

So if nihilism is ‘first-order’ truth in the form of a non-truth then first order ‘Being’ is also a form of ‘non-Being’. The plenitude of perceptible ‘second-order’ forms is subjectively ultimate and true for the interpreter or creator of this ‘Being’. While “Aristotelian

²⁰⁹ Vattimo, Gianni. *Beyond Interpretation*. p 12.

²¹⁰ Ibid. p 13.

²¹¹ Ibid.

pluralism...remains a objectivist-metaphysical thesis (the Being is said in many ways because, and only because, it *is* in many ways – irreducible to be sure, yet nonetheless articulated as one in the sole descriptive proposition that ‘reflects’ them in their plurality), that is...ultimately untenable from a hermeneutic perspective.”²¹² However this statement appears to have been made from a purely epistemic perspective.

These forms of ‘Being’ are irreducible as they will not collapse into other ‘second-order’ constructs. Yet in another sense they are based in a ‘first-order’ non-context with kenosis appearing to operate in both directions. The ‘first-order’ divine conceptual space, in which we may access our ‘inherent’ nature regardless of qualities, allows us ‘to be’ in what I argue is the ‘real’ sense of the word. That is, there are no reducible variables for this ‘Being’;²¹³ only the act of Being is reducible. With a nod to Heidegger, human ‘Being’ or *Dasein* “is subject to a systematic, radical uncertainty. Because we know that we will die... Death is the key to Life. The only genuine question is why we are at all.”²¹⁴

I am arguing that this ‘Being’ does not describe our physical life, for it is only through our ‘self-reference’ that we are aware of ‘Being’. So in a conceptual sense, how can death be the key to life? I am arguing that death is the same location as pre-birth. That is, the space we are injected into and the space that eventually consumes us. We are the only referent, since we are our own physical and conceptual creators. Since we only have an ‘absence’ or ‘space’ as our external reference, all human traditions are human creations. They do not last eternally and neither do we.

However, with this acknowledgement a certain freedom evolves. If one inverts “Sartre’s idiom, (that the human) does not create being, but rather injects nonbeing into the world, into an original plenitude of being”²¹⁵, then this supports my contextual argument. If ‘non-Being’ is the ‘first-order’ construct and our nature is ‘second-order’ (in all but our physical existence), then (from a ‘second-order’ perspective) we are ‘Being’ and we inject this ‘Being’ into the (‘first-order’) context of ‘non-Being’. Martin Heidegger covers this concept, with his ‘analytic of Dasein’:

²¹² Ibid. p 47.

²¹³ I must emphasize that I am referring to conceptual Being, and ignoring our physical requirements of food, shelter, warmth and procreation. While procreation effectively drives our sexual desires, these are no different from any other mammal. The only difference is that with our self-reference, we are aware of it. However, within conceptual reality, the projection of our sexual desires is just another variable to fill our ‘space’, with an inverted kenosis. There may be some objection to comparing sexual desire with God’s presence, yet in many religions (from Pagan, through Tantric to Shamanistic), sexual acts are the path to enlightenment.

²¹⁴ <http://www.philosophypages.com/hy/7b.htm>

²¹⁵ Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. p 32.

We are ourselves the entities to be analysed. The Being of any such entity is *in each case mine*.²¹⁶ These entities, in their Being, they are delivered over to their own Being... which is an issue for every such entity.²¹⁷

While Heidegger is not separating 'first-order' and 'second-order' reality, this statement is for practical purposes still very valid. In everyday life we are unaware of the distinctions between 'first-order' and 'second-order' reality and as such, barely conscious of the way we 'are delivered over into our own Being':

That entity which in its Being has this very Being as an issue, comports itself towards its Being as its ownmost possibility.... And because Dasein is in each case essentially its own possibility, it *can* in its very Being, 'choose' itself and win itself; it can also lose itself and never win itself; or only 'seem' to do so.²¹⁸

In a similar vein, Heidegger argued, "Nothing is what shapes Being generally. This reveals the most fundamental, transcendent reality, beyond all notions of what-is slipping over into what-is-not.... The only genuine philosophical question is why there is something rather than nothing".²¹⁹ This is a question that I believe is answered in the differences between 'first-order' and 'second-order' reality.

If we look at the kitsch nature of society today, we realise the ('first-order') empty nature of our ('second-order') fictional reality. Žižek elucidated that the ""empty" sacrifice is the Christian gesture par excellence: it is only against the background of this empty gesture that one can begin to appreciate the uniqueness of the figure of Christ."²²⁰ Žižek supports his argument with some very useful examples.

In "Ernst Lubitsch's *To Be Or Not To Be*.... one of the funniest scenes of the film, [has] the pretentious Polish actor... [attempting to] impersonate the cruel senior Gestapo officer Erhardt"²²¹ in an exaggerated and vulgar manner. While the spectators initially assume this is "a ridiculous caricature" they shift their opinion when the real Erhardt "reacts to his interlocutors *in exactly the same way*. Although the "real" Erhardt... "plays himself," this

²¹⁶ Footnoted in Heidegger's text as "...The point is merely that the kind of Being which belongs to Dasein is of a sort which any of us may call his own."

²¹⁷ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and time / translated [from the 7th German ed.] by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson*. p 67.

²¹⁸ Ibid. p 68.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Žižek, Slavoj. *On Belief*. p 79.

²²¹ Ibid.

uncanny coincidence makes all the more palpable the absolute gap that separates him from the poor Polish impersonator.”²²²

As this example shows, there is no “authentic” way for one person to represent another; every representation is contextual, and responses are subconsciously conditioned accordingly. “The Real is the appearance as appearance, it not only appears WITHIN appearances, but it is also NOTHING BUT its own appearance... [an] ultimately illusory feature that accounts for the absolute difference within the identity.”²²³

To clarify; an ‘exaggerated and vulgar’ personality (such as ‘Gestapo officer Erhardt’) may be treated as a ‘ridiculous caricature’ in one context (namely when impersonated during a film for the benefit of an audience), and with absolute fear when confronted by a prisoner. Thus there is no underlying ‘reality’, save the real as “NOTHING BUT its own appearance”. Therefore this personality is a projection, to be contextually interpreted.

Since the ‘real’ does not (from a ‘first-order’ non-physical perspective) exist, it is specifically this ‘first-order’ absence that allows the ‘second-order’ “Real” to occur/be experienced, both as appearance and within appearance. The fact that the ‘Real’ can exist in two aspects simultaneously and be interpreted in entirely different ways denotes its fluid nature.

That is, the ‘exaggerated and vulgar’ behaviour has two antithetical meanings, depending on context. Therefore the ‘Real’ can have no independent existence, but relies on us for projection and interpretation. Note here that I am again purely referring to non-physical reality. If we apply this argument to religious principles, and “end with the Imaginary... we get the Real in its imaginary dimension... if we start with the Symbolic... we get the signifier itself transformed into the Real of a meaningless letter/formula.”²²⁴ We must remember that Žižek is here referring to his double negation that ‘can be experienced positively’. That is, whether ‘real’ or ‘imaginary’, all concepts are a function of humanity; they are our projections and our receptions. This then, appears to be kenotic within both ‘first-order’ and ‘second-order’ contexts.

If we examine ‘second-order’ reality, we find that the imaginary empties into itself; thereby creating the real, from its imaginary perspective. However this ‘real’ is purely contextual, and is only real within the confines of ‘second-order’ reality (as we have seen with the previous

²²² Ibid. p 80.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid. p 82.

example of the Gestapo officer). Thus, inversely, the 'first-order' absence appears. That is, this absence allows the inverted kenosis, and as this projection occurs, the space opens (left by the emptying of the projection) within the projector, thus the imaginary and the real are both contained. However the only 'first-order' non-physical reality is absence, space, or non-existence. The 'second-order' real needs interpretation and is purely subjective, but then all non-physical truths are.

So, if we examine the 'first-order' aspects of this statement, we have the divine emptiness emptying into the absence left by the projected 'second-order' constructs and the 'second-order' constructs simultaneously filling the divine 'first-order' space. Žižek illustrates this concept with the way that "Christianity... renounces this God of Beyond. This Real behind the curtain of phenomena; it acknowledges that there is NOTHING beyond the appearance – nothing BUT the imperceptible X that changes Christ, this ordinary man, into God."²²⁵

In short, if I understand Žižek's reading, his claim is that Christianity assumes no existent God, save that of appearances, a kitsch representation. All concepts must be 'second-order', (empty of 'first-order' meaning, and thus kitsch), which contradicts the notion of ('first-order') Christian truth. If God has no meaning, no truth or falsity, then the truth may only be that there is no truth.

What 'appears' *is* what is claimed and then believed, making appearance both a religious claim and a belief. Christ does not become God; he only 'appears' to, and in fact Christ is the appearance of and onto the man Jesus. There is only divine nihilistic kenosis²²⁶. While there may be an ultimate truth and traditions may make claims through revelation to know such truth, as we have seen, if this is the case we cannot speak of them.

If this is achieved on a societal level, then regardless of immediate context, community may still exist, with internal validity and integrity for all members. Diversity becomes a beneficial thing in opposition to homogenised normality. For this to occur, observers must have a common contextual interpretation, fulfilled by orthodoxy in its role of guidance for orthopraxy. Without this orthodoxy, we would be unable to perceive the diversity of beliefs. The diversity is therefore achieved by the individual subjective experiences within these loose contextual guidelines. If one carries this theory over to religious concepts, then since these concepts do not possess physical existence the believer must create them internally. This creation is always contextually interdependent (either supportively or antagonistically) and if

²²⁵ Ibid. p 89.

²²⁶ This kenosis is inverted from a second order perspective, or the context we live in.

people become aware of the dynamic in operation it gives far more creative ability to societal members.

Therefore, if we return to the earlier arguments of Cupitt and Rorty, our only (non-physical) truths are communal interpretations. We place concepts in openings. We define superiority and authenticity and always have done. My thesis very simple, and argues that we should become aware of our (conceptually creative) actions and consciously engage in these practices instead of subconsciously conforming to communal interpretations.

As Vattimo claims:

Nietzsche's thesis concerning the death of God.... is the narration of an experience which is announced to others, so that they too may discover its truth for themselves, 'constituting on the basis of this a *we* to which and in the name of which the name of Nietzsche might speak'.²²⁷

This truth is the 'first-order' truth that I speak of, namely that there is no external deity, which allows us the space to create our 'second-order' deities and religious concepts within our own relative contexts. Effectively this truth is that there is no truth, only a non-truth, which serves no applicable basis save allowing the aforementioned space to exist.

If one utilises the western post-Christian context, this suggests we outgrow traditional concepts, previously taken as external truth, but which were previous creations. We begin to consciously create our subjective 'second-order' religious truths for this current context, instead of blindly following past concepts. This may or may not occur within the context of the Hegelian dialectic, for while new concepts are evolving they are not necessarily synthesising two oppositional poles. These may instead reinforce previously polarised concepts, with those who choose to continue following past concepts, consciously choosing to do so. If the Hegelian dialectic is utilised, the 'we' that Nietzsche speaks of can 'Be' in the current context.

We may contrast this argument with our current historical and conceptual "understanding [which] is limited by our finitude, [and] our linguistic horizons"²²⁸ making our conceptual 'second-order' reality possible. An awareness of the dynamic would allow the conscious

²²⁷ D'Isanto, Luca. Quoting Vattimo, 'Metafisica, violenza, secolarizzazione', in *filosofia* 86, ed. Gianni Vattimo (Milan: Laterza, 1987), 72. in introduction to Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. p 6.

²²⁸ Ibid. p 7.

reinterpretation by all who choose to believe a subjective truth and would remove the traditional hierarchical power structures and notions of absolute truth. Thus 'Being' becomes authentic as the 'second-order' constructs can never replicate the 'first-order' nothingness and are created and interpreted subjectively, with the only subjective truth existing within the believer's (microcosmic or macrocosmic) context.

Macquarrie (1985) argued that in that context:

“atheism, either explicitly or implicitly, is very widespread in human society.... Those who adopt such an attitude see no need to bring God into the picture, and may even think that the idea of God is harmful to human welfare. This is known as humanism.”²²⁹

While I agree with Macquarrie, I must add that this conclusion is unnecessary if we simply ignore traditional (or obsolete) concepts of God. Most atheism of today arose from the corruption, persecution and infighting in the name of God, thus God may indeed be 'harmful to human welfare'. Yet traditional contexts still couch this argument.

If we follow Feuerbach, and assume the mantle of God and consciously project ourselves into the 'god-space' as we have always (sub-consciously) done, then a-theism is completely liberating for the human spirit. That is, it frees the human spirit from hierarchies that are 'harmful to human welfare', while maintaining the same dynamic. A real risk exists that we may begin to simply 'worship ourselves' without the 'God corrective'; yet as I have previously argued, this corrective is an absence of existence and is therefore purely an inter-subjective communal validation for intention action. Therefore, the same dynamic applies, we are now simply aware of it.

For this reason I oppose Macquarrie's conceptual difference between the 'universe' and the 'world'. He appears to speak as if the “universe itself is some kind of absolute or ultimate being... which is precisely what the naturalistic or materialistic atheist denies. He regards the world as simply a collection of contingent facts.”²³⁰ However, the physical universe and physical world have only a slim correlation to our contingently produced 'world'. They provide a physical context for our 'second-order' constructed beliefs and creations but that is all. Our concepts and beliefs are no more existent than 'God' or the 'world'. Macquarrie proves my point while seeking to negate traditional atheism:

²²⁹ Macquarrie, John, *In search of deity*. p 45.

²³⁰ *Ibid.* p 47-48.

The atheist... may import... certain 'values'.... Nietzsche's will to power is an example of this, and there is something similar in Marxism.... In such cases pure atheism has been abandoned, and there has been smuggled into the theory a creative power with at least some of the traditional attributes of God.²³¹

I am therefore in full agreement with Macquarrie's conclusion that:

The ultimate expression of atheism was the philosophy of Nietzsche, in which everything is contingent or relative, and we stand on the verge of nihilism. There is no longer a forward or backward, an above or a below, a good or evil, except what we determine these shall be. There is no centre of reference, no absolute, and we have to ask ourselves seriously whether the logical working out of atheism must not have necessarily lead to nihilism.²³²

It is through an inversion of 'traditional atheism' that this new a-theism allows humanity to acknowledge the 'creative power' we have always had, and forces us to assume our correct role. No longer may we subconsciously create while referencing an external mythic 'truth'. Everything has always been 'contingent or relative' and we have always determined 'good or evil'. It seems that we finally understand the dynamic of religious and secular conceptual creation, understand that we are the 'centre of reference' and always have been. We may project our concepts and ourselves and then justify our actions against these projected concepts, whether religious (some external deity) or secular (the laws of the land, especially when utilised in order to action the death penalty). The initiatory point has always been the human species.

Paul Boghossian asks the question of whether one may have a belief in something without desire, suggesting that:

"there appears to be no difficulty in thinking of someone as a pure believer: that is, a creature who only has views about how things are, but no concept of how she would want them to be."²³³

Boghossian then asks conversely whether one may desire something with no belief in its existence. This seems unlikely, as "understanding the idea of wanting things to be different than they are actually believed to be...presupposes the concept of belief."²³⁴ If we reframe these two positions within a religious context, we find that:

²³¹ Ibid. p 48.

²³² Ibid. p 50.

²³³ Boghossian, Paul A. The Normativity of Content. in *Philosophical Issues*. Vol. 13. October 2003, pp31-45. p 42.

²³⁴ Ibid.

“(i)n the first place, such a God must be temporal... in the second place, such a God must be both the creator and the goal of all finite beings.”²³⁵

If God is ‘the goal of all finite beings, then it stands to reason that these beings, ‘us’, would desire it. However, if God is neither temporal, or our goal, but only the ‘complete absence’ that allows us to be temporal and to desire, then my argument that we create ‘second-order’ God in order to satisfy our own ‘first-order’ desires appears validated. Therefore such a God cannot positively exist (regardless of the argument that any singular may not possess a real world signified existent), for if it were to exist (in anything other than temporal extension) it must have come into existence at some stage, negating the possibility of its infinite characteristics. If we argue that God created itself in order to know itself, then this is also problematic, since God is no longer singular, and is contained within the dualistic universe.

Any positive existent, whether ‘first-order’ or ‘second-order’ can be negated and consequently either physically or conceptually destroyed. It is only through the absence of such a creator god, that the nihilistic divinely inverted kenotic space may operate. So if God is the absence of everything, then a-theism aligns with atheism, theism and polytheism. For, in this context, God is the absence of all duality, therefore, the absence of all theoretical and theological constructs. Using an inverted kenosis then, God is the sacred space that theists and polytheists project into, and, in one sense (when the focus of atheism is not simply the refutation of theism), God is what atheists speak of.

Macquarrie refers to Plotinus’ preference for unity within:

“the dialectical opposition of the one and the many...claiming that...the moving multiplicity of things and events in the world is illusion of mere appearance. The multiplicity, too, is real and the world of sense is real, but their reality is admittedly of a relatively low degree, compared with external realities.”²³⁶

Within the context of this argument, I take these ‘external realities’ to be of a physical characteristic, as our own bodies are. Therefore these are either purely ‘first-order’ existents or a mixture of ‘first-order’ existents and ‘second-order’ concepts (in the cases of humanly constructed objects).

²³⁵ Macquarrie, John, *In search of deity*. p 55.

²³⁶ Ibid. p 62.

So, with the ‘complete absence’ of ‘first-order’ deit(y)(ies), Hegel’s “absolute, on this view, is not to be grasped in conceptual form, but felt, intuited”²³⁷ and subsequently expressed.

(F)eeling is for Hegel only the beginning of the knowledge of God, and it has to be developed in conceptual form.”²³⁸ For Hegel:

“spirit goes out from itself, yet remains within itself in a complex relationship of itself with itself. As subject, it knows itself as reflected in the object, while the object in turn knows spirit as the original subject.”²³⁹

It is this ‘second-order’ projection into the nihilistic divinity of (conceptual) ‘first-order’ non-existence that I am arguing for in Hegel’s concept of the ‘complex relationship’ spirit has of ‘itself with itself’. This is only achieved through both our ability to project consciousness and our ability to be self-reflexive. Since we all interpret reality differently, every interpretation is unique or authentic (before it is communally validated), as it does not directly reference any primary truth.

This individual interpretation of truth would be both unique and authentic for each participant, as only the physical consequences can be valid or invalid; with all ‘second-order’ concepts examined for ‘first-order’ physical consequences. However, for the purposes of religious fulfilment, there need be no such justification, as long as these two realms are kept separate, with the acknowledgement of any possible ‘first-order’ consequences.

The best method for transmitting a ‘second-order’ creation (either orally or textually) has always been the narrative. In all narratives whether meaning is implicit or explicit, one thing is constant, namely a linear progression. This progression need not be chronological, but is there never the less. It is this projection that allows us to interdependently interpret and/or create meaning, by referring to this narrative.

Contemporary films such as *Pulp Fiction* (1994) and *Memento* (2000) are both examples of linear non-chronological narratives. Yet everyone who saw these films managed to form some conclusions and thus attached meaning to the experience. A linear narrative may still follow a non-chronological or circular contextual transmission, but that does not mean the story has no conclusion.

²³⁷ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *The Phenomenology of Mind*. p 71.

²³⁸ Ibid. p 129.

²³⁹ Ibid. p 130.

Narrative meaning.

As William Gass argues: for all “stories, there are agents and actions; there are patterns; there is direction; most of all, there is meaning.”²⁴⁰ To draw an analogy between these narratives and our conceptual life, if people consciously create their own subjective stories, then meaning is also subjectively conscious. Whereas if people blindly follow dogmatic constructs, their meaning references the (perceived) creative construct of the original author, in whichever state of mind or spiritual orientation they were when they wrote it.

Roland Barthes offers a contrasting argument, yet one that still ties into the overall argument:

Writing is the neutral, composite, oblique space... the negative where all identity is lost.... As soon as a fact is *narrated* no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively... this disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins.²⁴¹

If writing does not act ‘directly on reality’ then it enters the realm of the aesthetic and can have no consequences. The problem arises when writing that has no bearing on reality is interpreted as having bearing, sometimes with very negative consequences.

