

MAGICAL CAPITALISM

*Enchantment, Spells,
and Occult Practices in
Contemporary Economies*

Edited by Brian Moeran,
Timothy de Waal Malefyt



Magical Capitalism

“A lot of anthropological learning, from a rich past and a lively present, goes into rethinking the imaginative nature of human economy in this book. When the Nobel Prize in Economics is awarded for work on ‘magical capitalism,’ remember where you saw it first.”

—Ulf Hannerz, author of *Writing Future Worlds*

“No current work demonstrates the renewed power of esoteric anthropological knowledge within the sanctum of economic power-knowledge better than the writings in this volume.”

—George Marcus, *UC Irvine, USA*

Brian Moeran
Timothy de Waal Malefyt
Editors

Magical Capitalism

Enchantment, Spells, and Occult
Practices in Contemporary Economies

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Foreword

Writing this brief Foreword is a pleasure. The chapters collected here (and richly framed and contextualized by the editors in their Introduction) are by a diverse assembly of anthropologists who share the virtue of not having become disenchanted with the great founding thinkers of their line of thinking, such as Marcel Mauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Max Weber. And this equips them well to tackle the peculiar enchantments of capitalism in the modern world.

The variety of empirical sites that provide the basis of the arguments in this book—architecture, fashion, design, witchcraft, law, science fiction, finance—leaves little doubt that there is nothing transparent, self-evident, or routine about the devices, skills, and protocols that enable the enormous role of capitalism in our lives. Rather, the power of capitalism is based on what the Grand Inquisitor in Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* called “miracle, mystery and authority”. The chapters in this book are about the many ways in which miracle and mystery permeate the workings of capitalism.

I was stimulated to ask three questions when I read through these chapters, and I share them here as my tribute to their richness. The first is whether we have seen a gradual move away from religion as the main ghost in the machine of capitalism (a line of thinking we owe to Max Weber) to magic as the critical diacritic of capitalism. Of course, this is a matter of how one defines the two terms, but there are important matters

at stake regardless of definition. Weber, we might recall, argued that the Calvinist ethic was the key to modern Occidental capitalism precisely as it eliminated all traces of magic (by which he meant any technique intended to affect divine power and action) from its ideas of salvation. Since the chapters in this volume take pains to show that magic involves skilled professionals, esoteric techniques, and practical effects, they do not fall into the trap of confusing cosmology with ritual practice and firmly stick to the latter as the hallmark of capitalism. The question that these chapters have pushed me to ponder is whether the long process of secularization did produce a sort of disenchantment in the sphere of religious dogmas, cosmologies, and narratives but opened the door to a massive re-magicalization of the world, through the infusion of “effects at a distance” in the realm of money, profit, and technology, the key elements of capitalism.

The second question that I am now inspired to ponder is what the relationship might be between “magical capitalism” and, its obverse, which we might call, “capitalist magic”. The relation of the noun and the adjective in these two phenomena might be significant. When we think with the authors in this collection about what might be magical about capitalism, it seems that insofar as capitalism is intrinsically or essentially magical, it needs no further professional magicians to enhance its effects. The idea that capitalism is intrinsically magical can be seen in Marx’s famous M-C-M formula, in which commodities are just a device to lubricate the self-expansion of money. In today’s financial capitalism, the commodity has receded, leaving a formula closer to M-M (money begetting money through such forms as derivatives). In this perspective, the role of publicists, advertising professionals, brand specialists, and the like seems a minor and secondary part of the defining magic internal to profitmaking under uncertainty. But “capitalist magic” suggests a different approach, one which suggests that magic has many forms and that the capitalist form of magic is but one among these. This provokes the further question: what is specific about this form of magic? Here, the chapters in this volume highlight the place of language in legal contracts, bankers’ policy pronouncements, and the graphic tools of financial analysts and traders. These are examples of a very particular kind of magic in which quantity is yoked to quality (money to uncertainty) through a sort

of alchemy which is mysterious, ritualized, and technical. Perhaps we should think of the ways in which magical capitalism and capitalist magic sustain and enhance one another, thus helping us to push further in the spirit of the authors in this volume.

The third question these chapters left me with concerns the relationship between magic and modernity, an issue that the Editors also take up in some detail in their Introduction. They (and the authors) make a convincing case that modernity and magic are co-present, and co-dependent, in both the Latourian sense that modernity is still haunted by phantoms of other ways of thinking and in the sense that modernity is filled with mysteries, interruptions, gaps, and aporias that open the space of enchantment. This insight made me wonder about our digital times (on which this book also has fascinating perspectives), and our world of “screens”, “codes”, “clouds”, “trolls”, and “tweets”, and ask whether we have entered an era of applications, design philosophies, and constant updating which the philosopher, Cameron Tonkinwise, calls a new ontology of time and things, built around failure, testing, and user experience. This new ontology is thoroughly magical, insofar as it is all about “effects at a distance” produced through material mediation and is at the same time hyper-modern because it relies on entirely new (digital) forms of communicating and cohabitation.

These three questions indicate and exemplify the thoughts that this volume has provoked in me. They are sure to provoke other questions in other readers. Read on!

Berlin, Germany
November 12, 2017

Arjun Appadurai

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1

Magical Capitalism: An Introduction

Brian Moeran and Timothy de Waal Malefyt

The word “magic” refers to a broad range of beliefs that include animism, charm(s), divination, enchantment, fantasy, fetish, glamour, illusion, miracles, the occult, shamanism, sorcery, spells, the supernatural, superstition, trickery, and witchcraft. In this respect, it is “society casting spells on itself” (Taussig 1980: 136). It is also a simple superlative (Davies 2012: 1) and is one of the oldest subjects of discussion and theorizing in anthropology. From time to time—despite E.B. Tyler’s (1929: 111) assertion that magic is “one of the most pernicious delusions that ever vexed mankind”—anthropologists, as well as the occasional scholar from other disciplines, have suggested that magical practices are alive and well in contemporary industrialized societies, where finance and trade, government gatherings, the law (including intellectual property and trademark law), medicine and health, technology, advertising, marketing, cultural production, and consumption all, at one time or another, operate according to magical premises.¹ In other

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words, capitalism and its supporting mechanisms are not often as rational as they make themselves out to be.² Indeed, counter to Weber's claim (1948: 139) that "no mysterious incalculable forces" of "magical" means come into play in our "disenchanted" modern world, Jean and John L. Comaroff (1998: 281) respond, "capitalism has an effervescent new spirit—a magical, neo-Protestant zeitgeist—welling up close to its core." As to how and why this "magical turn" in modernity should be so is our subject matter in *Magical Capitalism*.

In this Introduction, we focus on various modern magical practices taking place in a variety of capitalist organizations, activities, and events and discuss what does, or does not, enable them to be successful. Mindful of Donald Trump's assertion that his tweets make him the first "modern" President of the USA, we follow Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels (2003) in arguing that magic is rooted in modernism, but we also suggest—following Michael Taussig (2003: 273)—that magic works and becomes so powerful because it doesn't just skilfully conceal, but skilfully reveals its skilful concealment (which is why Trump's tweets are so effective). In so doing, it becomes *transformative* and effects *change*.

We do not normally speak of "magic" in the same breath as "modernity," if only because anthropologists have long declared it to serve only the most primitive societies and their functions. As a result, magic and modernity have been radically positioned as opposites. Yet Pels (2003: 32) and Latour (2010) have argued that the two have always belonged together, and that what passes for the modern has never existed free from the shadow of the magical. At the same time, however, they also suggest a more controversial inverse equation—with which we agree—that magic never exists outside of modernity, witness the following quotation from the UK edition of *Marie Claire* in December 2015:

We're spellbound by Scarlett Johansson, bewitched by the opulence of vintage florals and drawn to the dark side of black party pieces. Welcome to the season of magic and sparkle.

In other words, that which is cast as "close, present, and transformative" in which "possibility arises" and "fate is overcome"—how Latour (2010: 103) describes religion may also be applied to magic—exists alongside

modern beliefs of “freedom, emancipation, inventiveness and intentionality” (ibid.: 14). We do not need to *oppose* the magical to the modern because, as a construction *and* version of reality, each is a “synonym” for the other (ibid.: 24).