Yet in most stories “opening events are always an excuse, for the real aim of every story is a justification”²⁴². With the non-existence of divine ‘first-order’ justifications, these ‘second-order’ fictive constructions become visible for what they are. Gass suggests the reason for “our fondness for narratives, as well as a great part of the structure of narratives themselves, derives from genealogy and the refining of kinship”²⁴³; while Barthes argues that writing is ‘neutral, composite, oblique... (and) negative’. I agree that writing is all of this, yet it is also more. Writing acts in the same manner as the ‘complete absence of any ‘first-order’ and allows us to empty into it.

So, if we craft narratives primarily for our current context, we may more accurately engage pertinent issues instead of reinterpreting narratives²⁴⁴, reapplying them to today’s society. Not only does this leave less room for hierarchical manipulation, it also forces us to acknowledge the state of our spiritual welfare and to act on that state.

²⁴⁰ Gass, William H. *Tests of Time*. p 5.

²⁴¹ Barthes, Roland. “The Death of the Author” (1977). <http://social.chass.ncsu.edu/wyrick/debclass/whatis.htm>

²⁴² Gass, William H. *Tests of Time*. p 6.

²⁴³ *Ibid.* p 8.

²⁴⁴ This concept was elucidated by Pearson in 1952.

Returning to Vattimo, we are reminded:

(t)he point is that the text of creation, as well as that of the Scriptures, opens the way to an unlimited semiosis.... If nihilism is understood as kenosis, as the self-exhaustion of transcendence, it is devoid of any apocalyptic features, but announces itself with the logic of religion.²⁴⁵

Therefore, if humanity assumes the role of an inverted God of Genesis, we contextually create our own conceptual narrative (the world) each day, which is communally projected onto our physical context and validated against a nihilistic backdrop. There are no negative connotations to this form of nihilism for it liberates humanity and forces us to assume responsibility for our own belief structures. Vattimo concludes:

“(f)rom the perspective of kenosis, then, existence appears as infinite plurality.... It is a humanity that glimpses the trace of a God... that emerges from infinite dialogues and interpretations.”²⁴⁶

Derrida also uses the word “‘trace” (the French word [that] carries strong implications of track, footprint, imprint), a word that... presents itself as the mark of an anterior presence, origin, master. For “trace” one can substitute “arche-writing” (“archi-écriture”), or differance,” or in fact quite a few other words that Derrida uses in the same way.”²⁴⁷ The point to this is that whether taken in a positive or negative way, ‘trace’ amounts to God. In a positive sense, trace (when subscribing to Feuerbach) is the ‘imprint’ that traditional society has left on today’s schizophrenic nexus. In a negative sense, trace is the sacred space that allows the inverted kenosis, of ourselves emptying ourselves into the space. Regardless of the interpretation, trace explains the ‘missing’ element of today’s kitsch society.

These ‘infinite dialogues and interpretations’ are possible only within the infinity that is absence. One cannot quantify nothing, or non-God; one can only project into the nothing. If we recognise the negation and experience it positively instead of continually filling it up, we may break out of the circular dynamic that is the nexus, as Laing states shortly. For as Derrida claims:

²⁴⁵ Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. p 12.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.* p 17.

²⁴⁷ Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Translator’s preface. p xv.

“the sign is the place where “the completely other is announced as such – without any simplicity, any identity, any resemblance or continuity – in that which is not it” (69,47). Word and thing or thought never in fact become one.”²⁴⁸

Singularity cannot be signified, for there is no referent. Derrida continues, stating: “Such is the strange “being” of the sign: half of it always “not there” and the other half always “not that.” The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent.”²⁴⁹ For without that which is absent, there would be no space for the sign to project into and the inverted kenosis could not occur. “Derrida’s trace is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent present, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience.”²⁵⁰

Mike Grimshaw appears to follow Derrida’s ‘infinite plurality’ by also utilising architectural trends as a microcosmic investigative tool. In his article on “Soft Modernism” he elucidates that “as the globalized [sic] world seems to be uncritically embracing that which it calls postmodernism... architecture has conversely thrown off the ornamentation of postmodernism.”²⁵¹ One may see the circular dynamic in action, with the ‘globalised world’ embracing the ‘trace’ of the old concept, while the ‘architectural world’ projects the next concept, for the globalised world to embrace. Again, this concept will be dealt with in more detail with the nexus.

Grimshaw continues by arguing that:

“(m)odernity hinged on two broad axes--reduction (less/ loss/ order/ control) and progress. Postmodernism acted as the polar opposite: excess (eclecticism/ ornament/ chaos/diversity) and relativism.... To attempt to understand the rise of soft modernism we perhaps need to think in terms of a Hegelian dialectic where modernity is the thesis, postmodernism its antithesis and soft modernism its synthesis-- perhaps. For what is happening is a modernism without theory, without context, that exists as style alone.”²⁵²

I strongly support this argument and would only add that this ‘soft modernism’ is divorced from its linear narrative, from history, and from our physical context. This is why ‘soft

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p xvi.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. p xvii.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Grimshaw, Mike. ‘Soft Modernism’ *The World of the Post-Theoretical Designer*.

http://www.ctheory.net/text_file?pick=418.

²⁵² Ibid.

modernism' is so pertinent for today's religious concepts, since 'soft modernism' effectively heralds the return of kitsch.

No longer is there a narrative, no longer is there progress, there is only relativity, and that relativity occurs within a context of order and control. It is ironic that this order and control reflects the current social environment. With 'an infinite plurality' of 'conceptual relativism' and an absent common referent, we are (for the most part) unable to recognise the manner in which we are being controlled. Again referring to Zizek, our 'freedom' is commodified with reference to those 'unfree' countries.

Consequently, our possessions or commodities effectively own us, with us acting as slaves, ignorant to the controlling physical consequences of our conceptual desires. I am arguing that this dynamic is viral by nature, therefore if we are "(t)o make sense of social epidemics, we must first understand that human communication has its own set of very unusual and counterintuitive rules. What must underlie successful epidemics...is a bedrock belief that...people can radically transform their behaviour[sp] or beliefs in the face of the right kind of impetus."²⁵³

If we compare our lives with another self-organising complex life form within our context, the virus, we may learn something of our dynamic. Fritjof Capra argues that the sole purpose of a virus "is the production of new viruses that will then go on to form living systems of this peculiar kind in the environments provided by other cells."²⁵⁴

Following this line of reason, it seems feasible to classify the societal behaviour of 'western' humanity as viruses. As the late Bill Hicks parodied, "We're a virus with shoes, okay? That's all we are."²⁵⁵ On a serious note, if we consider our environmental context as a biological organism and our communities as cells in a parasitic relationship with this organism, then we structure 'living systems' within the environments provided by other communities. We do not harmonise with our ecosystem but 'self-organise' and go onto produce more 'viruses', with new ecosystems subsequently tailored for our needs and desires. However, we do not possess viral evolutionary (st)ability and thus I suggest we should redefine our role as part of our ecosystem's self-organisation.

²⁵³ Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point. How little things can make a big difference.* p 258.

²⁵⁴ Capra, Fritjof. *The turning point: science, society, and the rising culture.* p 299.

²⁵⁵ <http://www.konformist.com/2001/hicks.htm>

Our concepts of god(s) would then reflect this holistic schema, instead of a hierarchically organised mechanical power game. Capra argues that since ecosystems are self-organising, “particular populations of organisms undergo periodic fluctuations.... animals and plants live together in a combination of competition and mutual dependency.”²⁵⁶

There is no true hierarchy present, except in the human sphere, where we operate outside our physical context into a fictional context. This is evidenced within our culture, sport and antecedently, our religion. “Excessive aggression, competition, and destructive behavior [sic] are predominant only in the human species and have to be dealt with in terms of cultural values rather than being ‘explained’ pseudoscientifically as inherently natural phenomena.”²⁵⁷

This leads me to the obvious conclusion that it is no coincidence that these attributes are found in many humanly projected Gods, including the Judeo-Christian/Abrahamic God(s). Writing out of a 21st Century (post) Christian context, I am arguing that these attributes reflect our own nature, since our ‘God’ is a ‘second-order’ projection of our own consciousnesses. More than this, since this ‘God’ is accepted as omnipotent and omniscient, it externally validates all actions in continuing this virulent ontology until we meet our own demise. I am certainly not advocating another post-Christian apocalypse, but rather advocating some conscious thought in our ontology, bearing some personal responsibility for our beliefs and actions.

Systems hierarchy.

Capra suggests a systems hierarchy in opposition to this traditional hierarchy. He “turned the pyramid around and transformed it into a tree, a more appropriate symbol for the ecological nature of stratification in living systems.”²⁵⁸ With the inversion of the traditional hierarchy, one ‘god’ or ‘truth’ is transformed into many subjective truths, with the many followers of this ‘truth’ transformed into one communal collective creating a plenitude of religious beliefs, all of which (referring to Penner) are neither true or false.

“The important aspect of the stratified order in nature is not the transfer of control but rather the organization [sic] of complexity.”²⁵⁹ I must reinforce the point that any attempt to order our environment and ourselves as we would our physical creations is problematic. We are part

²⁵⁶ Capra, Fritjof. *The turning point: science, society, and the rising culture.* p 301.

²⁵⁷ Ibid. p 302.

²⁵⁸ Ibid. p 305.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

of this ecosystem, not operating externally from it; yet these are the societies we construct. Our traditionally hierarchical aspirations, for power and eventual eternal life have fashioned an unsatisfactory society for most of us, as meritorious contexts do not work for all. By separating ourselves from our context and from our 'second-order' deities, we breed an element of dissatisfaction and fear, which is all too evident in the world today. "Since we too are born and are bound to die, does this mean that we are parts of larger systems that continually renew ourselves?"²⁶⁰

I must argue yes, as social evolution takes place far quicker than genetic evolution²⁶¹ and the path it takes depends on the societal context of the day. That is, thought forms may be transformed instantaneously, while biological transformation must obey the physical laws of 'first-order' reality. As Capra notes: "The evolution of consciousness has given us not only the Cheops Pyramid, the Brandenburg Concertos, and the Theory of Relativity, but also the burning of witches, the Holocaust, and the bombing of Hiroshima."²⁶²

Since these signifiers initially image only a conceptual signified location, their only reality is their own symbolic or signifying nature. That is, the signified location does not become physical until the image is acted upon, or until 'first-order' consequences occur. This dynamic bears a strong analogy to religious reality, where Slavoj Zizek's critiques of Hegel's and Kant's concepts are a good illustration. However, before proceeding one must recall Wittgenstein's assertion that 'objectivity' is entirely contained within linguistic representations and Jaffe's evidence that 'monotheistic structure' is distilled from 'mythic narratives and liturgical life'.

Zizek argues "(t)he Sublime is...the paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view, in a negative way, of the dimension of what is unrepresentable."²⁶³ The word 'object' is used here in that same way Wittgenstein uses it, having 'no kind of composition' and 'is unrepresentable' since it cannot be contained within language. This is the paradox Zizek speaks of, since the view must be a negative view in order to be unrepresentable, yet all positive views are open to a myriad of interpretations as Emily Brady argues with aesthetics. Therefore I am arguing it is this negative view; this absence of all things that allows the myriad of 'mythic narratives' Jaffe speaks of.

²⁶⁰ Ibid. p 307.

²⁶¹ Ibid. p 325.

²⁶² Ibid. p 326.

²⁶³ Zizek, Slavoj. *The sublime object of ideology – (Phronesis)*. p 203.

This is an inversion of the argument Kant appears to take up when he “presupposes that the Thing-in-itself exists as something positively given beyond the field of representation... a way of indicating, within the domain on phenomenality, this transcendent dimension of the Thing which persists in itself beyond phenomenality.”²⁶⁴ I disagree with Kant that the ‘Thing-in-itself exists...beyond the field of representation’ and prefer Hegel’s argument “that there is *nothing* beyond phenomenality, beyond the field of representation.”²⁶⁵ Therefore the ‘Thing-in-itself’ may be real, but it is a negative reality, an absence of existence.

The primary difference (which I believe Hegel is correct in identifying) is that while our physical reality has phenomenal existence, our spiritual reality does not, and instead requires language to enjoy some form of existence. However, with its entrance into physical existence (through either voice or text) it instantly becomes dualistic and hence loses its singularity. “(T)he Sublime is... an object which occupies the place, replaces, fills out the empty place of the Thing as the void, as the pure Nothing of absolute negativity – the Sublime is an object whose positive body is just an embodiment of Nothing.”²⁶⁶ If we transfer our interpretation of God from the bible to that of Nietzsche’s metaphysics, we will see that his concept has also been misread.

Since we currently “live in a formal and ordered social world, in which science and technology are available to rid our stay in the world of the terror that belonged to primitive man”²⁶⁷ we have assumed the mantle of the God of Genesis 1:28. When this fiction is taken as truth, it is of major concern. If we ultimately frame ourselves in a nihilistic (physical as well as conceptual) context, we must openly and carefully look and listen for the consequences of our fictive constructions, while maintaining an inter-dependent vigilance of our environmental context.

In the next chapter I will argue that in contrast to this possibility, we currently operate in a semi-conscious state. I hypothesise that unless we are to assume some responsibility for our conceptual creation, we will become more and more dislocated from our context. This is not an apocalyptic warning, but purely an investigation of the methods of our belief dynamic.

²⁶⁴ Ibid. p 205.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p 206.

²⁶⁷ Ibid. p 7.

Chapter Three.

In this chapter, I will firstly outline our societal slide into a pastiche/kitsch ontology. This pastiche ontology occurs through our lack of a referent, which dislocates us further from our context, making us schizophrenic interfaces within the nexus of the information stream.

Pastiche reality.

Frederic Jameson illustrates our (individual and collective) contextual dislocation by outlining the societal slide from parody to pastiche in the postmodern world. While “(b)oth... involve... mimicry(,)... parody... produce(s) an imitation which mocks the original.”²⁶⁸ So by mocking the original, the parody reinforces its existence, as I have argued narrative also does. That is, whether supported or opposed, the original hierarchical position remains. This is an important contrast to pastiche non-existence, especially when referred to Zizek’s inverted interpretation²⁶⁹ of the traditional sublime and Baudrillard’s simulation within a religious context. Throughout history propaganda machines have parodied “other” cultures and institutions to reinforce their own context, while reinforcing (albeit from a disparaging perspective) their interpretation of the “other” context.

However “(p)astiche is blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor[sic]”²⁷⁰ and with this loss of humour, the mimicry fades and the original subject is lost, or more correctly “dies”. Again, this is a ‘second-order’ “death”, as the physical subject still exists, and it is simply the physical subject’s function that dies. Where the ‘modern’ parody was linked to the individualist ‘private’ self, the ‘postmodern’ pastiche signals “that the old individual or individualist subject is “dead””; and that one might even describe the concept of the unique individual and the theoretical basis of individualism as ideological.”²⁷¹

The ‘subject’ is not only dead; but from our present contextual perspective it never existed, since we have no referent for it because of our contextual dislocation. The current hegemony argues that it “is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification which sought to persuade

²⁶⁸ Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 113.

²⁶⁹ I will deal with this argument in my conclusion. Suffice it to say, Zizek argues that the negative can be experienced positively and does not need to be ‘filled out’ with a variety of variables.

²⁷⁰ Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” in Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 114.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.* p 115.

people that they “had” individual subjects and possessed this unique personal identity”,²⁷² when placed within the ever-present-present of the information stream that I will discuss later in this chapter.

When this ‘mystification’ is applied to our Imago Dei argument, it explains the problems with religious truth today, as Ludwig Feuerbach illustrates:

(I)n religion man necessarily places his nature out of himself, regards his nature as a separate nature; necessarily, because the nature which is the object of theory lies outside of him, because all his conscious existence spends itself in his practical subjectivity. God is his *alter ego*, his other lost half; God is the complement of himself; in God he is the first perfect man.²⁷³

Therefore, with no ‘individual subjectivity’ it is impossible to project a personal ‘*alter ego*’ or God, and thus we currently live in reference to ‘second-order’ concepts (that are nihilistic when placed in a ‘first-order’ context), projected by those with knowledge of the dynamic of belief.

Supporting my argument is Jameson’s notion that current:

“writers and artists...will no longer be able to invent new styles and worlds – they’ve already been invented; only a limited number of combinations are possible.... [since] all that is left is to imitate dead styles.”²⁷⁴

This limitation occurs through our need for a real world referential ontology and the necessary communicative context for discussing our reference to any signifying aesthetic. While these limited understandings may (as the holist would argue) point to something more than their finite constituents, they are still drawn from a finite context. Otherwise we have no means of understanding something we do not understand, which obviously leaves us with another tautology.

This is apparent within textual and aesthetic creations such as art and music. There is a continual referencing of past concepts, within the pastiche practices of today, bringing about a plenitude of fragmented non-existent styles and selves. There is not and never was (from our

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Feuerbach, Ludwig. *The essence of Christianity*. p 195.

²⁷⁴ Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” in Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 115.

current perspective due to the negation of the subject) a 'first-order' (non-physical) textual or aesthetic existent. People continually reference (non-existent) 'past' concepts to shape 'future' ones, while never considering that these concepts were kitsch simulations as well and not representations.

Baudrillard articulates:

Representation stems from the principle of the equivalence of the sign and the real... Simulation, on the contrary, stems from the utopia of the principle of equivalence, *from the radical negation of the sign as value*, from the sign as the reversion and death sentence of every reference.²⁷⁵

Therefore, any real concept of the sublime or the divine must (as Žizek argues) be essentially negative (due to the 'complete absence of any 'first-order' divinity'), as it is impossible to locate a real equivalent of any concept of God. So all concepts (that are contained within language) must, as Jaffe notes, be "mythic narratives", a problem not confined purely to texts.

Images also devolve in significance as we understand more about the nature of the sublime. What starts as a reflection of a "profound reality" proceeds to denature it and finally "masks the *absence* of a profound reality; it has no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own pure simulacrum."²⁷⁶ An excellent example of the 'absent subject' is the *Star Wars* saga.

Where this would have previously been a satire based on "the most important cultural experiences of the generation that grew up from the '30s to the '50s [that] was the Saturday afternoon serial of the Buck Rogers type.... [for today's audience] there is no longer any point to a parody of such serials since they are long extinct."²⁷⁷ These serials are extinct on three levels.

Not only are the individual selves portrayed within the serials extinct, but also both the physical and conceptual existents (being the serial itself) are also extinct, due to our microcosmic and macrocosmic external referencing and our historical dislocation.

²⁷⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. "The Precession of Simulacra" in Baudrillard, J. (ed.) *Simulacra and simulation*. p 6.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." in Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 116.

That is, the characterised portraits (of the ‘good guys’ and ‘bad guys’) are not only extinct, but the whole of their prior context is extinct. Consequently, since the individualist subject no longer exists (regardless of whether it ever did) neither do the values it portrayed.

This may be clarified with the Mel Brooks parody “Space Balls” based on the Star Wars episode “The Return of the Jedi”, as both the characters and context were immediately recognisable. However the same does not hold when comparing Star Wars (which was also influenced by the work of Joseph Campbell²⁷⁸) against its target parody, the original Buck Rogers. Jameson notes our longing for these previously important contextual cultural experiences, articulating:

Star Wars, far from being a pointless satire...satisfies a deep... longing to experience them again... (O)n some first level children can take the adventures straight... [while] the adult public is able to gratify a deeper and more properly nostalgic desire to return to that older period and to live its strange old aesthetic artefacts through once again.²⁷⁹

This ‘nostalgic desire’ refers to the first Star Wars trilogy in the 1970’s, which had a far greater cultural impact than the more recent trilogy. This fails to deliver nostalgia for the first trilogy and bears no relationship at all to the original Buck Rogers serials, thus illustrating its pastiche nature. However, it should be noted here that the Buck Rogers television series (1979-1981²⁸⁰) effectively parodied Star Wars.

Our pastiche ontology occurs because we lose sight of the previous generation’s ‘cultural experiences’ after a certain time period has elapsed, and procure them as our own. These ‘experiences’ exist within a linear timeline where they provide a future for us to live into. However, in opposition to linear non-chronological narratives, there is no meaning to be found, since we are dislocated from the context that our previous generation(s) enjoyed. This continual recycling of the previous generation’s pastiche concepts effectively traps us in societal reincarnation, as Engels argues:

Men make their own history, whatever its outcome may be, through each person following his own consciously desired end, and history is precisely the resultant of

²⁷⁸ For a detailed account of Lucas’ rediscovery of Campbell’s *The Hero with a thousand faces*, see <http://www.jitterbug.com/origins/myth.html>.