This suggests an alternative vision to the one found in the first quotation above. It is not that the world is now *disenchanted*, as Weber suggested; rather, it has been *re-enchanted*. The modern world is no less mysterious, more rational, knowable, predictable, and thus ultimately manipulable, than the premodern world. Magic has not declined, to be replaced by science, bureaucracy, law, and power. Rather, modern societies thrive on glamour (an old Scottish word, *gramyre*, originally meaning “magic,” “enchantment,” or “spell”), deception, illusory feats, ritual, symbolism, drama, theatricality, fake news, and tweets that reveal “a state where ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’ modes of thought coexist and continuously make contesting claims for definitions of reality” (Jöhncke and Steffen 2015: 10).

Modern societies, then, are characterized by opposing tendencies, themes, and forces of rationality and irrationality (Jenkins 2000: 14). As the “‘objective knowledges’ of western science are becoming increasingly understood at best as contingent rather than permanent varieties” (Latour, quoted in Jenkins 2000: 17), there is increasing room for uncertainty, mystery, the unknown, and seemingly non-rational alternatives.³

In this Introduction, we reveal the concealed practices of modern magic on two levels: first, where and why we have magic in the first place; second, what happens when magic does take place. In so doing, we attempt not to fall into the trap of seeing our revelations as a “sacred task” in the way that moderns tend to do (Latour 1993: 44). After all, whatever we reveal and conceal—however, we transform fellow anthropologists’ ideas and do, or do not, effect change—is itself a magical practice (in the same way that scholars writing about art or fashion, whether they want it or not, collaborate in the continued treatment of paintings or clothes as something other than they are). That is an inherent part of the anthropology of magic: we, as interpreters, become part of the object of our study (Taussig 1993: 8). It cannot otherwise be justified (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006).

Magical Networks

Precisely because anthropologists have discussed magical practices in different parts of the world over one and a half centuries or more, there is little consensus among them about what, exactly, constitutes a magical system (Wax and Wax 1963: 499). However, two of modern anthropology's founding fathers—Bronislaw Malinowski and Marcel Mauss—argued that we should treat magic as a *system* of actors, actions, and language. To this we would add a more porous definition to that of system, consisting instead of a *network* of specific materials, professional skills, ideas, habits, conditions, media, and meanings, which together constitute an *assemblage* of magical practices and beliefs that re-associate and reassemble the social (Latour 2005: 7) in particular times and places, and for certain purposes.

Let us now lay out the basic argumentation for what constitutes such a network. Mauss argued that all magical systems required three elements to be in conjunction with one another: magician, magical representation, and magical rite (Mauss 1972: 18). Malinowski (1922: 403) made a similar tripartite schema in which he focused on the *condition* of the performer, thereby suggesting that magic is an embodied and emergent process: a continual *becoming* of the social and the material:

Magic all the world over... represents three essential aspects. In its performance there enter always some words spoken or chanted, some actions carried out and there are always the minister or ministers of the ceremony. In analysing the concrete details of magical performances, therefore, we have to distinguish between the *formula*, the *rite* and the *condition of the performer*.

We follow Mauss in our delineation of the networks of magic at work in contemporary capitalism. First, a *magician* has—or, rather, is seen to have—certain qualities that a lay person does not. Certain professions have been, and still are, thought to possess magical powers because of the dexterity and outstanding knowledge of their practitioners. Whether successful inventor or investor, fashion designer or financial trader, spin doctor or neurosurgeon, barrister or business leader, “it is their profession

which sets them apart from the common run of mortals and it is this separateness which endows them with magical power” (Mauss 1972: 29). Because, like Orson Welles, they “prevail over uncertainty,” they are widely recognized by society as able to accomplish things beyond the power of normal human beings (Moeran 2015: 64–66).

The question arising from this, however, is: *who* becomes recognized as a “magician,” and on what grounds? Clearly, it is public opinion that “makes the magician and creates the power he wields” (Mauss 1972: 43). But, is it his or her pertinent skill (eloquence in a politician, for example, or creativity in an advertising copywriter) or some other factor (an ability to manipulate personal networks, for instance) that persuades a public already primed by the nature of his profession to believe in the magician? This is where the idea of a “network” supersedes that of “system.” Almost certainly, recognition takes place initially within a particular social world—of politics, finance, advertising, film production, and so on. But in modern societies, the public at large is in most part created and sustained by the media, which act as intermediaries between magicians and their audiences. This means that we need to explore not just how, when, and where a magician performs his/her magic in front of whom, for what purpose, and with what results, but how what starts out as limited recognition seeps out into society as a whole, thanks to media attention, word of mouth, and social media buzz.