²⁷⁹ Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” in Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 116.

²⁸⁰ <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078579/>

these many wills operating in different directions and of their manifold effects upon the external world.²⁸¹

Jameson notes the warning signs of:

“the very style of nostalgia films invading and colonizing even those movies today which have contemporary settings: as though... we have become incapable of achieving aesthetic representations of our own current experience.... at the very least, an alarming and pathological symptom of a society that has become incapable of dealing with time and history.”²⁸²

Baudrillard appears to agree with Jameson’s noting of the incapability ‘of dealing with time and history’, arguing that it is with the absence of the real that “nostalgia assumes its full meaning. There is a plethora of myths of origin and of signs of reality – a plethora of truth, of secondary objectivity, and authenticity”.²⁸³ These are obvious within Jameson’s fragmented society, which finds its roots in Plato’s cave argument.

This argument suggests “(c)ultural production has been driven back inside the mind... it can no longer look directly out of its eyes at the real world for the referent...”²⁸⁴ Thus it seems we have (in the words of Francis Fukuyama) effectively reached the end of time and are living post history. Fukuyama compares:

“Plato’s *thymos*... the psychological seat of Hegel’s desire for recognition.... (with) the “desire for recognition”... (T)he former refers to a part of the soul that invests objects with value, whereas the latter is an activity of *thymos* that demands that another consciousness share the same valuation.”²⁸⁵

So the ‘desire for recognition’ is a function of the *thymos*. However, with no ‘real world referent’ the *thymos* is unable to validate its desire for recognition, hence is unable to live within a historical context. This causes the fragmented, pastiche, schizophrenic society that Jameson warns of. While the “*thymos* is, even in its most humble manifestations, the starting

²⁸¹ Engels, Frederick. *Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of classical German philosophy*. p 46.

²⁸² Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” in Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 117.

²⁸³ Baudrillard, Jean. “The Precession of Simulacra.” In Baudrillard, J. (ed.) *Simulacra and simulation*. p 6-7.

²⁸⁴ Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” in Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 118.

²⁸⁵ Fukuyama, Francis. *The end of history and the last man*. p 165.

point for human conflict”²⁸⁶, once this is removed from society, it allows the growth of *Megalothymia*, or “(t)he desire to be recognized as superior to other people.... Its opposite... (*I*)*sothymia* [or] the desire to be recognized as the equal of other people”²⁸⁷ is more difficult to validate.

Fukuyama progresses this argument, claiming:

Hegel too understood that the fundamental transition that had occurred in modern life was the domestication of the master, and his metamorphosis into economic man. But he realized that this did not mean the abolition of *thymos* so much as its transformation into a new and, he believed, higher form. The *megalothymia* of the few would have to give way to the *isothymia* of the many.²⁸⁸

I am arguing that with the lack of real world referents, and an ignorance of the mechanics of religious and secular belief systems, most of us are in a position of *isothymia* in order to indulge the *megalothymia* of those few pulling the proverbial strings. Certainly we are not trapped in this position by any other means than our own ignorance, as there are no conspiracies to discover.

We are in this fragmented state through our own greed and laziness, transferring our “Imago Dei” image to kitsch commodities to satisfy our immediate desires. We are living post history, for we have lost all concept of continuity, and have no sense of our context. We only have veiled references to a (dead or non-existent (depending on the perspective taken)) past context; we have trapped ourselves. If we are to free ourselves, we must find a way of discussing the method our ontology follows within our (inter-) societal dynamic.

Whereas the narrative of linear modernity previously provided a future destination in space and time for living into (while also always looking backwards), post-historical living has ignored this concept. While we may treat life as the ‘eternal now’ this is simply evidence of our dislocation from our physical context. There are consequences for all actions, which occur whether we acknowledge them or not. What is required is an ontological destination to live into, a method of ‘Being’, not a tangible destination. The pertinent question here seems to concern locating signs of such ontology in a world of simulation.

²⁸⁶ Ibid. p 182.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. p 334.

Simulation.

Jameson refers to Lacan's model, which conceives of a linguistic sign:

“as having two (or perhaps three) components. A sign, a word, a text, is here modelled as a relationship between a signifier – a material object, the sound of a word, the script of a text – and a signified, the *meaning* of that material word or material text. The third component would be the so-called “referent,” the “real” object in the “real” world to which the sign refers.”²⁸⁹

Thus, to simplify, the signifier (from a ‘first-order’ perspective) exists since it is a sign that can be empirically validated. The signified element does not exist, but is real none the less, with the physical consequences of the signification being both real and existent. The referent also exists as it is a real object in the real world. So, if this theory was practically applied to today's society, the sign could be a police statement informing society of the dangers of pure methamphetamine, the signified element would be the inter-subjective meaning people took from that and the choices they made in their lives, and the referent would be the positive or negative physical consequences of those choices.

This is the method behind societal belief, a method that is inoperable without a full grasp of language, and a dynamic that is impossible to attribute to the sublime, as there can be no ‘real world’ referent for it. This argument is also utilised by the philosopher Charles Peirce, who splits a genuine sign's foundation into three aspects forming the triadic relative of icon, index and symbol.²⁹⁰ As John Fitzgerald critiques: “Peirce says: “A sign is in conjoint relation to the thing denoted and to the mind.... The kind of sign that fulfils this description is a symbol, especially a linguistic sign.””²⁹¹

Therefore, whether traditionally interpreting or consciously creating a significant element, one finds this symbolism in all language. This includes language of a religious nature, and any attempt to signify a designated subjective internal experience. There can be no independence between the sign and its interpreter, or the sign becomes degenerate, such as the naturally occurring relationship between smoke and fire.²⁹² That is, the sign requires the

²⁸⁹ Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” in Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture* . p 118-119.

²⁹⁰ Fitzgerald, John J. *Peirce's theory of signs as foundation for pragmatism*. p 44.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.* p 45.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

interpreter to generate a signified meaning, and the symbolism the interpreter uses to generate this signified meaning is contained within language, or else we may not speak of it.

The independence between sign and interpreter distinguishes between the external ('first-order') world of physical reality or what Peirce calls 'brute force', and the internal ('second-order') world of consciously perceived reality (through interpretive experience). The fact that there are a variety of interpretations points to the impossibility to 'know' the true semiotic function of a symbol. If we cannot 'know' the true semiotic function, then we are free to create the interpretations we wish, albeit it at a 'second-order' level (which is all humanity has ever been capable of). "There are no pure icons, that is, disembodied qualities, but the closest analogue is an idea or image in an interpreter."²⁹³

If one follows this argument to a linear conclusion, the split between internal and external becomes plain. "If a sign is an icon, for example, it cannot give assurance to the interpreter that there is an existing object corresponding to it."²⁹⁴ Without this, as Baudrillard has shown an icon or image bears 'no relation to any reality whatsoever: it is its own simulacrum', consuming itself into itself and creating its own kitsch reality. That is, the absence of a signifier removes any meaning, save that which we choose to commodify and create, whether actively or passively.

The commodification of 'the absence of a signifier' is obscene since "through it, objects communicate.... All functions abolished in... communication.... All secrets, spaces and scenes abolished in a single dimension of information."²⁹⁵ This abolition of function, secrets, spaces and scenes are functions of the schizophrenic information stream, as it controls our societal nexus and those who project the stream. This amplifies the obscenity (of information and/or commodification) and our desire for it as most of us search in vain for externally referenced meaning.

Deleuze and Guattari offer an example of the obscenity of the absent signifier:

There is a simple general formula for the signifying regime of the sign (the signifying sign): every sign refers to another sign, and only to another sign, ad infinitum. That is why, at the limit... what is retained is... only the formal relation of sign to sign insofar as it defines a so-called signifying chain. The limitless of significance replaces the sign.... Thus the sign... is

²⁹³ Ibid. p 55.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. p 49.

²⁹⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. "The Ecstasy of Communication." In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 131.

thought of as a *symbol* in a constant movement of referral from sign to sign. The signifier is the sign in redundancy with the sign.²⁹⁶

So, when we locate this ‘constant movement of referral’ within the information stream, we can see the amplified obscenity that contextually dislocates us. When our ‘second-order’ reality is dislocated from ‘first-order’ (physical) consequences, it is dislocated from us, hence, with our current societal ontology, we are dislocated from ourselves. Baudrillard outlines our dislocation from our physical context:

Simulation is... the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal... It is the map that precedes the territory... It is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts which are...ours. *The desert of the real itself.*²⁹⁷

This ‘*desert of the real*’ is our ‘first-order’ (physical) real, or our biological existential selves. ‘Vestiges’ of us ‘persist here and there’, but for the most part we do *not* exist. While this argument is only pertinent to the technological world (contained within the information stream), the consequences of our actions on the rest of the world are very real.

Mark C. Taylor advance Baudrillard’s argument:

Whether the referent of the sign is taken to be “real” or “ideal,” the distinction between signifier and signified is actually a product of *consciousness itself*... That to which consciousness points is already within consciousness itself... Consciousness, therefore, deals *only* with signs and never reaches the thing itself.²⁹⁸

So the only way there will be ‘something’ there to reach is if we reconnect to our physical (‘first-order’) context and realise the consequences of our intentions. To do this we must acknowledge the fictitious nature of our ‘second-order’ truths, as Slavoj Zizek elucidates. Zizek does this by outlining and naming the contrast between ‘first-order’ natural reality and ‘second-order’ created reality as ‘fetish’. This “is effectively a kind of *inverse* of the symptom... which disturbs the surface of the false appearance... (F)etish is the embodiment of the Lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth.”²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari Felix. *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. p 112.

²⁹⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. “The Precession of Simulacra” in Baudrillard, J. (ed.) *Simulacra and simulation*. p 1.

²⁹⁸ Taylor, Mark. C. *Erring: A Postmodern Atheology*. p 105.

²⁹⁹ Zizek, Slavoj. *On Belief*. p 13.

Fetish.

Zizek uses the analogy of a repressed death for his example, where “the repressed trauma returns in the symptom”³⁰⁰ unlike the fetish which allows one to cope with the rational reality of the death, by denying it with a lie. Therefore instead of repressing the trauma, only for it to emerge subconsciously in a harmful way, the fetish allows one to ‘lie’ to oneself in order to avoid the reality. If this practice is carried over into organised religion, it may be seen with the lie that there are (any number of) Gods to avoid the reality, the unbearable truth of ‘first-order’ absence of a qualitative God.

Adrian Johnson³⁰¹ reflects that “Zizek makes the paradoxical move of arguing, alongside his rejection of a stable distinction between subjectivity and sociality, that the big Other of the symbolic order only effectively exists (albeit in an illusory, ephemeral fashion) insofar as subjects treat it "as if" it possessed a stable, independent reality as an overarching system of collective mediation--"there is an "objective" sociosymbolic system only insofar as subjects treat it as such" (Zizek, 2000a, p 26³⁰²).”³⁰³ A practical secular example of fetish occurs in the Columbia Pictures film, “GO”.³⁰⁴

Two characters in this film, a gay couple that play a pair of ‘soap opera’ doctors, hit a woman in the car park of a rave, sending her body into a ditch. They hurriedly drive off, but on reflection think she is dead, and return to dispose of the body. The driver (Adam) who hit the woman stands on the edge of the ditch; while his accomplice (Zack) goes down to retrieve the body.

Zack: “Listen to me.”

Adam: “She’s dead.”

Zack: “She’s not dead.”

Adam: “She’s dead and I hit her and I killed her and she’s dead.”

Zack: “She’s not dead, she’s acting dead. Listen Adam, this is just a scene, look at the light, the one you’re blocking, say hi to Molly in makeup.”

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Dr. Johnson is currently an interdisciplinary research fellow in psychoanalysis at Emory University and a training candidate at the Emory Psychoanalytic Institute.

³⁰² Zizek, S. *The Art of the Ridiculous Sublime: On David Lynch's Lost Highway*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.

³⁰³ http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz/itw/infomark/190/672/65267324w5/purl=rc1_EAIM_0_A127868982&dyn=4!xrn_1_0_A127868982?sw_aep=cante
rbury

³⁰⁴ Copyright 1999 Columbia Pictures Industries Inc. All Rights Reserved.

Adam: (crying) “Hi Molly.”

Zack offers Adam as many vege-burgers as he wants from the place: “round the corner.... just help me get through this scene Adam.”

Adam: “I’m not delusional Zack.”

Zack: “Well then grab her fucking arms.”

Although the victim (who, incidentally is still alive but from their current perspective) is dead, and Adam has tremendous guilt for ‘killing’ her, fetishising reality in this manner allows him to help dispose of the ‘body’ while still maintaining rationality.

In this case, Adam is able to function by lying to himself about the ‘unbearable truth’ of his actions. He is ‘not delusional’ and knows exactly what he has done, but by ‘acting’ (or lying to himself) instead of losing emotional control as he initially did (when he was a crying mess) Adam is able to function in a fully rational manner. Adam has simply conditioned himself to believe a certain lie.

When this example is expanded we can see how our entire existence is externally conditioned and how we have no concept of how little our lives actually belong to us. Fetish is a conscious method of accepting (otherwise known as a coping strategy) our unfavourable circumstances in life, as opposed to subconsciously inhibiting them and not recognising the dynamic. Fetish allows us to escape into our alternative realities, although not in a schizophrenic way. We are not isolated from the external world (reality), thus we do not create fictional personalities and existences. We merely allow ourselves some escapism, a holiday from the world as such, in order to cope with the external dynamic.

So, it is only because of this coping mechanism that “fetishists...are thoroughly “realists,” able to accept the way things effectively are – since they have their fetish to which they can cling in order to cancel the full impact of reality.”³⁰⁵ This ‘second-order’ ‘fetishism’ allows the person to cope with (and assumes an antithetical position to) their ‘first-order’ ‘physical reality’. Yet the person is not lost in either position but (sub-)consciously synthesises the middle position to enrich their life, in this case as a coping mechanism. From an objective rational perspective, fetishising is lacking reason, is wasteful and is effectively an empty practice. Yet from a subjective perspective, it is essential to a balanced life. The variables and methods of the fetish dynamic are sure to vary widely, and one may be assured that some aspects are rather unsavoury.

³⁰⁵ Zizek, Slavoj. *On Belief*. p 14.

Yet regardless of the specifics:

(If the fetish-object is taken away from the fetishist, this cynical facade of pragmatic resignation disintegrates “So, when we are bombarded by claims that in our post-ideological cynical era nobody believes in the proclaimed ideals, when we encounter a person who claims he is cured of any beliefs, accepting social reality the way it is, one should always counter such claims with the question: OK, but where is the fetish that enables you to (pretend to) accept reality “the way it is?”” (Zizek, 2001c³⁰⁶, p 15).³⁰⁷

Contextually, if there is true freedom of choice and the individual endures no external influencing factors, fetishism is a safe and practical method for many individuals to manifest an alternate reality (for a certain limited period of time) in order to ‘accept reality “the way it is”’. This fetishisation does not interfere with their ‘societally objective’ reality, yet allows them to cope with certain eventualities, minus the chemically assisted ontologies so many of us choose in this secular day and age. Failure to attend to this aspect of our dynamic ensures the bulk of our ‘second-order’ created reality as naturally problematic, manifesting as the (‘first-order’) ‘symptom’.

Since we are the variables within our system, we often miss noticing the dynamic in action, since it is not physically observable. For example “capitalism's life-blood, money, is simply a fetishistic crystallization of a belief in others' belief in the socio-performative force emanating from this same material. And yet... its vampiric symbiosis with individual human desire... makes it highly unlikely that people can simply be persuaded to stop believing and start thinking.”³⁰⁸

The “social relations” of this ‘Capitalist commodity fetishism’ then drive “the mystification of one’s daily activities, the religion of everyday life which attributes living activity to inanimate things”.³⁰⁹ Therefore, our whole subconsciously conditioned, ‘second-order’ conceptual existence is effectively empty, from a ‘first-order’ perspective. That is, the only ‘first-order’ reality is the physical context for the consequences of ‘second-order’ conditioned thought.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ http://infotrac.galegroup.com.ezproxy.canterbury.ac.nz/itw/infomark/189/672/65267324w5/purl=rc1_EAIM_0_A127868982&dyn=4!xrn_1_0_A127868982?sw_aep=canterbury

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Perlman, Fredy. *The Reproduction of Daily Life*.
<http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/perlman/sp001702>.

Currently anything that is unacceptable to the status quo (some of it rightly so) is termed destructive. This communal validation has always been essential for religious acceptance, and while this has always been the case, it is only with the postmodern/pluralistic freedom of expression that such explicit criticism has been widely noticed. “Personal action is either predominantly validating, confirming, encouraging, supportive, enhancing, or it is invalidating, discomforting, discouraging, undermining and constricting. It can be creative or destructive.”³¹⁰

Nexus.

Laing (writing in 1967) outlined the manner in which:

we obey and defend beings that exist only in so far as we continue to invent and to perpetuate them.... We act not only in terms of our own experience, but of what we think *they* experience, and how we think they think we experience, and so on in a logically vertiginous spiral to infinity.³¹¹

I am arguing that the majority of societ(y)(ies) are manipulated in just this way; blindly following the few who have mastered the trait of manipulating others’ experiences. Laing identifies a reciprocally interiorised group (labelling it a ‘nexus’), whose unification is achieved purely through its members with no “‘common object’ nor organisational or institutional structures”.³¹² This ‘nexus’ bears a striking resemblance to what Zizek terms the negative sublime, an argument that I discuss in my conclusion.

This nexus contains no common objects or structure and its unity and the “condition of permanence of such a nexus... is the successful re-invention of whatever gives such experience its *raison d’etre*.... Each person has to act on the others to maintain the nexus *in them*”³¹³. Therefore, with its reciprocal interiorization, there are very few if any observable qualifying characteristics from an external perspective, making it a perfect example of consciously created community.

This nexus has gained unprecedented access to our inner worlds through the fluidity and provisionality of the perceived fixed truth of the electronic media, which allows unlimited manipulation. As Baudrillard comments: “With the television image – the television being the

³¹⁰ Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. p 29.

³¹¹ Laing, R D. *The politics of experience*. p 65-66.

³¹² *Ibid.* p 72.

³¹³ *Ibid.* p 74.

ultimate and perfect object for this new era – our own body and the whole surrounding universe become a control screen.”³¹⁴ For example, we may use the Patriot Act of post 9/11 America to illustrate the practical method of a nexus. “The Patriot Act allows the government to do widespread surveillance, hold people indefinitely without charges, take away due process from non-citizens, and more.”³¹⁵

While this would have been previously unthinkable in ‘the land of the free’, it is now perfectly acceptable when (accompanied by the correct media spin) it is based around the nexus of George W. Bush. Carol V. Hamilton names Bush as a “Presidential Simulacrum”, comparing him to “Jerzy Kozinsky’s...character named, Chance the Gardener”³¹⁶ played memorably by Peter Sellers:

(I)n a post-literate, hyperreal world, those accretions of historical time and psychological reflection that produce subjectivity tend to disperse before they constitute a deep, coherent self. The result can be a personality like that of Bush ...a commodity produced by contemporary American culture, with its bizarre admixture of consumerism, television, worship of celebrities, and glib Christian fundamentalism.³¹⁷

So this presidential simulacrum acts as the perfect nexus (since he effectively does not exist except as an image projected into a space) while also spouting “Churchillian rhetoric... [which] is used inappropriately... [in] America’s, war against its haters, despoilers, destroyers, with scant attention to complex histories that defy such reductiveness”.³¹⁸ As the public are fed this dynamic through the media, they (also effectively act as a nexus, and) subconsciously maintain the ‘truth’ of it, by receiving and transmitting it over and over as all good interfaces should.

However, the information is dislocated from their contextual reality and thus all ‘complex histories’ and physical consequences are deemed irrelevant. With this contextual dislocation, the rhetoric/information/image is simulacrum/hyper-real/kitsch.

This dynamic of this information stream is the exact inversion of the sublime (that also has no real world referent), as this is a secular construction following the same method. The only

³¹⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. “The Ecstasy of Communication.” In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 127.

³¹⁵ Lettich, Melanie. *Cleveland anti-war defendant speaks out*.

<http://www.notinourname.net/restrictions/cleveland-defendant-speaks-6aug03.htm>

³¹⁶ Hamilton, Carol. V. *Being Nothing: George W. Bush as Presidential Simulacrum*.

http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=427.

³¹⁷ Baudrillard, Jean. “The Ecstasy of Communication.” In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 127.

³¹⁸ Said, Edward W. *The Clash of Ignorance*. <http://www.thenation.com>

meaning the information stream carries is that which is encoded to it, but this meaning is determined by the spin-doctors controlling the interface input.

That is, the information stream acts as an inverted ‘first-order’ (or kitsch) absence in order to receive ‘second-order’ properties. However this inversion also acts to remove the choice of the human interface. The space within our language for the (positively inverted) sublime³¹⁹ allows the projection of certain chosen concepts within our cultural context.

Albert Einstein (1941) has previously brought this subject to our attention with a practical example that I must agree with:

*In their struggle for the ethical good, teachers of religion must have the stature to give up the doctrine of a personal God, that is, give up that source of fear and hope which in the past placed such vast power in the hands of priests. In their labors [sic] they will have to avail themselves of those forces which are capable of cultivating the Good, the True, and the Beautiful in humanity itself. This is, to be sure, a more difficult but an incomparably more worthy task ...*³²⁰ (Italics in quotation)

That we have failed to ‘give up the doctrine of a personal God’ only adds to my argument that we collectively wish to take the easy path and have our immediate desires fulfilled. We see this same dynamic in today’s society through the transformation of the religious hierarchy into those whom control the information flow. Since the nexus currently force feeds concepts through our interface, the only means of rejection (and reversing the flow) would seem to be a removal from the data stream. This would require conscious effort but would allow us to see the dynamic in action. I must reiterate that this is not a conspiracy theory, for those controlling the ‘information flow’ are only fulfilling the demands of our immediate desires. Therefore, I realise that this ‘conscious effort’ is extremely unlikely to occur within the 21st Century.

Patrick West argues that the physical consequences of our ‘fulfilled desires’ and our contextual dislocations are immediately apparent:

³¹⁹ It must be remembered that Zizek’s sublime is a negative location that we continually ‘fill out’ with our chosen concepts, and then ‘hold these concepts up to be original’; an argument that I detail in my conclusion. Therefore the ‘positively sublime’ variables act in a negative manner and fill out our space, removing our freedom for our own projections. Again, this is not a conspiracy theory, as it simply investigates the dynamic that fulfils human desires; the law of supply and demand.

³²⁰ Einstein, Albert. *Science, Philosophy, and Religion, A Symposium*, published by the Conference on Science, Philosophy, and Religion in Their Relation to the Democratic Way of Life, Inc., New York, 1941.”<http://www.positiveatheism.org/writebtomcat.htm#EINSTEIN>

In the arts and in our lifestyles, endless *bricolage*, regurgitation and imitation bear testament to (simulation)... We drink in fake Irish pubs, cocoon ourselves in virtual reality, and visit Disneyland to immerse ourselves in the worlds of ancient Egypt, Greece, Rome, Olde England or the Wild West... Technology dictates that nearly any object can be simulated... If someone is an identical copy, then what makes the original “original”? After all, we do not label identical twins as “real” and “copy”³²¹

That is, this acceptance is hyperreal since there are no ‘real world’ signifiers to correspond to in this inversion of the sublime, making it an obscene nexus. The problem is that we as a species have become too caught up with variables and paid far too little attention to the dynamic of the nexus and our pastiche society. Returning to Deleuze and Guattari, we become aware of the method of the dynamic:

(T)he form of expression is reducible... to a set of statements arising in the social field considered as a stratum.... The form of content is reducible... to a complex state of things as a formation of power.... We could say that there are two constantly intersecting multiplicities, “discursive multiplicities” of expression and “nondiscursive multiplicities” of content.³²²

With expressiveness, permanence of record, swiftness and diffusion as the major contributory factors to efficient communications,³²³ it was “possible for society to be organized more and more on the higher faculties of man, on intelligence and sympathy, rather than on authority, caste, and routine.”³²⁴ However, when information is taken as permanent instead of provisional it is a primary concern, and the consequences of this are exacerbated in today’s society. With the printed media(s) (d)evolution³²⁵ into the electronic media two simultaneous consequences eventuated. Fixity transformed into fluidity, in essence replicating the transmission of traditional oral narratives, with our information disseminated through infotaining news personalities. We formed a loyalty to certain personalities and trust their information transmission as a function of their integrity.

³²¹ West, Patrick. *Faking it big in the 21st century*. <http://www.newstatesman.com> Monday 22nd January 2001.

³²² Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari Felix. *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia*. p 66-67.

³²³ Cooley, Charles, Horton. *On Self and Social Organization*. p 103.

³²⁴ Ibid.

³²⁵ I am arguing for two (antithetical perspectives to this phrase. While on one level printed media evolved to a fluidic media (television, cyberspace etc) it simultaneously devolved into the same media. Where recipients previously practiced critical interpretation when accessing printed media (and could take or leave it as required), with the birth of electronic media we were bombarded continually. We are openly receptive in (the previously articulated) schizophrenic nature, to all information with no possible shielding, consequently the ‘small coterie of experts’ have access to our internally referenced selves in a way never before achieved. While we still treat information as if it is truth, we become oblivious to the speed this ‘truth’ is manipulated as required. This supports my use of Jameson’s argument that we (as well as society on the whole) have become pastiche or kitsch.

Simultaneously, receivers (readers transformed into watchers and listeners) accepted this new provisional truth as a permanent one, since we have been raised in the age of printed media. That is, we still act as if there is a linear narrative, a documented history, but this only exists within the information stream of the 'ever-present-present'. We have forgotten that with no (divine or secular) external referent, we must realise that the only reason those in hierarchy enjoy their power is because we acknowledge and accept them and their abilities.

The Bivings group (who specialise in internet lobbying for major corporations such as Monsanto) provide evidence of the operative method of this power dynamic. An article on their website "warns that "there are some campaigns where... it is important to first 'listen' to what is being said online... Once you are plugged into this world, it is possible to make postings to these outlets that present your position as an uninvolved third party.... Sometimes only the client knows the precise role we played. Sometimes, in other words, real people have no idea that they are being managed by fake ones."³²⁶

With our dislocation from the 'everyday world' we accede to the suggestions and demands of 'fake' people with a modicum of fuss. If our informational inputs assure us of the (hierarchically positioned) truth of their concepts we accede happily, as long as we maintain a passive position. Charles Cooley argues: "we ought to keep at least a subconsciousness of this radical change in mechanism, without allowing for which nothing else can be understood."³²⁷ Without noticing this 'radical change' the best we can hope for, is to retrospectively notice shifts in society, and even if this is achieved, we will remain ignorant of reasons for them arising due to the fluid fixity of our 'ever-present-present'.

In Cooley's historical context there was "nothing in this new mechanism quite so pervasive and characteristic as the daily newspaper.... a sort of screen on which is inscribed a world-wide gossip!"³²⁸ While the 'daily newspaper' seems mundane by today's 'gossip screen' standards, we must remember that the proportional contrast between gossip newspapers and other forms of printed media is equivalent to that between electronic media and 'gossip newspapers' today.

³²⁶ George Monbiot, "<http://www.guardian.co.uk/Archive/Article/0,4273,4412987,00.html>" *The Fake Persuaders*, The Guardian, May 14, 2002 @

<http://www.globalissues.org/HumanRights/Media/Corporations/Examples.asp>

³²⁷ Cooley, Charles, Horton. *On Self and Social Organization*. p 104.

³²⁸ *Ibid.* p 105.

Regardless of motivation and content, this gossip “promotes a widespread sociability and sense of community.... (and) fosters superficiality and commonplaces in every sphere of thought and feeling”³²⁹, albeit in an intensified form today. The dynamic of supply and demand is pertinent here, for if we did not desire consumerised acceptance, those in power would have no need for the delivery of it. No one is to blame; we have simply ceased maintaining the structure of a post Christian society.

This is evidenced by the manner in which “(t)he relation between the statement and the act is internal, immanent....a relation of *redundancy*.... Newspapers, news, proceed by redundancy, in that they tell us what we “must” think, retain, expect, etc.”³³⁰ We relinquish our creativity in this ‘relation of redundancy’, yet it would take very little to remember/re-learn the method of the creative dynamic.

This ‘relation of *redundancy*’ has become dislocated from the fixity of the printed media, with the (d)evolution of the ‘information stream’, thus dislocating itself and us from our historical context. Stewart Hoover outlines our contextual dislocation, as we become entrenched in the ‘ever-present-present’:

In the secular news, everything is immediate and oncoming. You don’t see enough of the religious view or of the community news.... Even if you do see a church doing... a revival or something, it doesn’t follow through. You anticipate its coming, but what happened *after* that revival?³³¹

Essentially this function of the information stream acts as a synthesis between the printed media and the orally transmitted traditions as Ruth Finnegan illustrates:

When the description of the past depends on recollection... as in an oral culture, the account is liable to be directly susceptible to present-day fashions and the current allocation of power.³³²

Finnegan then contrasts this susceptibility to printed media:

³²⁹ Ibid. p 106.

³³⁰ Ibid. p 79.

³³¹ Hoover, Stewart M. *Religion in the news: faith and journalism in American public discourse*. p 108.

³³² Finnegan, Ruth. *Literacy and orality: studies in the technology of communication*. p 20.

where there is a permanent and unchangeable record *in writing*, there is, by that very fact, at least the possibility of a detailed and self-conscious check on the truth of historical accounts.³³³

Therefore, we have a fluid media that is susceptible to alteration, which we accept as a fixed record. That is, with our contextual dislocation (due to our use of the media for our external referencing) our only useful purpose is to transmit and receive information (which maintains the media); the specifics of the information are irrelevant, and it is purely the transmitting dynamic that matters.

Baudrillard articulates the consequences of our passage into simulation:

The very quotidian nature of the terrestrial habitat hypostasised in space means the end of metaphysics. The era of hyperreality now begins.... what used to be lived out on earth... is henceforth projected into reality...into absolute space which is also that of simulation.³³⁴

Yet how could this occur without our knowledge and agreement? How can most of us be living a life of simulation, while still believing it to be real? These questions can be answered with reference to Baudrillard's outlining of the method of desire fulfilment:

The control of the extensive and speedy media of modern communications can add extra strength to a totalitarian government and additional force to a power seeking demagogue.... (It is sometimes argued that the overall effect of the present system of telecommunications (together with mass-circulation newspapers) in modern industrial society is to lull and manipulate the people into acceptance of the current power structure.³³⁵

This supports the argument that we appear engaged in the practice of externally referencing our pastiche reality from the obscene flow of information, which we subconsciously utilise to maintain our interdependent nexus, while following traditional patterns. Pastiche hierarchical structures subsequently remain. Therefore hyperreality is our own 'second-order' manipulation of our previous 'second-order' reality and ourselves. It accounts for our exuberance in accepting it through the familiarity of its dynamic. The 'information stream' is only manipulated because we allow it, and in many cases desire it.

³³³ Ibid. p 21.

³³⁴ Baudrillard, Jean. "The Ecstasy of Communication." In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 128.

³³⁵ Ibid. p 35.

New Zealand case study.

The historical ‘familiarity’ of this dynamic is outlined in Bill Pearson’s *Fretful Sleepers*³³⁶ essay, which was published in the New Zealand journal *Landfall* in 1952. Pearson was born in 1922, in Greymouth where he also grew up. He then:

“attended Canterbury University College, Dunedin Training College and Otago University College.... taught briefly at Blackball School...served in the Dental Corps in Fiji in 1942–43, in the infantry in Egypt and Italy and in the occupation force in Japan in 1943–46. After completing an MA at Canterbury in 1947–48, he taught at Oxford District High School in 1949 and then went to King’s College, University of London (PhD 1952). He remained in England, writing and working as a supply teacher for London Council Schools 1952–53. He returned to lecture at Auckland University College (later University of Auckland) from 1959 until his retirement as associate professor in 1986, apart from periods overseas”.³³⁷

As such, Pearson’s career spanned a wide variety of contexts and offered him a variety of perspectives. Therefore his argument provides a useful contrast to today’s nexus, while comparing the implicit behaviours of yesteryear with today’s society. If we compare our current ontology to Pearson’s ontology, it would appear that while New Zealand has made technological and cultural progress, we still collectively act as the atomised ‘man alone’ (a fact Pearson criticised in 1952). This atomised attitude, when combined with our marginalised geographical location makes us an excellent microcosm to investigate today’s global yet atomised society. The nexus regulates our own individual experience (through our interface) against what we think other individuals experience. This supports Laing’s ‘vertiginous spiral to infinity’.

Therefore, it is our ‘atomised’ nature that makes this dynamic possible, as all individuals within the collective follow this dynamic in the same manner as we traditionally followed a religious belief. That is, the kitsch nature of our continual semiconscious behaviour is illustrated by ‘projecting itself into absolute space’.

Since our society has made ‘technological progress’ within the ‘global community’, the effects of this progress should be quite pronounced. That is, we should have noticed a more

³³⁶ ‘This essay was first published in the New Zealand journal *Landfall*, September 1952, and reprinted with corrections in *Landfall Country*, ed. Charles Brasch (Caxton Press, 1960).’ (Sourced *Fretful Sleepers* and other Essays, 1974). Russell Brown, a former columnist in the New Zealand Listener, and National Radio employee has also just reprinted *Fretful Sleepers* in his book, *Great New Zealand Argument: Ideas About Ourselves*. A review of this can be seen on <http://www.stuff.co.nz/stuff/0,2106,3325931a4501,00.html>

³³⁷ <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writers/pearsonbill.html>

pronounced contrast, since we were previously geographically marginalised before our contextual dislocation within the global interface. If we begin by considering some of Pearson's central claims, it should be readily noticeable whether they still hold today, or whether they contrast with the consequences of our technological evolution.

Pearson wrote contextually that:

(t)he New Zealander delegates authority, then forgets it. He has shrugged off responsibility and wants to be left alone.... (o)nly when things go visibly wrong does he recall his right to question authority and change it. When he complains half his bitterness is that he has been made to complain because he hates complaint and he can't complain with dignity.³³⁸

While there are certainly a percentage of New Zealanders who involve themselves in pertinent issues, this has always been the case. The primary New Zealand ontology still appears to be one of apathy, (if the current social environment is anything to go by,) illustrating the atomisation and (consumer driven) kitsch lack of 'reality'. It certainly appears that our current global simulacrum is merely the destination of our collective natures within the developed world, for if we are not an accurate microcosm, why do these results appear to bear out on a macrocosmic scale?

I am arguing that we have become divorced from our existential physical context as well as our historical location, and now reference ourselves against the information we are fed. We have become part of our own system of belief, sucking ourselves into ourselves, purely 'to transmit and receive information.' Objects within our context have become "tests, they are the ones that interrogate us.... Thus all the messages in the media function in a similar fashion: neither information nor communication, but referendum, perpetual test, circular response, verification of the code."³³⁹

Ranulph Glanville, agrees with this claim, and refers to cyberspace to argue:

Events are made by observing....occur in the space between....also determine that space.... [and] make up the interface.... The interface lies... between [the] acts of the Objects.... When we assume the interface is "as if" it were on the Object of our observing, we give no space to

³³⁸ Pearson, Bill. *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays*. p 2.

³³⁹ Baudrillard, Jean. "Hypermarket and hypercommodity." In Baudrillard, J. (ed.) *Simulacra and simulation*. p 75.

that Object to help form that interface. Then the interface only admits action and reaction: behaviour determined by the observing Object.³⁴⁰

Whether we are the observing Object, or the event that the information transmitter observes, becomes irrelevant. We collapse into each other, (removing the space and) becoming singular, with no contextual reference and no dualistic means of interpretation. Thus our societal nexus continues instantaneously transmitting and receiving within a closed loop context.

Hence “one can no longer talk about the “real”.... [or] try to dispel the old conception of language as naming...a one-to-one correspondence between a signifier and a signified.”³⁴¹ With ‘postmodern’ fractionalisation any communal possibility of such naming has long since evaporated. While schizophrenics cannot know the past and future components of language, they “will clearly have a far more intense experience of any given present of the world than we do, since our own present is always part of some larger set of projects which force us selectively to focus our perceptions.”³⁴² This perceptual focusing or ‘closing our mind’ is purely contextual and is a choice that we make, usually without considering the consequences, as we continue within our ever-present-present.

To clarify, instead of acting as a switching interface that is divorced from ‘first-order’ reality, I am arguing that we have the ability to either choose already existent deities, or create new ones, as intentional tools to enhance our ‘internal sphere’. By considering what emotional and psychological states would satisfy our requirements in the long term (both individually and societally), we could consciously work toward realising this goal.

Again, I realise that mainstream society has little time for this practice due to societal obligations, but if academics and theologians made the physical consequences of our ‘ideas and scholarship’ apparent, our ontology should shift. That is, if academics and theologians contextualised their theoretical concepts by linking them to our physically existent reality, instead of adding to societal dislocation: then mainstream society should reconnect to our context.

Mediating clergy would serve no purpose and religious and secular hierarchical power structures should consequently become obsolete, unless they were chosen as a reaction to their disappearance. That is, they would hopefully be actively chosen and not passively

³⁴⁰ Glanville, Ranulph. “Acts Between and Between Acts.” In Ascot, Roy. (ed.) *Reframing Consciousness*. p 13.

³⁴¹ Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture* . p 119.

³⁴² Ibid.

utilised to avoid conscious thought; they would be an integral part of the societal context and not a hierarchical hegemonic power structure. People would not follow by apathy, but instead by assent (replicating the traditional Christian model within a secular context).

Traditionally our accepted 'facts' and 'truths' (with the exception of physical facts) are purely others' annotated experience that is passed down to us. Currently we receive and transmit them as (dislocated) switching interfaces. While the traditional practice perpetually trapped society into the previous context and allowed little choice, the current practice keeps us in the 'ever-present-present', where we suck ourselves into ourselves through our desire for *isothymia*.

Imagined Community.

Benedict Anderson confirmed this 'superficiality' with his four primary aspects of the Imagined Community; the first two directly describing the dynamic of the schizophrenic nexus, while the last two deal with the perceived sovereignty of the post modern nation state:

- 1) It is *imagined* because the members never know their fellow members. Nationalism invents nation.
- 2) It is imagined as *limited* because it has finite boundaries.
- 3) It is imagined as sovereign because this is an age of post-Enlightenment and Revolution, i.e., an age of freedom of individuals.
- 4) It is imagined as a community because the nation is conceived as deep, horizontal comradeship.³⁴³

Since we are isothymic schizophrenic switching centres, we never know the inner nature of our fellow desirers, save within the information stream, where we are singular and thus have no 'real-world' reference point. The 'finite boundaries' of our electronic media appears limitless from our subjective position, yet it provides a very real boundary between our 'Imagined Community' and our physical context, where all consequences of our actions affect our existence.

Anderson's imagined community has also been criticised³⁴⁴ as: culturally reductionist, invalid in certain cases concerning nationalism and religion, flawed in arguing that the Americas

³⁴³ Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. p 5-7

³⁴⁴ <http://www.revisionist-notes.co.uk/revision/964.html>. © UK-Learning 2001-3.

were the birthplace of nationalism, and flawed concerning anti-colonial nationalisms. Its premise is apparently:

that the decline of religion made it possible... to imagine the nation.... Whilst Europe existed as the great religiously imagined communities, the conception of time was one in which history was fused together. The past, present and future were not linked causally, but through the will of the divine. Within such a conception of time, the word "meanwhile" can have no meaning. With the dissolution of such communities, it became possible to imagine a state in which there was... "*homogenous, empty time*".³⁴⁵

It is worth briefly investigating these criticisms to show that, regardless of them, Anderson makes valid points in his argument. The main thrust of this argument is that imagined religion fused history together and that 'empty time' was only possible with the decline of these religions. While America may not have been 'the birthplace of nationalism' I must agree with Anderson and argue that it was the birthplace of current nationalism.