Let us now turn to magical *rites*. Every magical network includes one or more central operations in which the magician acts. An economic summit, a trading floor, an operating theatre, a film set, a court of law, a television talk show⁴—such magical rites are often “precisely those which, at first glance, seem to be imbued with the least amount of sacred power” (Mauss 1972: 9), although there are many other “tournaments of values” (Appadurai 1986; Moeran 2010a) (an auction, a fashion collection, a museum exhibition, the Booker Prize, Academy, and Grammy Awards) which are designed to configure and “consecrate” a particular field (of art, fashion, culture, literature, film, and music) by means of magical performances (Bourdieu 1993: 120–125; Mauss 1972: 47; see also English 2005).⁵ To be effective, creative, and to *do* things (Mauss 1972: 19), such events also take place in specially qualified places (like art galleries, law courts, [operating] theatres,⁶ concert halls, stock exchanges, and television

studios) (*ibid.*: 46), where other conditions, professional skills, habits, ideas, meanings, and so on, are brought to bear.

Magical rites like these are designed to effect *transformations* (in share prices, in a patient's health, in defining "fashion," in the interpretation of a political event or criminal act) and thus tend to be strictly prescribed in terms of time, as well as location. They are performed regularly at particular times of the year (fashion "weeks," annual awards ceremonies, biennials) or, if daily, within strictly controlled time limits (hence the opening and closing bell at the New York Stock Exchange). Magical rites, like ritual in general, make use of, or themselves are, a form of language, which translates ideas and their *representations* to display magic's *effect* (a Bank of Japan risk balance chart forecasting real GDP growth [cf. Holmes 2014: 22]; an image of a naked woman with snake around her neck for Guy Laroche's perfume of "Paradise Regained," *Fidji*, indicating phallogentric seduction). Almost invariably, the part is identified with the whole in a form of contiguous magic (a risk balance chart represents the [future] economy; use of a single product women's continued subjugation by men). This is what Mauss calls "the first law of magic" (Mauss 1972: 64; Tambiah 1968: 190).

So, too, with Mauss' second law of magical representation—that of similarity—in which "like" both produces and acts upon "like," so that an object (a risk balance chart or perfume ad) is designed and able, to represent the whole (the economy or gender relations), while also acting on it to make it happen. By so doing, the idea of the image assumes the nature of a symbol: a good economy signals financial security, political acceptance, employment, family contentment, and so on; gender a male-dominated society in which women continue to be subjugated to the male gaze and reduced to sexual objects (witness Trump's presiding fixation on women's bodies?). For both the economy and gender relations to become *real*, rather than imaginary, it is sufficient for the magician to select a single quality (GDP, seduction), which can then be set in opposition (the third law of magical representation) to other selected qualities (bank rates and inflation, for example, or competence, flexibility, and patience) (Mauss 1972: 68–69).

Many forms of representation used in magical rites are verbal. Indeed, as we see later in more detail, uttering words in the form of a spell is itself

a ritual, which progresses from word to thought, to power, and finally to deed (Tambiah 1968: 175). This is why Malinowski (1922: 408) regarded the “virtue, the force, the effective principle of magic” as lying in the spell. Whether we are looking at a beauty advertisement (*Create the illusion with cosmetic cover-ups*), reading the latest pronouncement in a fashion magazine (*Galliano weaves magic at Haute Couture collection*), or watching a Bloomberg news video (*Is 2500 the magic number in Shanghai?*), magic rites are used to:

Re-structure and integrate the minds and emotions of the actors. The technique combines verbal and non-verbal behaviour and exploits their special properties. Language is an artificial construct and its strength is that its form owes nothing to external reality: it thus enjoys the power to invoke images and comparisons, refer to time past and future and relate events which cannot be represented in action. Non-verbal action on the other hand, excels in what words cannot easily do—it can codify analogically by imitating real events, reproduce technical acts and express multiple implications simultaneously. Words excel in expressive enlargement, physical actions in realistic representation. (Tambiah 1968: 202)

Having laid out our understanding of Mauss’ theory of magic, supplemented by examples of how a magical network functions, we now illustrate our thesis that magic is alive and well in contemporary societies by offering six scenarios of magical thinking and magical practices—ranging from cultural production to *manga* comics, by way of an ailing economy, a political event, modern technology, and good luck charms and talismans. Into these scenarios we weave our theoretical discussion of uncertainty, performance, spells, enchantment, mimesis, and transformation.