I argue that, like culture, religion is a function of human society; an effort to fulfil our desire for singularity and with the decline of religion this desire was simply transferred from God to the flag. I also disagree that Anderson's thesis is 'culturally reductionist', since all three major Abrahamic monotheisms follow this same dynamic. While his argument may be religiously reductionist, I feel that this is an unfair criticism, since the majority of the western world follows a religious or secular methodology with monotheistic roots. Since this is the context we are working out of, then it seems reasonable to base the argument within this context. Anderson's 'homogenous, *empty time*' is the perfect context for the schizophrenic nexus we enjoy today. While it may be argued that religion is on the rise; whether in the form of fundamentalist Islam or a return to one of the many Christian traditions, this return is of an atomised nature. That is, the religion does not cause the cessation of patriotism, international commerce and continually glocalising communities. Church and state are unlikely to form a symbiotic enterprise in the foreseeable future. This religious revival appears to be more of a search for community, and personal meaning as a member of said community.

Cooley articulates human social interactions as "a sample...of those processes... identifying itself with the general movement of a group as to achieve a remarkably just anticipation of what the group will do."³⁴⁶ This I argue accounts for traditional cultural differences, and evolutionary variations between 'truths' (when not interfered with through external means).

³⁴⁵ Ibid.

³⁴⁶ Cooley, Charles, Horton. *On Self and Social Organization*. p 126.

Thus the inter-dependency that existed maintained the societal identity. However within the nexus, this interdependency exists through our 'switching interface' and therefore on a subconscious level. As the conditioning 'information stream' informs us of the next provisional truth(s), we simultaneously create this/them on a societal level and accept them as valid.

Cooley suggests that an acceptance of an evolutionary perspective allows us "to see the relation between society and the individual as an organic relation."³⁴⁷ This relation, when applied to our current consumerist culture and our *isothymia*, works very efficiently to maintain our position in 'empty time' and 'empty space' for the previously mentioned inverted kenosis to occur. If this appears entrenched in a philosophical argument and irrelevant to the practical world, one need only look to the marketplace to locate two excellent current examples of this concept. As stated above, it must be remembered that as we interact with these 'objects' or 'tests' we ourselves transform.

Jeff Brand argues for utilising the effects of video games on children as a transformative tool, in "Australia's e-journal of social and political debate:

For young learners today, video games are part the "cultural furniture" (this term used by UK author and journalist Steven Poole). The development of boys and girls, their socialisation, and their formal learning (including literacy) are at risk if they reject contemporary media. What humanises technology most completely is appropriation of it.³⁴⁸

This research is supported by "(r)esearchers at the Institute of Education at London ... (who) confirm that games are good for a child's development.... (and) are as culturally relevant as music, film and literature."³⁴⁹

Yet while these humanised technologies may aid in personal development, they still interact within the matrix of information processing. This is a consequence of technological progress, and while games such as Play-station 2 and X Box may be contextually beneficial, they still turn humans into (the previously mentioned) electronic interfaces. The difference between the actual games and the associated marketing is also a pertinent issue:

Julie Creighton, director of the Duracell Kid's Choice Toy Survey.... said. "If you ask children what they want, they give you the marketing information they've been fed by the

³⁴⁷ Ibid. p 131.

³⁴⁸ <http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=366>

³⁴⁹ http://www.xboxgamers.com/index.php?temp_view=view_news.php&viewid=1693

media. But if you ask them why they want it, you'll learn what meaning the toy has in their lives.³⁵⁰

It is striking how our children replicate our behaviour, as we behave in exactly the same way in response to marketing campaigns, with the majority of our population (locally and globally) preferring to be spoon-fed by the mass media rather than logging on to the quality cyber-media that exists with critical integrity³⁵¹ to gain an informed perspective.

While it is easy to criticize the current generation of teenagers for their consumerist desires it *must* not be forgotten that we are their parents. They are a product of our conditioning as we are a product of adults of a similar age to Bill Pearson, thus they are the 'destination (and dislocation) of our collective nature'.

This current dislocation from historical continuity shows how "the experience of the present becomes powerfully, overwhelmingly vivid and "material": the world comes before the schizophrenic with heightened intensity, bearing a mysterious and oppressive charge of affect, glowing with hallucinatory energy."³⁵² This has little application within creative visualisation, as there are no referents and both the game and the player collectively become a kitsch, or 'invertedly sublime singular' simulacrum. By searching for external salvation (only to find none) we have settled for sensory intensity with the games acting as technological appendages, making us cyborgs with a gaming interface.

This concept was explored in the David Cronenberg's science fiction film *Existenz* (1999) with the video game interfacing through a bio-port in the gamer's lower back. While this is purely science fiction, it illustrates how close Donna Haraway's conceptual cyborg is to current reality:

Late twentieth century machines have made thoroughly ambiguous the difference between natural and artificial, mind and body, self-developing and eternally designed, and many other distinctions that used to apply to organisms and machines. Our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves frighteningly inert.³⁵³

³⁵⁰ http://psychcentral.com/library/holiday_children.htm

³⁵¹ There is a plenitude of sites providing balanced and critical reporting. Some examples are: "<http://www.reuters.com/news.jhtml>" <http://www.reuters.com/news.jhtml>, <http://www.indymedia.org/>, <http://www.bbcworld.com>, <http://www.aldaily.com/>, <http://www.gnn.tv/>, www.wired.com/news/, www.cbc.ca/news/.

³⁵² Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture* . p 120.

³⁵³ Haraway, Donna J. "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" in Kirkup, Janes, Woodward & Hovendon (eds.) *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*. p 52.

Thus by joining with them, we become the space for them to project into, dislocating us into a ‘singular simulacrum’. For a real world progression from Cronenberg and Haraway, we need only look to Markus Giesler, an assistant professor of marketing at York University. Geisler describes the experience of using an iPod as one:

“that transforms listeners into “cyborgs” through a process he calls “technotranscendence.”.... Giesler notes that users give their iPods names, and carry them close to their bodies—the vibrations of the hard drive makes the device feel alive.”³⁵⁴

Consumers therefore unintentionally support Haraway’s theory that these machines make humans ‘frighteningly inert’ with the iPod user considering it:

a body extension. Its part of my memory, and if I lose this stuff, I lose part of my identity.... The consumer is plugged into all kinds of technologies and networks that affect consumer behavior [sic].... consumption patterns change: from materiality to information--the internet; from ownership to access--file sharing; and from pattern to randomness--the iPod³⁵⁵.

With the shift from physical ‘first-order’ to kitsch ‘second-order’, and from contextual reality to dislocated hyper-reality, the human interface now ceases thinking about the context of the experience and instead becomes part of the new dislocated context, transmitting and receiving with heightened sensitivity. This dislocation is heightened by the previously gimmicky “(s)huffle mode.... [which] is (now) the most viable strategy to access information that would otherwise be lost.... It reduces the complexity of consumption. It’s a cyborg consumption strategy.”³⁵⁶

However, like Dr Frankenstein’s monster, Haraway’s concept has evolved and will continue to evolve. Katherine Hayles argues that where the “(c)borg looks to the past as well as the future”,³⁵⁷ current cyborgs have no concepts of historical narrative and are instead best summarised by the shuffle mode which is now most popular. Therefore, while the ‘traditional cyborg’, like Frankenstein’s monster, was created in a certain context, this same cyborg was not contextually dislocated (as we currently are) and was therefore not a hyper-real simulation of itself. That is, our technology has a conceptual life of its own, with us becoming

³⁵⁴ Kahney, Leander. *My Ipod, My Self*. <http://www.wired.com/news/mac/0,2125,66426,00.html>

³⁵⁵ Ibid

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Hayles, N. Katherine: “The Life Cycle of Cyborgs: Writing the Posthuman.” In J Wolmark (ed.) *Cybersexualities: A reader on feminist theory, Cyborgs & cyberspace*. p 158.

increasingly 'inert'. The analogy here is that the *megalothymic* master that currently dominates us is our own creation, a creation we appear to desire, yet be completely ignorant of.

One example of this is the way that "(m)imesis in modernity moves between...the sublime and the kitsch.... mirror reflections of each other, each.... [that] require the disintegration [and proclaim the fundamental illusion] of time and space. That which lies beyond can either be theistically or atheistically interpreted; it can either be plenitude or void."³⁵⁸ While this disintegration 'of time and space' speaks of transcendence, it outlines the dynamic that is utilised within the nexus of today. I am arguing that it is this desire (for transcendence) that maintains our current societal structure and our blindness to the underlying dynamic.

The absence of 'reality' is borne out with previous signifiers loss of their signified consequences. "[A] signifier that has lost its signified has thereby been transformed into an image."³⁵⁹ Not only does it cease to exist, it never did (from a 'first-order' perspective, of course). That is, its only previous reality was as a cultural construct and since meaning has been diverted to images, it simply now just "is".

An analogy may be drawn here between transcendence and Bataille's immanence, except that we are consuming our projected provisional immanence to satisfy our immediate desires; dislocated from our physical context. Where previously, "(t)he oppositions subject/object and public/private were still meaningful.... today the scene and mirror no longer exist: instead, there is a screen and network."³⁶⁰ The illusion of 'objective' reality has vanished, leaving the myriad of kitsch atomised interpretations:

So the first originals are not those who simply mimetically follow another, but in some sense they *exemplify* a creative power immanent to their being as humans. ... They do not merely image themselves.... (t)hey struggle to rescue human promise from its formlessness...³⁶¹

Again, if this argument appears overly dramatic, we may find it easier to trace the path from human to cyborg with a return to Bill Pearson's New Zealand example. Where Pearson drew

³⁵⁸ Ward, Graham. "Transcendence and Representation." in Schwartz, Regina. (ed.) *Transcendence: philosophy, literature, and theology approach the beyond*. p 135.

³⁵⁹ Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 120.

³⁶⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. "The Ecstasy of Communication." In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 126.

³⁶¹ Desmond, William. *Art, origins, otherness : between philosophy and art*. p 70.

attention to many explicit aspects of New Zealand society, I argue that these have become pastiche, implicitly constructing our current ontology with no reference to the past.

Pearson's referencing of what he terms the two-faced attitude of middle class New Zealand (assuming such a collective still exists) to social climbing³⁶² is particularly pertinent here. This still appears to be a search for an external referent, and for meaning, while attempting to maintain some independence. If we treat New Zealand as a globally liminal context (due to our short period of nationhood, our subsequent lack of historical tradition and our low population), then we provide an interesting microcosm into human nature, once it has been removed from its context. That is, without extended history and high population for us to immerse ourselves in, we illustrate human nature without influencing factors.

Pearson stated that "(b)eing middle-class we fear and sneer at royalty and aristocracy, yet we hanker after them because an aristocrat's goodwill confers security on our self-esteem.... We sneer at English customs, yet from every visiting Englishman we exact words of praise and are offended if he criticises us."³⁶³ It seems we want their praise and approval, yet we don't want to be like them. This need for belonging or community would appear to be a human condition.

However, while the behaviour remains, it has passed from parody into pastiche in the same way as the *Buck Rogers* type serials have passed to the *Star Wars* trilogies. We still behave in the same way but we have forgotten the reason for this behaviour. What is more, this attitude has disseminated into our local contexts, causing a rather schizophrenic contrast to our 'tall poppy' syndrome. We want acceptance and praise yet we have no wish to be noticed and most of us will avoid 'rocking the boat' at all costs. Pearson elucidates how in his day, when people left their hometown to travel to university, the hometown folk would look for a chance to condemn you for being different.³⁶⁴ This being 'different' was another pseudonym for 'getting ahead' and Pearson ruminates that at that stage, no other population in the world behaved in this manner.

I argue that it is still the case; that 'blue collar' people have to work extremely hard to shake the conditioning of youth. Yet the reason for this 'condemnation' has long since been forgotten. We act on 'autopilot' never questioning why we behave in these ways. It is for this reason that I am arguing for the pastiche nature of today's society.

³⁶² Pearson, Bill. *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays*. p 5.

³⁶³ *Ibid.* p 6.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

As Pearson³⁶⁵ so aptly illustrates, we all fear (to some extent) public opinion or ‘not looking good’.³⁶⁶ This fear has been passed through generations in a ‘self fulfilling prophecy’, eternally recycling “in the same way as this year’s pullets pecked by old hens grow into next year’s hens to peck the new batch of pullets.”³⁶⁷ This externally referenced fear from the previous generation is negative for two primary reasons.

Firstly and most obviously it keeps those of us in the current context referencing against the same values, whether supportively or antagonistically; but secondly and I argue more importantly, the reasons for these values erode over time, are lost and assimilated into our ontology, with us never questioning why. This is especially apparent within the information stream, as the spatial collapse and contextual dislocation consequently removes our reference points.

Pearson bemoaned the inability of New Zealanders to speculate about themselves³⁶⁸ suggesting that “(i)t all boils down to a paralysing self-consciousness, a fear to appear in public without fulfilling every expectation of the audience, a craving for protective camouflage.”³⁶⁹ I want to suggest that these behaviours are the human ontology, exacerbated by our ‘man alone’ status in this previously isolated community.

Where in other cultures there has been a long history with which to identify, a linear community to belong to with traditions to follow, these are all sadly lacking in New Zealand. We are left with the perpetual recycling of antagonistic attitudes to each other and ourselves, with a fear of achievement beyond the societal aggregate.

The paradox presents in the fact that we require an externally referential source of meaning and praise, yet we will not expose ourselves enough to receive such praise, and when we do receive it we camouflage our gratitude with self-deprecating insults.

³⁶⁵ Pearson appears to have pre-empted Gass’ *Tests of time* by 50 years, with this concept. This also supports my argument that liminality is more evident in (what was then) more marginalised societies (such as New Zealand of the 1950’s and 1960’s by pure virtue of its geographical location).

³⁶⁶ This may also be a base human condition, for there are many such philosophies (in the form of New Age courses) in existence, which help one to deal with this ‘looking good’. I have borrowed the term from *The Landmark Forum*, but the channelled New Age concepts of Jane Roberts (Seth), which while they may be rather dubious in origin, never-the-less also argue that we create our own reality and our own meaning. Consequently, if we create our own meaning and we choose not to be overtly influenced by the external influences of others; the only fact that is relevant is our interpretation of our environment and thus our created meaning. While this is an atomised concept, it is still validated within and between communities. We all live within some communal context and the extent of this ‘looking good’ is usually determined by our friends and family, for it is their opinion that matters most.

³⁶⁷ Pearson, Bill. *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays*. p 7.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p 11.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p 13.

Schizophrenia.

Therefore we are schizophrenic. We show two faces to life, in this ever-present-present: our private face, which craves for belonging and community contrasts to our public face, which presents these 'self deprecating' insults and the consequences of our 'craving for protective camouflage'. While this behaviour is a societal schizophrenia, it still falls within clinical guidelines.

Dr. Julian Silverman³⁷⁰ has distinguished two types of schizophrenia, "essential schizophrenia" and "paranoid schizophrenia". With "essential schizophrenia" one withdraws "from the impacts of experience in the outside world.... [which] falls back and away, and invasions from the unconscious overtake and overwhelm one."³⁷¹ This appears an accurate representation of our society as information interface. The physical consequences or 'impacts of experience' fall away, with the electronic media overwhelming our unconscious and overtaking us. While this describes the *isothymia* or 'desire to be recognised as the equal of other people', it does not apply to the few in the position of *megalothymia*.

In "paranoid schizophrenia"...the person remains alert and extremely sensitive to the world and its events, interpreting all, however, in terms of his own projected fantasies, fears, and terrors, and with a sense of being in danger from assaults. The assaults, actually, are from within, but he projects them outward, imagining that the world is everywhere on watch against him."³⁷² This belief acts as a powerful motivational force for the 'desire to be recognised as superior to other people' or *megalothymia*. If the whole world is 'on watch against him', then the best way one can stave off these perceived attacks is to be superiorly intimidating. Joseph Campbell adds that:

man.... has both an inherited biology and a personal biography, the "archetypes of the unconscious" being expressions of the first.... (In a schizophrenic plunge one descends to the "collective," and the imagery there experienced is largely of the order of the archetypes of myth.³⁷³

³⁷⁰ Dr. Julian Silverman is the author of "Shamans and Acute Schizophrenia" in the *American Anthropologist* Vol. 69, No. 1, Feb 1967.

³⁷¹ <http://www.jstor.org/view/00027294/ap020375/02a00030/1?searchUrl=http%3a//www.jstor.org/search/BasicResults%3fhp%3d25%26si%3d1%26Query%3dShamans%2band%2bAcute%2bSchizophrenia&frame=noframe¤tResult=00027294%2bap020375%2b02a00030%2b0%2cFF0E&useRID=84b50701@canterbury.ac.nz/01cce4403520bd105a8116dab&dpi=3&config=jstor>

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Campbell, Joseph. *Myths to live by*. pP 210.

This argument is supported with the content of popular electronic fantasy and war gaming (as a simulacrum for mythic archetypes) in the *isothymia*'s 'desire to be recognised', by assuming a persona within the game's contextual conflict; while the *megalothymia*'s desire for superiority can cause epic physical consequences, when one is deluded enough to attempt to dominate the 'collective' according to mythic narratives. There is a dislocation from physical community and historical time. Everything is pastiche with no referential points (and no perceived consequences to our actions); yet we behave as if these referential points still existed.

The rampant consumerism of today only drives us to keep up with current trends for fear of falling behind, for fear of losing the externally referential support and praise of the advertising media (in an implicitly hegemonic way) and other members of (our and other) societ(y)(ies). Even this praise we desire, will (and always has) lack(ed) intimacy, as this is impermissible to Kiwi mate-ship. While we wish to be recognised as the equal of other people, we do not wish them to know that we desire this. Pearson illustrated this hypocrisy (of desiring something yet simultaneously criticizing those who are noticed as also desiring it), and these attitudes are again pertinent when contrasted with current society; illustrating the current lack of community, even if it was previously based on hypocrisy.

For instance "(t)he youth leering off to his first booze-up drinks as if he has been initiated into the mysteries of manhood."³⁷⁴ He has attained the rite of passage, enthusiastically accepting his role in the hypocritical community, and behaving in a way deemed as unacceptable in his family home. Yet, other "fathers can't be bothered with this hypocrisy: they swear and drink at home and their children grow up knowing the hypocrisy of others who are models before their children and only relax in the bar."³⁷⁵

These 'models before their children' would frequently criticise the behaviour of those who 'swear and drink at home' as unacceptable, yet those who behaved in this manner exhibited a great deal more integrity, as they did not modify their behaviour in order to garner societal approval, approval that would still be lacking intimacy. However, the fact that societal or communal approval was important provides a good contrast with today's absence of community, with individuals instead desiring societal approval with regards to consumer goods.

³⁷⁴ Pearson, Bill. *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays*. p 16.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

While revealing our schizophrenic nature, this hypocritical behaviour also illustrates the contextual shift (and atomisation) for our implicit emotional behavioural patterns. While drugs have (in many cases) replaced alcohol as the 'recreational choice' and the traditional sporting interests of 'rugby and racing' have atomised into a myriad of sporting pastimes (which while previously existent, only garnered a minute amount of public interest), it is the massive growth in computer games, iPods and the information stream that best illustrates our dislocation: "What we need to retain... is the idea that... schizophrenia, emerges from the failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language."³⁷⁶

Wittgenstein has shown that speech and language contain our reality, a view supported by Noam Chomsky:

A child, in Chomsky's view, "knows" the principles of language before he says his first words.... "Knowledge of language," Chomsky is careful to point out, "results from the interplay of initially given structures of the mind, maturational processes and interaction with the environment." Chomsky's theories rest upon two observations about language. The first is that a grammar describes a basic knowledge shared by all speakers of the language. The second is that our use of language is fundamentally creative.³⁷⁷

Therefore, with our language lapsing into the 'ever-present-present', and hence not achieving its potential, historical evolution is impossible. No longer is there an inter-dependent community but instead a plethora of atomised individuals, desiring a 'self-interested' context, consequently disallowing any inter-connected community and ensuring a schizophrenic destiny. This is especially apparent "in the hyperreal United States, where "reality TV" has usurped reality itself, (and) the problematic status of "the real" is precisely the issue."³⁷⁸ As Baudrillard continues:

(T)oday it is the very space of habitation that is conceived as both receiver and distributor...regulating everything from a distance.... Simulators of leisure or of vacations in the home...become conceivable.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁶ Jameson, Fredric. "Postmodernism and Consumer Society." In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 118.

³⁷⁷ Achbar, Mark ed. *Manufacturing consent: Noam Chomsky and the media*. p 23.

³⁷⁸ Hamilton, Carol. V. *Being Nothing: George W. Bush as Presidential Simulacrum*. http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=427.

³⁷⁹ Baudrillard, Jean. "The Ecstasy of Communication." In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 128.

The same dynamic operates here as within the nexus. The inverted sublime, the space of habitation, regulated at a distance by a self-contained group, with ‘little if any qualifying characteristics’. Baudrillard progresses this theory one step further, by showing how our entire life is simulated, reinforcing Foster’s description of Jameson’s shift from parody to pastiche. The problem pertains to how the “transistorization [sic] of the environment, relegates to total uselessness...all that used to fill the scene of our lives.... The real itself appears as a large useless body.”³⁸⁰

Where Zizek’s ‘fetish’ reinforced reality, allowing the lie to permit the unbearable truth, Jameson’s ‘pastiche’ removes the truth from our lives, causing a fragmented solipsistic schizophrenic reality. When viewed “(f)rom an anarchist perspective, however, fragmentation does not indicate the dissolution of society but its perfection, the realization of a utopian world divided into independent autonomous units.”³⁸¹

Baudrillard appears to agree with this ‘large useless body’ of ‘pastiche reality, reinforcing Jameson’s argument that the signifier has not only lost its signified meaning, it never possessed one (from today’s dislocated perspective). He argues that:

(o)bscenity begins precisely when all becomes transparence and immediate visibility, when everything is exposed to the harsh inexorable light of information and communication...we live in the ecstasy of communication. And this ecstasy is obscene.... (It) puts an end to every representation.³⁸²

With ‘a simulated transistorization of pastiche schizophrenia’ replacing any ‘real’ linear narrative, mainstream society has turned to an obscene consumerism in an attempt to gain hypocritical societal acceptance, which is itself kitsch. This schizophrenia means that all historical trends (and none) are present now and continually now. Thus modernity, post modernity, soft modernity and all other societal progressions simultaneously effect our atomised society, suggesting that anarchy may indeed be our final destination. That is, with our externally referenced manipulation, our atomised society and our ever-present-present information stream, we appear headed on the path to non-community. That is, individualism within a context of ‘might is right’, or anarchy.

³⁸⁰ Ibid. p 129

³⁸¹ Weir, David. *Anarchy and culture: the aesthetic politics of modernism*. p 169.

³⁸² Baudrillard, Jean. “The Ecstasy of Communication.” In Foster, Hal. (ed.) *Postmodern Culture*. p 130.

In this final chapter, Frederic Jameson continues to support the perspective outlined in chapter 3, arguing that schizophrenia is evident in “the immense fragmentation and privatisation[sic] of modern literature...[that] foreshadows deeper and more general tendencies in social life as a whole.”³⁸³ The argument (as Žižek elucidated with the ‘free society’) is that we have lost our inter-connectedness as we become increasingly atomised and commodified, this increasing our consumerism and the fictional nature of our fractal lives.

The traditional religious institutionalised hierarchy have transformed into consumer marketing; consequently we believe that certain products will bring us salvation, therefore we live in primary reference to them. Our attention spans relate to the electronic media (that is, very short) and the only meaning in our lives is signified by advertising slogans. While we may still ‘empirically validate’ words on a computer screen, something more than this is happening. We feel connected to these words, as if they speak directly to our consciousness (which in fact they may do) with the removal of all filters, increasing the intensity of our input. While we perceive these words as fixed, following our written tradition, they may be altered at a moments notice, causing a panic bred from dislocation.

This new societal panic derives from “this state of terror proper to the schizophrenic... with no halo of private protection, not even his own body, to protect him anymore.... now only a pure screen, a switching center[sic] for all the networks of influence.”³⁸⁴ Our hypocritical desire for ‘societal acceptance’ has paradoxically fulfilled itself without our notice. While we have hidden our desires, protecting our ‘inner selves’ from the physical world with ‘external armour’; we have submitted our ‘inner selves’ to information overload in a way we would never accept in physical reality. In the 1950’s the New Zealander who was “afraid of that accursed self of his that might get off-side of his norm-ridden society”³⁸⁵ would never allow emotional depth to show to others. However, this fear has evolved so that today we are so busy with our *isothymia* that we have collectively become, as Baudrillard has stated, a ‘switching centre’, and schizophrenic interface.

Edward Said argues that culture (at least in the current ‘western’ sense) serves this role, and “works very effectively to make invisible and even “impossible” the actual *affiliations* that exist between the world of ideas and scholarship, on the one hand, and the world of brute

³⁸³ Jameson, Fredric. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” in Foster, Hal. ed. *Postmodern Culture*. p 114.

³⁸⁴ Hoover, Stewart M. *Religion in the news: faith and journalism in American public discourse*. p 132-133.

³⁸⁵ Pearson, Bill. *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays*. p 14.

politics, corporate and state power, and military force on the other.”³⁸⁶ In this context, culture serves to remove from view, the ‘first-order’ consequences of ‘second-order’ intentions. We may be assured that these consequences exist; they are simply irrelevant in a world devoid of meaning. Perhaps the irrelevance of these consequences needs to be placed in the current context of cultural sensory desensitisation, due to our lack of a collective ‘halo of private protection’ to protect against the various ‘networks of influence’ along the ‘information stream’.

For example, Fredy Perlman argues that even when “(c)apital wears the mask of a natural force.... [and] it is admitted that the power of Capital is created by men, this admission may merely be the occasion for the invention of an even more imposing mask, the mask of a man-made force, a Frankenstein³⁸⁷ monster, whose power inspires more awe than that of any natural force.”³⁸⁸ This, while using the dynamic of a nexus, may take the form of a religion or nation state philosophy.

Ignorance of conceptual consequences.

Returning to Haraway’s argument that practical examples of these information driven schizophrenic nexuses abound, and can be reduced to a single function, or dynamic, for our creation of monsters such as Frankenstein’s, we see:

Modern states, multinational corporations, military power... political processes, fabrication of our imaginations... commercial pornography...and religious evangelism depend intimately upon electronics. Microelectronics is the technical basis of simulacra, that is, of copies without originals.³⁸⁹

One suitably disgusting example of this is “(v)irtual child pornography [which] does not involve children. Instead, it uses computer simulations of children. "If there are no children involved, you're not exploiting any children," said [Rep. Jerry] Nadler. Thus, a previous law banning virtual child porn was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court” of the U.S.A.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁶ Said, Edward W. *Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies*. in Foster, Hal. ed. *Postmodern Culture*. p 136.

³⁸⁷ Fredy Perlman appears to cite Dr. Frankenstein as a monster, with his power to create life inspiring awe and not his actual creation. <http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/perlman/sp001702...>

³⁸⁸ Perlman, Fredy. *The Reproduction of Daily Life*.
<http://www.spunk.org/library/writers/perlman/sp001702...>

³⁸⁹ Haraway, Donna J. “A Manifesto for Cyborgs” in Kirkup, Janes, Woodward & Hovendon eds., *The Gendered Cyborg: A Reader*. p 56.

³⁹⁰ Rep. Jerry Nadler @ "<http://www.lidbrooklyn.org/bp110104.htm>"

Therefore the physical consequences of our information stream are in many cases deemed irrelevant. These simulacra, these functions of our information stream, our current nexus, are the building blocks that inspire a new and awe full future nexus, hence we always have an apocalypse to live into. This also reinforces Said's argument of the invisibility of *affiliations* between ideas and brute force, whether externally explicit, or internally implicit. When the physical world becomes irrelevant (or desensitised), both the origins and consequences of 'ideas and scholarship' also become irrelevant. "There is always an Other; and this Other willy-nilly turns interpretation into a social activity, albeit with unforeseen consequences, audiences, constituencies and so on."³⁹¹ We treat this 'Other' as an external part of our nexus, only referring to it in a socially acceptable manner, this acceptance conditioned by both transmitters and receivers within the nexus.

While this dynamic is most apparent in religion and concepts of God, the same dynamics apply to 'politics, corporate and state power'. It is this ignorance of the separation between 'first-order' and 'second-order' reality and the ignorance of the consequences of mixing the two that must be acknowledged. If our concepts are externally referenced (as they currently are) it is easy to ignore this fact, yet if concepts are (societally) internally referenced, personal responsibility must win out. While a shift in referencing may bear exactly the same results as those currently on offer, at least we would consciously choose these results, instead of having them transmitted to the 'switching centre' that currently is our subconscious.

It appears that the simplicity of this concept, that all non-physical concepts have fictional origins, attaining provisional truth only through 'the harsh inexorable light of information and communication', has been hidden through over-complication. It appears accepted that knowledge is atomised within various disciplines, with very little inter-dependence. All universities "appear to exercise an almost totally unrestrained influence: the principle that knowledge ought to exist, be sought after and disseminated in a very divided form."³⁹²

I argue that this divided dissemination of information only proves that there is no underlying truth to be ascertained, for if there were, these varied paths should all allow some common frame of reference, which they do not. By that, I mean that while similar disciplines can converse, they still rely on their respective perceptual filters and it is the similarity in these filters that allows the conversation.

³⁹¹ Said, Edward W. *Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies*. in Foster, Hal. *Postmodern Culture*. p 137.

³⁹² *Ibid.* p 140-141.

For example, if an evolutionary psychologist, a sociologist, an anthropologist, a theologian and an oral historian all travelled to the highlands of Papua New Guinea (and I use this example purely for its remote location), it seems a foregone conclusion, that they would draw rather different interpretations of the culture they investigated. No one of them could provide an understanding of it; they could only interpret it from within their own respective frameworks, and would require a common frame of reference in order to discuss their data. However an unconditioned common frame of reference is not forthcoming.

Therefore I am arguing for the absence of any divine external referent, which effectively occurs as a divine absence. That is, without this absence, we would not have our ‘second-order’ divine external referents. However, we still appear to act as though these referent(s) exist (outside the context of our ‘second-order’ interdependent constructions) and have an almost phobic opposition to encountering the method at work, instead following specifically isolated paths as if they were truth, when none exists. Said reiterates this argument with the requirement “to pass through certain rules of accreditation... [to] learn the rules...speak the language... master the idioms and... accept the authorities of the field...to which you want to contribute.”³⁹³

Said also inadvertently supports Pearson’s concept of last year’s hens³⁹⁴ pecking this year’s pullets, as this ‘pecking’ continually conditions the division of contextually disseminated ‘truths’ that we require in order to converse within our disciplines. While we require certain language skills, we do not need to perpetually reinforce the same doctrinal ‘truths’. It is a prerequisite to both individual and societal evolution that we understand the dynamic of our chosen field, but this dynamic may be understood without necessarily accepting ‘the authorities of the field’. Every ‘truth’ should be critically re-evaluated in an ongoing manner.

I am arguing that this ‘re-evaluation’ is antithetical to the dynamic of our current societal nexus; this is reflected in the practice of literary studies, which (amongst others) focuses on “masterpieces in need of periodic adulation and appreciation. Such correlations make possible the use of words like “objectivity,” “realism” and “moderation” [which] when used in sociology or in literary criticism... represent *non-interference* in the affairs of the everyday world.”³⁹⁵ Our ‘everyday world’ within the obscenity of the ‘single dimension of information’ is just another influential image projected into our ‘schizophrenic switching centre’.

³⁹³ Ibid. p 141.

³⁹⁴ Pearson, Bill. *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays*. p 7.

³⁹⁵ Said, Edward W. “Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies.” in Foster, Hal. ed. *Postmodern Culture*. p 155.

Yet it cannot be stated too strongly that there is no conspiracy in operation here; for as previously stated 'if we did not desire consumerised acceptance, those in power would have no need for the delivery of it.' This reflects Pearson's earlier statement that when the New Zealander of the 1950's "complains half his bitterness is that he has been made to complain because he hates complaint and he can't complain with dignity."³⁹⁶ Whatever our historical or geographical context within the 'western' culture, we seem to desire our 'truths' to be externally given, to be concise and to be of no threat to our perceived everyday world. We are for the most part uninterested in the physical consequences of our intentions on the 'Other' whether this 'Other' is located within our own or another community. An argument may be made that this is a consequence of the Judeo Christian/ Greek legacy. Joseph Daleiden argues:

Claiming special knowledge of God's will, the Judeo-Christian religions (as well as other religions) have sought for three millennia or more to usurp the political process to further their theological ends.³⁹⁷

What is required is fluidity of thought, a conscious interpretation of the 'everyday world', instead of an externally conditioned acceptance of it. Conceptual 'knowledge' must be critically and consciously investigated, or as Said argues; interference is necessary with a "crossing of borders and obstacles, a determined attempt to generalize exactly at those points where generalizations seem impossible to make."³⁹⁸ While this may be an unreasonable expectation of 'mainstream society' (due to work, social and familial obligations causing time constraints), there is no excuse for 'intellectuals' who must "reopen the blocked social processes ceding objective representation (hence power) of the world to a small coterie of experts and their clients."³⁹⁹

While external referencing is still an obvious prerequisite to any form of social knowledge, this must be balanced against internal referencing based in critical interpretation. Charles Horton Cooley elucidates that "(t)here is no sharp line between the means of communication and the rest of the external world. In a sense all objects and actions are symbols of mind, and nearly anything may be used as a sign".⁴⁰⁰ With an (apparently) inadvertent nod to both Wittgenstein and Rorty, Cooley seemingly denotes our reality as constrained by language, as

³⁹⁶ Pearson, Bill. *Fretful Sleepers and Other Essays*. p 2.

³⁹⁷ <http://josephdaleiden.com/work3.htm>

³⁹⁸ Said, Edward W. "Opponents, Audiences, Constituencies." in Foster, Hal. ed. *Postmodern Culture*. p 157.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p 158.

⁴⁰⁰ Cooley, Charles, Horton. *On Self and Social Organization*. p 100.

there is (currently) no other method for discussing ‘symbols of mind’, save our part within the collectively schizophrenic interface of the nexus.

However as we have seen, within the nexus there are a multitude of signifiers and an almost infinite amount of signified consequences determined by the ‘small coterie of experts and their clients’. We should always remember “that communication...is truly the outside or visible structure of thought, as much as (the) effect of the inside or conscious life of men”.⁴⁰¹ When this dynamic is collectively applied to us as schizophrenic interface within our ‘ever-present-present’ obscenity of information, communication becomes identical with our ‘inside or conscious life’, and we see our role as a singular ‘sublimely-inverted’ collective. It is necessary to recall Zizek’s concept of the sublime here:

the logic of the negation of the negation’ – the discovery that negation can be experienced positively.⁴⁰²

There are two important elements in this statement pertinent to our current situation. First, in order for negation to be experienced positively, there must be dualism, for if there is not, we become negated and lose our ‘real-world’ reference point. It may be argued that this is the goal of all religions, to experience non-duality; yet this has always been impractical from an evolutionary perspective, hence there has always been a split between mainstream society and the clergy/sangha/shaman. While these individuals or institutions may assume a significant or even dominant position within the society, if the whole society assumed their position, it would break down very quickly, due to total contextual immanence. Second, there is a major difference between experiencing negation positively and replacing negation with a positive singularity. The reason negation is sublime is that it has no ‘real-world’ referent and (due to its singularity) is the absence of all signifiers.

With our ‘nexus-driven’ inversion of this singularity, we become desiring clones, divorced from ‘real-world’ consequences and schizophrenically receiving and transmitting the many signifiers. Again, this is not a conspiracy theory, nor Gnostic rhetoric. I am not arguing that there is some spark of divine knowledge, or some mischievous demon playing with humanity in some freakish puppet show. I am also not arguing that all humanity acts in this way, but unfortunately for mainstream passive society, most of us (either deliberately or accidentally) do act in this way. What I *am* arguing for is some realisation of the dynamic of our belief

⁴⁰¹ Ibid. p 102

⁴⁰² Kay, Sarah. *Zizek: A Critical Introduction*. p 24.

structures and their contextual consequences, for active as opposed to passive belief structures.

To return to my earlier argument: 'Whether a hierarchically organised cosmological schema or a nationalist based democratic bureaucracy, it is the inverted 'self-disclosure' or inverted kenosis, with the conceptual framework being emptied into the space, that allows the maintenance of the respective institutions.' So since our desires are active they cause us to become passive, ('our machines become active while we become frighteningly inert',) that we may receive what we desire, and without a 'halo of protection' we assume our position as schizophrenic switching centres.

This combined with our *isothymia* ensures that our collective maintains the nexus, as this gives us community and allows those who transmit the information to 'empty out' kenotically into our 'empty space'. As previously stated, Jameson's 'failure of the infant to accede fully into the realm of speech and language' ensures the 'plethora of atomised individuals, desiring a 'self-interested' context, consequently disallowing any inter-connected community'. However all is not lost, for if we become aware of the method of communication, become aware of the lack of 'first-order' divinity and of the actions of 'the coterie of experts' (both religious and secular), we may gain the ability to live in a truly authentic way.

This authenticity would be achieved with the many individual (atomised) interpretations/creations of society shared interdependently with others (within and between communities) through language. This is certainly not a (sublime) utopian concept, for we are closer to that in our 'ever-present-present', even if this has been inverted into a (kitsch) dystopic context. However this is as close as we are likely to come and this is illustrated when we create a space and then fill it with human constructs.

Pluralist society.

Terry Godlove unintentionally offers a solution to our current hierarchical societal problems by outlining the operational dynamic behind a functioning pluralist society. He argues:

the fun and the frustration in coming to understand one another involves mixing and matching considerations of holism, natural history, rationality of value, together with all we know of our interlocutor's capacities and education, together with our knowledge of the causal, non-

rational forces we suspect are in play – group pressure, raging hormones, wishful thinking, and cognitive predispositions might all be candidates.⁴⁰³

In short, a pluralist society has many internal biologically individual and external societally contextual influences and interdependent historical traditions, with the society's conceptual function (that is, our conceptual structures being a function of us), being (holistically) more than the sum of its constituents. Hence in a Feuerbachian sense we project ourselves into the 'absence' (in the previously argued inverted kenosis) to externally self reference. "The creation of meaningful events out of raw happenings... results from the performance itself, from "the movements of the body in space and time""⁴⁰⁴, and thus it is a function of the performance.

The subconsciously conditioned mind currently (supportively or antagonistically) interprets events in reference to the current contextual external reference, the information stream. In a religious sense, this is how external 'experiences' occur and are held to be evidence of an external deity. They are purely subliminally conditioned/stimulated functions of us, referenced either against the mainstream or the periphery of society.

In many cultures the 'emotional stimulation' that motivates a religious experience occurs in the form of a crisis, which is often manifested as a psychosis (usually experienced in early adolescence). It is pertinent here to ask the question, "(w)hat happens when we construct our lives in the discourse of crisis?"⁴⁰⁵ Or more pertinently, what happens when we construct our lives in the discourse of a religious experience, founded in the moment of crisis? Sheila McNamee provides the first step to answering this question by suggesting two options for the description of life's 'disruptive episodes'⁴⁰⁶. The first conception is that something '*happens*' to a person while the second suggests "circumstances have *brought the crisis to the person*,"⁴⁰⁷ (Italics in quote) be that ourselves or some external factor(s).

McNamee argues that people experiencing crisis can follow two paths, and while I am in full agreement, I must suggest that a third possibility also exists. She shows that the term 'crisis' is derived from the Greek term *krinein*, which means separation from "others in our

⁴⁰³ Godlove. Terry. F. "Saving Belief" in Frankenberry, N. ed. *Radical interpretation in Religion*. p 15.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid. p 18.

⁴⁰⁵ McNamee, Sheila. "Reconstructing Identity: the Communal Construction of Crisis." in McNamee, Sheila and Gergen, Kenneth J. eds. *Therapy as social construction*. p 186.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

interactive communities.”⁴⁰⁸ Thus crises would seem to be socially constructed marginalising events that dislocate the recipient of the experience from the societal centre.

The recipient then follows what McNamee argues are the only two possibilities for people in crisis, either: “(1) finding a route *back* to the center[sic], or (2) moving *beyond* the border into another domain (which includes both ‘healthier’ non-crisis identities and the possibility of the ‘abnormal’ domain).”⁴⁰⁹ Therefore, they communally validate their experience and locate themselves within this new community. Since crises are social constructs, a third possibility is that instead of moving to another society or back into the centre of the current society, one may instead choose to live on the margins of society.