Scenario 1: Cultural Production

In October 2015, hard on the heels of Paris Fashion Week, Suzy Menkes—who, at one stage at least, provided the nearest thing one could get to “objective” reporting in the fashion industry—praised Alber Elbaz, chief designer at Lanvin, for his “magical realism.” Precisely where such magical

realism was to be found was hard to judge. Was it in the “stretchy corsets [made] to fit snugly under a one-shoulder black dress with slits between the angular drapes?” Or in the designer’s ability to “simplify the closet into an art form?”⁷ Whatever, Menkes’ take on magical realism seemed a long way from that of another fashion designer, Tata Christiane, whose magical realism collection blurred “what is real and what is fiction” with “mocked mood, mixture of fabrics and motifs [*sic*]. Feathers and frou-frou. Fantastic and marvellous. And Humour.”⁸

Neither of these takes on magical realism bears much resemblance to its artistic and literary origins,⁹ although (unless we are dedicated fashionistas) we would recognize that, in the world of fashion, magical realism speaks from the perspective of people who live in our world but experience a different reality from the one *we* call “objective.” In short, it endeavours to show us a world through the eyes of others. In this respect, we may note that fashion is often described in terms of magic and that the industry itself operates according to magical thinking (Moeran 2015). Designers are “magicians” or “shamans” who have “muses”; their collections are “magical” as they play with fantasy and reality; and fashion itself is all about “glamour”—an old Scottish word meaning “enchantment.” In some ways, the fashion system may be rather closer to magical realism than either Menkes or Christiane realized, in that for it, too, time is not linear, causality is subjective, and the magical and the ordinary are one and the same. Even so, magical realism comes and goes in terms of critical consciousness: in this season, out the next—a fact which leads us to comment on the uncertainty characterizing not just fashion and the fashion industry but cultural production in general (as some of the chapters in this book reveal).

The uncertainty of cultural production (by which we refer to the processes by which art, fashion, film, literature, music, performing arts, and video games are conceived, created, distributed, and sold) is first and foremost *financial*, since demand is uncertain and “nobody knows” (Caves 2000: 3) whether any creative product is ever going to be a “hit” or a “miss” (Bielby and Bielby 1994). Luciana Arrighi, Production Designer for the Merchant Ivory film *Howards End*, put it this way:

None of us ever knows whether a film is going to be a success or not and I think that's part of the magic of the film industry, because you know what is good or bad—or, at least, *I* can—but you *never* know whether it's going to hit the jackpot.

This financial uncertainty principle is accompanied by another of what we may broadly define as “aesthetics.” Magazine editors, stylists, photographers, fashion designers, and other creative personnel can rarely—if ever—be pinned down beforehand about the aesthetic choices that go into the structuring of a fashion magazine issue, the shooting of a fashion well, the selection of a model, and so on. They may try to stage things beforehand, but they are in fact looking for what fashion photographer Mario Testino has referred to as “unpremeditated magic” to make things happen.

This *aesthetic* uncertainty (what Richard Caves [2000: 3–10], in his seminal work on creative industries, refers to as the *art for art's sake* property) stems in large part from the often unanticipated *transformations* that occur as mental concept takes on two- or three-dimensional form and is then re-used with its own internal transformations (witness a fashion magazine description of a collection: *A flourish of feathers turns a semi-long coat utterly seductive*). The fact that nobody is ever quite sure about how an inner vision will materialize during the creation of a product, nor how an audience will react to it, explains both aesthetic and financial uncertainty, while also adding to the finished product's perceived magical quality.

Like all forms of cultural production, making a fashion collection or editing a fashion magazine requires careful coordination of the diverse skills of designers, seamstresses, fabric cutters, editors, make-up artists, photographers, publishers, layout artists, advertising managers, hair stylists, models, and so forth. This is what Caves refers to as a *motley crew* property.