Liminality.

Liminality (as a function of crisis) may be an empowering experience; David Aberbach illustrates one consequence of liminality, in which “the charismatic leader rises from the ordinary, to be transformed and fulfil this destined role.... [Therefore] (c)risis creates charisma.”⁴¹⁰ However, we must remember that both crisis and charisma are ‘socially constructed’, are therefore ‘second-order’, and are only societally important within a homogenised mainstream community. That is, as I have previously argued with reference to Terry Godlove’s interpretation of a pluralistic society; charisma is far less effective when there is no communal consensus and validation.

Would liminal non-conformity and societal dislocation cause the individual to be distressed/motivated enough to act in a charismatic manner, if the mainstream was not homogenised? Would the charisma be socially acceptable? Would liminally charismatic behaviour be brought into the mainstream in a non-hierarchical society? These questions raise the dangerous problem of what occurs when physical consequences are ignored; or when ‘second-order’ reality is accepted as ‘first-order’ truth:

Throughout evolution it has always been the *misfit* that has been the vehicle of creative change.... by creating maladjustments (in religious language, willing ‘evil’), misfits continually cause the present to be transcended (in religious language, they create ‘good’).⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid. p 187.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. p 188.

⁴¹⁰ Aberbach, David. *Charisma in religion, politics and the media*. p 4.

⁴¹¹ Reaney, Darryl. *The Death of forever: a new future for human consciousness*. p 233.

When we consume the misfit's concepts we forget the subjective nature of all 'second-order' belief systems. For instance "in Hitler's ideology.... (r)edemption is brought about by knowing, by knowledge."⁴¹² However, as we have seen there is nothing to know, except in this case, Hitler's belief in redemption. Thus, when his charismatic message was transmitted through the interface to the mainstream community who were collectively undergoing the socially constructed crisis, it became the mainstream ontology.

In this 20th Century context, the "transformation of extraordinariness into charisma... and magnetism of the potential charismatic leader"⁴¹³ caused six million deaths. "A charismatic leader [such as Hitler]... cannot consider himself to be the agent of an ideology, which always represents some measure of constraint.... A chiliastic idea is infinitely.... malleable – it can be what the leader says it is."⁴¹⁴ Thus this 'malleable idea' becomes a propaganda tool, for projection into the nexus where the mainstream consumes the liminally constructed crisis.

This reiterates my argument that it is only with the absence of any 'first-order' truth that we are left with the 'second-order' creations that are accepted by the mainstream, as it externally references for some type of meaning:

The production of proof... falls under the control of another language game, in which the goal is no longer truth, but performativity – that is, the best possible input/output equation.⁴¹⁵

So we rely not on what is said but how it is said. As Marshall McLuhan states, "The medium is the message" because it is the "medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action."⁴¹⁶ In our present dislocated society, the (medium is the information stream and the) performativity of the meaning occurs through the fulfilment of our desires. In this case we desire meaning.

When we remember that all (discussable) reality is contained within language, we see that "(t)his is how legitimation by power takes shape.... The performativity of an utterance, be it denotative or prescriptive, increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one has at one's disposal."⁴¹⁷ Since all (non-physical) truths are effectively reducible

⁴¹² Fontaine, Petrus Franciscus Maria. *The light and the dark : a cultural history of dualism*. Amsterdam : J.C. Gieben, 1986-<1995 >. p xxxii.

⁴¹³ Nyomarkay, Joseph. *Charisma and factionalism in the Nazi Party*. p 11.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid. p 21.

⁴¹⁵ Lyotard, Jean François. *The postmodern condition: a report on knowledge*. p 46.

⁴¹⁶ McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding media: the extensions of man*. p 9.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid. p 47

to faith statements, the amount of propaganda therefore ‘proportionally increases’ the legitimation of the hegemonic power’s consumption of the liminal crisis.

By combining Macquarrie’s argument with a question of Aberbach’s, we arrive at an interesting paradox: “Religion or spirituality, uncriticized by reason, tends to become fantastic and undisciplined; truth divorced from justice (‘value-free’) may easily become inhuman”⁴¹⁸ as ‘second-order’ reality is, when divorced from ‘first-order’ consequences. Yet “(i)s it not also true that charisma provokes crisis? In this paradox the dynamic nature of charisma lies.”⁴¹⁹

The problem is that “(c)harisma can be a force for evil, but it also represents that part of human nature which keeps alive primeval wildness and freedom. To frame its fearful symmetry is to strangle it.”⁴²⁰ However, antithetically, framing ‘its fearful symmetry’ also amplifies it. While Hitler’s ideals may still have influenced a pluralistic society, they would not have found the same ‘feeding ground’ as that of a hierarchical homogenised society in crisis, searching for liminal referents. Again, the Holocaust is easily the most pertinent case study to support this argument. Without rational bureaucratisation “the Holocaust would be unthinkable. It was the rational world of modern civilization that made the Holocaust thinkable.”⁴²¹

That is, the Holocaust would never have occurred without the legitimation of ‘bureaucratic propaganda’:

The most poignant point, it seems, is the easiness with which most people slip into the role requiring cruelty or at least moral blindness – if only the role has been duly fortified and legitimized by superior authority.⁴²²

One solution to this ‘poignant point’ may be for the hierarchical mainstream to cease bureaucratising peripheral charismatic movements, and instead allow these minority movements in a pluralistic manner. Yet this danger is reduced within the conceptual variety of the pluralist society. I acknowledge that relative ‘evil’⁴²³ would still occur,

⁴¹⁸ Macquarrie, John. *Twentieth-century religious thought*. p 462.

⁴¹⁹ Aberbach, David. *Charisma in politics, religion, and the media : private trauma, public ideals*. p 5.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.* p 108.

⁴²¹ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. p 13.

⁴²² *Ibid.* p 168.

⁴²³ “Evil, in a large sense, may be described as the sum of the opposition, which experience shows to exist in the universe, to the desires and needs of individuals; whence arises, among humans beings at least, the sufferings in which life abounds.” <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05649a.htm>.

but the scale of the damage would be markedly reduced. Again, if we return to Godlove's interpretation of a pluralistic society, I am arguing that 'relative 'evil'' would be far less likely to take hold within a hegemonic bureaucracy, since in a truly pluralistic society, there would be a great many competing conceptual realities. The consequence of this is that none of these 'conceptual realities' would enjoy preference, with every concept being forced to compromise in some manner.

Therefore, I must oppose Cooley's argument that "(a) well-developed individual can exist only in and through a well-developed whole, and *vice versa*."⁴²⁴ While an individual must enjoy some social contact, the level of such contact and the condition of the whole are completely flexible. This is currently borne out within the 'information stream', as we are hardly a 'well developed whole' (either individually or collectively), when acting as a 'switching interface'. I am simply arguing that the marginalised individual may not conform directly to societal norms, (especially when the Holocaust's historical context is used as an example) but it is out of this non-conformation that individual and therefore societal growth occurs.

The Edge.

The *Saatchi and Saatchi* advertising guru Kevin Roberts gives an example of this with the naming of his website www.nzedge.com. In 1996 Roberts and Kevin Kelly (founding editor of "Wired") were in conversation, with Kelly relating "that New Zealand was really easy to understand, "because in biology – his genre – change and innovation occurs first on the edge of a species, where the population is most sparse."⁴²⁵ It is worth noting that prior to founding "Wired", Kelly was a nomadic photojournalist and spent most of the 1970's in isolated parts of Asia; he also ran a mail order catalogue for global budget travel during the 1980's.⁴²⁶ So it would seem that Kelly is well qualified to speak of fringes and edges. Kelly's argument is detailed in a conversation with Joe Flower where he states that:

Almost all innovation in a system happens at fringes.... The nature of an innovation is that it will arise at a fringe where it can afford to become prevalent enough to establish its usefulness without being overwhelmed by the inertia of the orthodox system.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁴ Bauman, Zygmunt. *Modernity and the Holocaust*. P 168.

⁴²⁵ <http://nzedge.com/speeches/design.html>

⁴²⁶ <http://kk.org/biography/>

⁴²⁷ <http://www.well.com/user/bbear/kellyart.html>.

This emphasises my argument that there are other options to moving back into the centre of a community, or to a new community. It is this need for ‘normality’, for rational acceptance, and for crisis solution that pulls marginalised (individuals and) concepts into the mainstream. In contrast to this (homogenised normality) “‘(p)rimitive’ culture helps them through this experience with the result that it is beneficial to the individual, whereas [as Dr. Silverman stated] in our ‘rational’ culture ““the individual [schizophrenic] typically undergoes an intensification of his suffering over and above his original anxieties.””⁴²⁸

That is, the individual exerts more effort in regaining ‘normality’ than in experiencing the crisis. It is only the rational mind that assumes that crisis is a problem to be ‘solved’, instead of an occurrence to be experienced and moved through; illustrating the threat that ‘normal’ society sees in ‘liminal’ elements. Therefore, this perceived ‘threat’ is purely a collectively mainstream response. I am arguing for tolerance while people undergo their crisis, without rushing their transformation back into ‘normality’, in many cases with the aid of prescription drugs:

The unpalatable aspect of this is the inevitable requirement for hardship as a precondition of human growth, of the evolution of consciousness. Most people, obedient to the psychic pull of entropy, want ‘salvation in six easy lessons’. This is not possible.⁴²⁹

Our addiction to entropy would appear to be due to our terror of any kind of change, which occurs as a ‘form of death’ within any type of system.⁴³⁰ Any sort of system; “mechanical, biological or psychic, which operates on the principle of negative feedback has... to change in such a way as to restore itself to its original state.... If a self-preserving feedback system absorbs rather than resists change, it loses its self-sense, its identity – it dies.”⁴³¹ Thus, if an individually or societally projected construct is to change, then effectively it must die. However, this death is only a symbolic or kitsch death, since we still exist within the physical context of ‘first-order’ reality.

The problem arises when we accept this ‘second-order’ death as a threat to our well being. However, this is the nature of life, a nature we have forgotten. “People in grief often express their feelings in two familiar phrases: ‘nothing matters any more because my life is over’ and ‘I can’t go on’ the old ‘I’ cannot ‘go on’ because it is in the process of restructuring itself;

⁴²⁸ Campbell, Joseph. *Myths to live by*. p 204.

⁴²⁹ Reanne, Darryl. *The Death of forever: a new future for human consciousness*. p 233.

⁴³⁰ Ibid. p 235.

⁴³¹ Ibid.

the former (stable) homeostatic controls are too altered to simply return to their prior state.”⁴³² So, this problem seems to occur primarily when our ‘place’ in the ‘system’ shifts and we lose our reference points, or feel lost and liminal. As Godlove argued previously, this is all part of the ‘fun and frustration in coming to understand one another’.

Fluid dynamic.

Fritjof Capra follows a similar line to Godlove’s argument and suggests a new holistically interrelated systems view of life showing the “interdependence of all phenomena – physical, biological, psychological, social, and cultural.”⁴³³ In the absence of a “well-established framework”⁴³⁴ for this system, he argues for “a network of interlocking concepts and models and, at the same time, developing the corresponding social organizations[sic].”⁴³⁵

Effectively this is a non-hierarchical ‘grass-roots’ formulation, since all current schemas are isolated into their respective specific disciplines. As with religions, most academic disciplines argue for their respectively superior ability to understand the nature of human reality, whereas this ‘systems view’ argues for a complete interdependence of all disciplines. “Systems are integrated wholes whose properties cannot be reduced to those of smaller units”⁴³⁶, an argument reminiscent of Wittgenstein’s linguistic reality. However, reductionism should not be ignored as it provides useful descriptions for investigating and classifying individual and collective organisms.

“Reductionism and holism, analysis and synthesis, are complementary approaches that, used in proper balance, help us obtain a deeper knowledge of life.”⁴³⁷ There is no singular answer but rather an inter-dependent fluid dynamic operating in each context. In contrast to constructed machines where structure determines activity, ‘the best possible input/output equation’ determines organic performativity.

If we adopt a fluid organic perspective for investigating societal contexts, then (emotional, psychological, spiritual) evolution operates in harmony with the societal dynamic instead of from a marginalized perspective. Effectively, the mainstream adopts a ‘perpetually liminal’ ontology and applies that to constructed society.

⁴³² Ibid. p 236.

⁴³³ Capra, Fritjof. *The turning point: science, society, and the rising culture.* p 285.

⁴³⁴ Ibid.

⁴³⁵ Ibid. p 236.

⁴³⁶ Ibid. p 286

⁴³⁷ Ibid. p 288.

However, the mainstream does *not* reference, consume and homogenise the liminality (as occurred in the Holocaust), but instead consciously embraces the conceptual plurality. Unintentional consequences are still a possible problem, but it seems less likely they would achieve major proportions without the homogenising hierarchy to condition us through the ‘information stream’. “Through biology one understands how networks operate, how systems evolve, how trends rise and fall.”⁴³⁸

While liminality or marginality is useful for spiritual development, that is only because of the homogenised perspective of the mainstream. If the complete dynamic was inter-dependent (as in systems theory), then greater balance, harmony and consequently freedom presents. Systems still evolve, trends still ‘rise and fall’, but they are simply *that* and no more; functions of our biology, and functions that have less impact within the interdependence of the pluralistic society.

Capra outlines the manner in which self-organising systems continually interact with their environment and establish a twofold dynamic:

(S)elf renewal – the ability of living systems continuously to renew and recycle their components while maintaining the integrity of their overall structure – and self-transcendence – the ability to reach out creatively beyond physical and mental boundaries in the processes of learning, development, and evolution.⁴³⁹

The contrast (between hierarchically organising and self organising systems) is quite apparent in the maintenance of religious institutions and religious belief structures, where some interesting comparisons become evident. If the dynamic of religious belief is organic, then the institutionalised aspects of religion are very dogmatic and, in some cases destroy the organic fluidity within. If we return to Penner, we are reminded that there is nothing wrong with religious language and concepts, but there is also nothing right with them. They simply ‘are’ and any attempt to quantify whatever subjective truth they contain is irrelevant and sometimes dangerous.

Capra contrasts the maintenance of a self-organising system to a clock mechanism which “will proceed according to the second law of thermodynamics, from order to disorder, until it has reached a state of equilibrium in which all processes – motion, heat exchange, and so on –

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Capra, Fritjof. *The turning point: science, society, and the rising culture*. p 290.

have come to a standstill.”⁴⁴⁰ As with all things its energy came from nothing and will return to nothing. We are no different, yet we enjoy self-referential consciousness during our disordered time between order(s) and do not wish to ‘come to rest’, at least in the immediate future. However, we effectively live ‘at rest’ in our position as a ‘switching interface’, contextually dislocated and (with the collapse of observable space) singularly kitsch.

Living organisms (such as ourselves and our societies) “maintain a continuous exchange of energy with their environment to stay alive.... [which] allows the system to remain in a state of nonequilibrium, in which it is always ‘at work.’”⁴⁴¹ This non-equilibrium allows the dynamic of self-organisation and the two concepts should not be confused.

Capra illustrates the differences by contrasting the nature of machines with the nature of organisms. In ‘second-order’ nature, a machine carries out specific tasks as intended by its creator/constructor, whereas (in ‘first-order’ nature) “an organism is primarily engaged in renewing itself; cells are breaking down and building up structures, tissues and organs are replacing their cells in continual cycles.”⁴⁴²

My argument is, that our conception of god(s) derive (at least in the Judeo Christian traditions) from something that hierarchically create(s)(d) us. We place ourselves in the position of a ‘second-order’ god, as we create machines, tools and other technological implements, and then regress this concept back to a ‘first-order’ creative deity, an unmoved mover if you will, something to create us along the same lines. But we are not machines. If we realise our own ontological nature, as fluidly organic, we should be able to extrapolate a concept of deity as a non-existent subjective construct.

Individually and socially, we are engaged in ‘renewing ourselves’ and only ‘carry out specific tasks’ as an aid to this. The majority of people work to earn money to buy food, clothing, shelter and to fulfil our other desires. We would not choose to carry out these specific tasks if our desires were not fulfilled as a reward. Those who find their bliss in their work use this as a form of renewal; that is, we gain far more from carrying out the task than by simply completing it to gain a reward.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. p 291.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴⁴² Ibid. p 293.

Since complex organisms have a finite lifespan (individually and societally) they are renewed through “the phenomenon of reproduction, which is characteristic of all life.”⁴⁴³ Apart from the individual examples of reproduction (within families) societal concepts are also reproduced albeit in an evolutionary manner, until there is no further evolution possible within the context. We are organic systems, yet we treat our reality as some ordered mechanical context.

This world must instead be interdependent on human thought, as all human thought is ‘second-order’ and our physical world is (as previously argued) the ‘first-order’ physical consequences of our ‘second-order’ intentions. That is, political claims have ontological consequences; or, ‘second-order’ reality has ‘first-order’ consequences.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

Conclusion.

In this argument I have attempted to elucidate the underlying dynamic of our reality, together with our conceptual creations. I have hopefully shown that “(h)uman social and cultural constructs are the products of intentional actors with certain concerns, but once the products are “released” into the world they more or less lead their own lives and feed back upon what produced them.”⁴⁴⁴ This loop follows Haraway’s cyborg theory, and shows how unless we become aware of the dynamic, we will continually recycle in a closed loop, while referencing against invisible hierarchical external manipulation.

Don Cupitt (in referring to the American philosopher Charles Peirce) argues that ‘all thought is transacted in signs’⁴⁴⁵ and that communication is both contextually and communally validated:

Our ability to communicate effectively depends upon our prior communal development of a large number of agreed scales, each of a broadly evaluative kind.⁴⁴⁶

Yet the only ‘agreed scales’ we have within the ‘information stream’ are fed to our switching interface and are alterable in a moments notice. This may be supported in a religious context with regards to ‘sacred’ architecture, which “(a)ccording to Eliade.... provides access to that which is higher, eternal, and ultimately real.”⁴⁴⁷ Consequently, I am arguing that even when an object, event or ‘content of a statement’ exist(s)(ed), these are purely interpretations that may be taken and incorporated into ‘communal developments’ over a period of time. Each of these is subjectively true while bearing no objective factual characteristics.

For example if one contrasts a Chinese temple complex with a Christian church, one finds “the typical Chinese temple complex seems especially evocative of, and accommodating to, a spirituality that finds many sources of the sacred.... Clearly, a tradition’s dominant sacred space shapes its characteristic perceptions of the sacred

⁴⁴⁴ Jensen, Jeppe, Sinding. “Universals, general terms and the comparative study of religion.” in *Numen*, vol. 48. #3. 2001. p 245.

⁴⁴⁵ Cupitt, Don. *The long-legged fly*. p 16.

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid. p 17.

⁴⁴⁷ Brown, Frank, Burch. *Good taste, bad taste, and Christian taste: aesthetics in religious life*. p 202.

and the very identity of those who worship in a particular way.”⁴⁴⁸ Therefore, in the case of God, we cannot possibly know if it exists or not, since the only common frame of reference we have can only contain contextual representations/creations, making it impossible to engage in any useful discourse.

Consequently, all revelatory claims with regards to qualities are purely (as previously outlined) the fulfilment of human desires. The only possible exception to this argument, is the Christian argument for the self revelation of God within the physical world in the incarnation, but again, (as we have seen) we have no means of determining what is God and what is not (since we have no referent for the singular), therefore we cannot speak of God, which reiterates this thesis as a-theistic.

A further paradox exists within the various monotheistic (and especially Christian) framework(s), regarding:

[the]struggle to make manifest throughout the human world the reality of the Creator’s self-disclosure and to transform the human order in correspondence to the Creator’s love and will.... Cosmos and history collapse into each other, establishing an unmediated community of Creator and creation, the unification of all reality.⁴⁴⁹

The paradox is that this eventuality would mean the end of contextual and provisional reactions to this perceived self-disclosure and an end to the institutions. That is, these institutions pretend to seek a goal that would by necessity destroy themselves as ‘macrocosmically referenced individuals’, effectively causing their death. For ‘Cosmos and history’ to collapse into each other, the historical linear tradition would dissolve and hence the need for these respective institutions.

We may certainly argue that these institutions are never an ‘end in themselves’, but rather are calling for/pointing to the end of the need for their existence. In this manner they are theoretically ‘subjectively validated’ yet on a practical level they are not. The problem occurs when religious practitioners believe in their institutions and not in what these institutions point to. This is a major concern, for as we have seen within the context of this thesis, both the religious institutions and the concepts they point to

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. p 209.

⁴⁴⁹ Jaffe, M. S., *One God, One Revelation, One People: On the Symbolic Structure of Elective Monotheism*. p 762.

are human creations (since they are contained within language and are therefore dualistic), and we have no way of speaking about the singular.

Therefore I am arguing that it is extremely difficult to distinguish between religious orthodoxy, and what that orthodoxy points to. I have also argued that the orthopraxy is primarily a 'second-order' function of humanity's attempt to fulfil our desire for singularity, and therefore within the context of this thesis, I subjectively argue that all forms of revelation are purely mythic, which does not in any manner diminish their power(s).

However since the only method we have (within monotheistic traditions) for accessing the 'divine self-disclosure' (regardless of tradition) is to refer to the mythic texts, this/these institution(s) continually reinforce the reality of (contextual) revelation(s) (or mythic responses) and thus strengthen their contextual hierarchical framework(s).

These interpretations are based on the 'communal development of a large number of agreed scales' and allow the participants to contextually create the 'second-order' sacred. This is only possible with the absence of any 'first-order' sacred. While this equates to a form of nihilism, it completely inverts and is radically different from what Cupitt suggests "threatens us today. (This) is not so much the bare doctrine that nothing exists as rather the fear that nothing has value, there is nothing to live for – and *therefore* the world lacks 'reality'."⁴⁵⁰

It is exactly this 'lack of value' that allows us to create value, this 'nothing to live for' that forces us to create 'something to live for' and this 'lack of meaning' that forces us to create meaning. My argument concludes that there is not and never has been any 'first-order' non-physical reality and it is only this 'complete absence' that allows us to create our own 'second-order' reality.

The variables and conceptual frameworks are unimportant (aside from their physical consequences) and are purely a function of the method in operation. Existent and non-existent concepts may both enjoy reality in the same context, since existence occurs within a strictly physical context, regardless of whether this physical reality has been modified by conceptual 'second-order' reality.

⁴⁵⁰ Cupitt, Don. *The long-legged fly*. p 43.

Whether a hierarchically organised cosmological schema (e.g. a religious tradition or deep ecological movement) or a nationalist based bureaucracy (e.g. Nazi Germany, the current U.S.A. or North Korea), it is the inverted 'self-disclosure' or inverted kenosis within the conceptual framework being emptied into the space that allows the maintenance of the respective institutions, as well as a good dose of fear.

Russell McCutcheon outlines the operative method this same dynamic takes within religious traditions:

(T)here is a thriving industry, manufacturing and marketing what is called "religion," a construct created in workshops housed in an assortment of institutions throughout our particular society, not least of which is the academy. The socio-rhetorical critique of "religion" revolves around the assumption that – once again to rephrase Strenski's⁴⁵¹ earlier thoughts on "myth" – current concepts and theories of "religion" have been manufactured according to larger theoretical, professional, and cultural projects.⁴⁵²

I am arguing that this manipulation forms the context for our concepts of good and evil (although I am arguing that these are still relative). The relativity of our conceptual 'good' and 'evil' is underscored by the way we "close" our minds in a similar manner to those around us, yet in a quite different way from other groups of humans. This "underscores the need to avoid the common epistemological pitfall of reifying our own horizons and regarding them as inevitable."⁴⁵³ They are purely subjective, with our collective reality being inter-subjective, not objective.

This is illustrated with the myriad of belief systems that are present in the world. As Wittgenstein showed, objects of our 'second-order' world bear 'no kind of composition', and are easily manipulated. It is for this reason that I am arguing against any objective truth. When 'second-order' objects relate to the 'first-order' world, they act purely as contextual representations of this world, since we may have no knowledge of the true nature of this world or ourselves, but only glimpses of it.

⁴⁵¹ Ivan Strenski claims that scholars "who study the history and politics of the category of religion... (are) a nihilistic and polemical inbred clique... (whose) scholarship threatens the future of the study of religion." in McCutcheon, Russell T. "Religion, Ire, and Dangerous Things." *Journal of the American Academy of religion*. Vol 72 no1 p 174

⁴⁵² McCutcheon, Russell T. "Religion, Ire, and Dangerous Things." in *Journal of the American Academy of religion*. Vol 72 no1 ISSN 0002-7189 March 2004.p 185.

⁴⁵³ Zerubavel, Eviatar. *Social mindscapes: an invitation to cognitive sociology*. p 40-41.

In terms of interpreting religious concepts the experience is personal and subjective⁴⁵⁴, whether one receives 'revelatory insight' or contextually interprets an independent object, in the case of assigning religious characteristics to physical locations:

If a belief about the world is true and has sufficient justification or warrant for that kind of belief to qualify for knowledge, then we would say that sufficient conditions have been met for an individual to gain access to a certain understanding of the world.⁴⁵⁵

Gianni Vattimo, in supporting the need for religious belief, suggests that if "to act in conformity with the moral law, is to make any sense, it must be possible to hope reasonably for goodness (namely, the unity of happiness and virtue) to be realized in another world since it is clearly not given in this one."⁴⁵⁶ It is precisely for this reason that I oppose such concepts and argue for a nihilistic 'first-order' non-existence.

If we choose to ignore (with the exception of subjective religious practice and creative visualisation) the reality of another world, then we are forced to create all the qualities of this 'other' world here on earth. Religion would no longer bear Marx's 'opiate of the masses' critique, but could instead become a powerful tool for shifting our interpretative reality. Religion would effectively transform its traditionally empirical 'non-realist' position into a realist position.

That is, since all revelation is a human response pointing to something that may or may not be real, (since it is impossible to describe a singularity without it becoming a tautology), it is a huge risk to take especially when it negates our current physical 'first-order' existence. This is the crux of the a-theistic aspect of my thesis, that we create meaning in every aspect of our lives, meaning which may or may not exist, but meaning that is never-the-less subjectively real. The only difference between this suggested practice and our current ontology within the information stream, is that we are consciously referencing concepts against our physical context, hence duality is

⁴⁵⁴ While this experience occurs within a particular community and context, and this context undoubtedly shapes the nature of the experience, the experience itself is still a personal experience. It may be discussed within the domain of language, but as we have seen, language cannot describe such an experience. This in a nutshell, is the problem with religious language, when taken as anything more than mythic reality.

⁴⁵⁵ Metzler, Michael. *What Mary really didn't know*.
<http://www.wmich.edu/philosophy/heraclitean/vol21/metzler>

⁴⁵⁶ Vattimo, Gianni. *Belief*. p 23.

operating and we are connected to a history (of either a linear or circular nature); we are not trapped in the ever-present-present.

I suggest that the intention behind our functional relationality is real, and that we create this intention or meaning. Others we meet assess this intention, and these others create their own meaning, colouring their own interactions in either a positive or negative manner. In this way we sub-consciously condition others and ourselves, usually with no knowledge of the implicit dynamics of our interactions, which leads me to the nexus.

These beliefs and experiences are therefore faith statements, some of which are communally validated and some which are not. Therefore, in my (previously outlined) a-theistic argument for non-God, it is purely the 'complete absence' of (any 'first-order' non-physical object or God) that allows the different contextual creations that are understood through language.

Don Cupitt appears to support this argument and argues (as a non-realist) that "(o)bjectivity is given in and with language; it is not, as realists suppose, something external to language around which language wraps itself."⁴⁵⁷ So objectivity (within the context of this argument) is not objective in the world. If we take Rorty's world, no description matches the way 'the world independently is' and if we take Wittgenstein's world, no concept bears 'any kind of composition' and it therefore remains unobservable.

However, I would like to invert Norman Malcolm's argument that:

"(a) complex thing, to be fully understood, would have to be analysed into its constituent elements and the relationships between them. But if those elements were themselves *complex*, then the analysis.... could never display the final and complete sense of a proposition."⁴⁵⁸

If all elements/variables were absent, then a referent becomes rather like a fact. That is, a referent becomes an 'actual possibility' and no more, hence the provisional nature of all non-physical scientific truth. Non-physical objectivity is a function of language and as such, purely inter-subjective since it is a contextual creation. The

⁴⁵⁷ Cupitt, Don. *The long-legged fly*. p 19.

⁴⁵⁸ Malcolm, Norman. *Wittgenstein. A religious point of view?* p 37.

objectives that are 'very possible' are those that describe the physical laws of gravity and other physical consequences of 'second-order' intentions.

Other objectivities relating to purely theoretical concepts are more difficult to validate. Where one may experience falling off a roof to gain a common frame of reference for gravity, one may have more difficulty knowing the concepts of love or anger or God, until they strike, and even then our sensitivity to life experience may alter our interpretation of our desires in diametrically opposing ways as A.J. Ayer elucidates:

For to say that "God exists" is to make a metaphysical utterance which cannot be either true or false. And by the same criterion, no sentence which purports to describe the nature of a transcendent god can possess any literal significance.⁴⁵⁹

Hence languages offer us a context to loosely conform to, with concepts such as love, anger or God being experienced in culturally specific ways. While a cross-cultural transmission/expression of these concepts is possible, the fact that it *is* cross-cultural proves its respective contexts. For if this were not the case, these concepts would be immediately understandable, without the need for a common frame of reference.

Cupitt applies this concept to religious realism showing:

(t)he crucial objection... is that insofar as it succeeds in being realistic it necessarily ceases to be religious.... as an apologist manages to establish a realist interpretation of some major doctrine he necessarily destroys it as religion.⁴⁶⁰

Objectivity is not only impossible to apply to religious doctrine (as one may not escape their context completely); any attempt to do this destroys the doctrine, as we have seen within the post Christian secular society. Through Cupitt's argument, Wittgenstein's world may be taken as non-real, yet this seems to be purely another contextual interpretation, and may itself fall into the category of a language game. Antithetically, Rorty's world may appear to fulfil the 'realist' criteria. However, while "some formulations of realism and anti-realism overlook the possibility that, as conceived, *both* (conceptions of the world) may be false",⁴⁶¹ most appear to ignore the possibility that both may be 'true' or more correctly, contextually valid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ayer, A.J. *Language truth and logic*. p 174.

⁴⁶⁰ Cupitt, Don. *Taking leave of God*. p 45.

⁴⁶¹ Smart, J.J.C.& Haldane, John. *Atheism and theism*. p 233.

Consequently, 'truth' or 'validity' is purely contextual, and consequently, so, by necessity is morality. This validity is, in the same way as objectivity, purely intersubjective. This concept is most easily outlined with the media's use of 'spindoctoring' objects and events to portray truth. Might (in the sense of the largest media outlet) is definitely right. Hence while validity concerning physical laws is relatively easy to agree on (due to physically observable cause and effect), 'second-order' non-physical validity is somewhat more difficult to agree on, and requires communal validation (reinforced through the media).

Sarah Kay, in critiquing Slavoj Žižek appears in favour of this argument, showing:

that the whole point of the dialectical movement is not to cancel out ('sublate') its negative phase, but to shift perspective with respect to it. *'The "synthesis" is exactly the same as the anti-thesis; the only difference lies in a certain change of perspective'* (*Sublime Object*, 176, emphasis original). This is what is understood by 'the logic of the negation of the negation' – the discovery that negation can be experienced positively.⁴⁶²

That is, if the physical 'first-order' existent world is the thesis, and our conceptually created non-physical 'second-order' real world is the antithesis, expressed as a negation, then we too are a negation, since the synthesis is exactly the same as the antithesis. All that is required is to discover "that negation can be experienced positively", and cease filling it up with commodified fetishism(s).

It is tempting at this point to reincorporate part of the thesis, and read it through the antithesis. That is, to continue reading our physical context through our conceptual filters. However, I am arguing that this is especially problematic within religious conceptual frameworks. If we invert our position in a circular manner, (starting at the synthesis and branching out into the thesis and antithesis) then the thesis is exactly that which we use to fill out the absence of the antithesis. Instead of this practice, I am arguing that we should embrace the negation and realise that this allows us our 'second-order' reality, thereby negating this negation.

To apply the practical dynamic of this argument to religious belief, I will now apply this 'negation of the negation' to two concepts of God, one in the realist (thesis) position and one in the non-realist (antithesis) position. In each example an absolute

⁴⁶² Kay, Sarah. *Zizek: A Critical Introduction*. p 24.

space, or nihilistic non-God will occupy the other position. I will not entertain contingent or contextual concepts of God, since these are contained within language, and as previously argued, we are unable to speak of God in this way.

Remembering that by the logic of ‘the negation of the negation’, ‘negation can be experienced positively’, the synthesis arrives the same location, at least from our perspective. That is, if God is placed in the (traditionally) realist position, then the “synthesis” takes the antithetical position or the non-real position and therefore negates God’s reality. While realist God is still valid it is independent of us and hence we may have no knowledge of it, since to transfer Rorty’s ‘conception of the world’ to a ‘conception of God’, ‘we have lots of interpretations but none that match the way God independently is’. It is important to remember that whether or not God is real is irrelevant when we consider our perspective at the position of the synthesis, since if God is real we lack a dualistic referent for it.

In the Hegelian dialectic the synthesis becomes the new thesis, so regardless of the outcome (from a ‘first-order’ perspective) ‘God’ is either non-real, or ‘non-God’ is real. That is, ‘God’ that we may speak of must be a tautology, since for us to be able to speak of it; it is contained within language and is reducible to a ‘simple object with no kind of composition’. Diametrically opposing this; ‘non-God’ (or the previously outlined ‘complete Absence of any ‘first-order’ divinity) is the space that allows for the projection of our conceptual creations.

It is for this reason that the ‘negation can be experienced positively’, not in recreating realist God (since we can not match an interpretation to the way God possibly independently is), but rather by positively experiencing the negation of God. This absence allows one to either create and project a contextual God, or accept the space that is the nihilistic absence of God, as God from the synthesis perspective.⁴⁶³

However it must be remembered that this positive experience of the negation does not allow for the realist God at the synthesis position. This is because we are at the synthesis position, and while our entire conceptual reality (as well as this thesis) is a

⁴⁶³ See diagram 4.1.

faith statement, contained within language, it is all we have to work with. Because this argument refers to religious reality, the only possibility we have to speak of the way God might 'independently be' is to speak of the non-God, that is, to speak of negative theology. We cannot speak of anything else.

So when God is placed in the non-realist antithesis position, and non-God is placed in the realist thesis position, the synthesis again takes the position of the antithesis, hence God is non-real. However while non-real God occupies the synthesis position, real non-God is still in the thesis position. When this negation is again experienced positively, it negates God, since non-God⁴⁶⁴ was real and hence God was non-real. Again, realist non-God is irrelevant when we consider our perspective at the position of synthesis. "Emphasizing that there is a double negation at the heart of the dialectical process, Zizek insists that far from sustaining identity in imaginary wholeness, it radically undoes it."⁴⁶⁵

Malcolm Norman would also appear to agree with this 'undone identity' stating:

philosophers have frequently supposed that their mission was to reveal the general features of reality.... But as early as 1931 Wittgenstein had arrived at the realization that there is *nothing* to be discovered!⁴⁶⁶

Although Wittgenstein's world is different from Rorty's, the same dynamics apply. In Wittgenstein's world, no concept bears 'any kind of composition', and in Rorty's world, no interpretation or description matches the way 'the world independently is'; therefore 'there is *nothing* to be discovered' and God/the world is therefore unobservable. Hence "Wittgenstein's conception of religious belief attached no value to intellectual proofs of God's existence, and very little value to theological formulations in general."⁴⁶⁷

Zizek furthers my previous argument regarding the tautology that it is to speak of God, with concepts of the universal and the singular, showing that they are misaligned since "one of the signifiers has no corresponding signified.... This signifier is represented as S1 because, having no signified, it is singular, whereas all the other

⁴⁶⁴ The best definition for non-God, is the absence of God that allows our conceptual 'second-order' creation of God. It is primarily a term of convenience to provide a context for this argument.

⁴⁶⁵ Kay, Sarah. *Zizek: A Critical Introduction*. p 25.

⁴⁶⁶ Malcolm, Norman. *Wittgenstein. A religious point of view?* p 79.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid. p 90.

signifiers are double, hence S2.”⁴⁶⁸ So, with no signified aspect S1 is singularly unique and can “also be referred to as the ‘unary feature’.”⁴⁶⁹

This ‘unary feature’ differs from normal signs or names as these qualities or powers occur “in the medium of language, not in the medium of reality. In a sense the name is a ‘duplicate’ of the object....in a different medium.”⁴⁷⁰ With no signified or S2, nothing can ‘have all of the *powers*’ of S1 even within the reality of language. What is perhaps more pertinent is that nothing can be the ‘duplicate’ of the ‘unary feature’; therefore it is effectively an absence or what Žižek terms an ‘empty space’.

One example of this is “the claim that we are a ‘free society’... (for instance, one way we regularly show we are a ‘free society’ is by locking up people who threaten our ‘freedom’). But in everyday thinking, the term ‘free society’ becomes ‘filled out’ with all the aspects of our society which we treasure (family life, nice cars, TV, etc.)”⁴⁷¹ The important point here is that the term ‘free society’ is a (‘second-order’) political claim and not an ontological (‘first-order’) one, yet it is taken as an ontological claim and thus becomes our ontology. That is, in this case there is no distinction between ‘first-order’ and ‘second-order’ reality.

Not only is our ‘free society’ negated, but the space cleared by its absence is filled with things which ensure those within it are unable to be free. Our ability to be ‘free’ becomes commodified in comparison to the economic and commodified limits of ‘unfree societies’. Thus we are not ‘free’. This inversion or negation of this freedom is then held to be the original concept, even though it is antithetical.

Žižek concludes my argument in one of his earlier works, with reference to a favourite scene from a high-class restaurant in Terry Gilliam’s film *Brazil*.⁴⁷² When the ordered food arrives, it:

is a dazzling colour photograph of the meal on a stand above the plate, and on the plate itself a loathsome, excremental, paste-like lump:⁴⁷³ this split between the image of the food and the Real of its formless excremental remnant exemplifies perfectly the

⁴⁶⁸ Kay, Sarah. *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*. p 38-39.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p 39.

⁴⁷⁰ Malcolm, Norman. *Wittgenstein. A religious point of view?* p 31.

⁴⁷¹ Kay, Sarah. *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*. p 39.

⁴⁷² Žižek, Slavoj. *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology*. p 155.

⁴⁷³ Footnoted as, “See Jacques-Alain Miller and Eric Laurent, ‘L’Autre qui n’existe pas et ses comites d’ethique’, in *La Cause freudienne* 35 (1997), Paris, pp 7-20.

disintegration of reality into the ghostlike, substanceless appearance on an interface and the raw stuff of the remainder of the Real...⁴⁷⁴

I have intentionally omitted the conclusion of the above quotation, for Žižek argues that only a return to “the paternal Prohibition/Law... guarantees our access to reality.”⁴⁷⁵ This is a ‘second-order’ claim within the context of this thesis, and as such is no better or worse than many other claims. I am arguing that only by acknowledging the shift ‘of reality into the ghostlike’ will we regain our access to the real, and the context of this regaining is irrelevant so long as it does not contribute to the same ‘first-order’ consequences.

Recognising that our ‘first-order’ ontology is conceptually manipulated by ‘second-order’ political claims, is an argument that is also supported by Laing’s nexus, and supported by Žižek, who concludes that:

Via a process of double reflection, then, S1 appears first as negating the rest of the set, S2 – that is, as unique relative to its fullness – and next, via a negation of this negation, when the rest of the set is reflected into it, as typifying the universal in the form of the particular.⁴⁷⁶

However, instead of embracing the negation of the negation and accepting it ‘as unique relative to its fullness’, we continually ‘fill it out’ and then hold this concept to be the original ‘unary feature’ which, of course it is not. If my conclusion is reducible, it is reducible to this. Humanity should spend less time concerned with the variables of our belief systems, and spend more time concerned with the method and dynamic behind it. This tool is available to all, not just a ‘small coterie of experts.’ We should *reduceo ur egos*.

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid. p 155-156.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid. p 156.

⁴⁷⁶ Kay, Sarah. *Žižek: A Critical Introduction*. p 39.

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