With every step along the way to completion, all the necessary personnel must come together and do their necessary work within an allotted time frame. This method of work organization involves considerable negotiation among the different creative people about how best to persuade

their audience of the efficacy of their magical practices. Although all forms of cultural production are subject to hierarchical forms of management, there is still a lot of room for manoeuvring with regard to what the final product will look like, so that *social* uncertainty also prevails. Those involved in cultural production are never quite sure how others are going to react to their ideas and ways of doing things. It is within such a framework of uncertainties that the fashion, film, music, media, art, *anime*, and other cultural industries perform tasks which, because of their creative inputs, are often referred to as “magical.”

Modern Capitalism and Uncertainty

One of the principle means by which magic has been explained by anthropologists is that of uncertainty. Magicians, magical rites, and magical representations, together with their accompanying skills, habits, and so on, work together to overcome uncertainty. As Malinowski put it many decades ago, the broader use of magic is associated with “the domain of the unaccountable and adverse influences, as well as the great unearned increment of fortunate coincidence” (1954: 29). In other words, magic deals with the uncertainty of our knowledge of the world (Gell 1992: 57)—whether that of open-sea fishing (Malinowski 1954: 31), where fishermen’s hunches and dreams often prevail (Pálsson 1988), or economic forecasting (Holmes 2014: 21–22), profit-making activity (Appadurai 2015: 32), and the outcome of different forms of cultural production (Moeran 2015: 219–222). Like applied science, magic is thought to control events (Lloyd 1966: 178, quoted in Tambiah 1985: 67).

By uncertainty, we refer to a sense of unpredictability and its accompanying anxieties that pervade the workings of government, business, and the economy and that, towards the end of the second decade of the millennium, take the form of terrorist attacks, stock market crashes, global warming, Brexit, entertainment belly flops, and the election of Donald Trump as President of the USA.

Nevertheless, the “uncertainty principle,” cannot explain the underpinnings of magic completely. While it appears to explain the *apparent*

dynamics of magical practices, we would do well to remind ourselves, as Lévi-Strauss (1962: 66–67) did long ago, that everything we do in life involves uncertainty and risk, including that of failure. So we need to ask ourselves which undertakings with uncertain outcomes are accompanied by “magical” practices and which not (Wax and Wax 1963: 498), and in what ways this is especially so under conditions of capitalism.

Capitalism itself is an uncertain prospect and has, of course, many forms: notably Anglo-American stock market capitalism, on the one hand, and welfare capitalism, practised by Japan, Germany, and the Nordic countries, on the other hand (see, for example, Dore 2000). Thrift (2005: 2) contends that capitalism (we would prefer the plural form, capitalisms) does not consist of neat whole systems of “unities and totalities,” but rather is highly unstable, “unfinished,” in constant flux, and continuously changing in form and practice, as it is uncertain about the future and yet depends upon it. Similarly, corporations are composed of malleable fields and shifting networks, which are only “partly in control” as “constantly mutating entities” (ibid.: 4). This new take on capitalist ideology is evident in Caliskan and Callon’s (2009) examination of *economization*, a term they apply to the experiments and new configurations that denote “the processes that constitute the behaviours, organizations, institutions and, more generally, the objects in a particular society which are tentatively and often controversially qualified by social scientists and market actors as ‘economic’” (p. 370).

Magical conditions would seem to have much in common with conditions of capitalism, since both are practised under tenuous conditions and, through many of their forms, use particular kinds of practices and ideology to deal with ambiguity and unpredictability while initiating processes of change—which are, however, themselves constrained by the framework of theories about how change should be enacted and to what extent it is permissible. At the same time, the various worlds of different forms of capitalism now resemble less a rational or intellectual world of proper checks and balances, and more an “imaginary of the medieval world of dark superstitions and religious bliss than we fondly choose to believe” (Thrift 2005: 2). Is magic then the spectre of capitalism, always present but never fully affirmed?

If so, then we should “abandon critical thought, forget notions of belief, magic, hypocrisy and autonomy, losing the stunning mastery that has made us Moderns and proud of it” (Latour 2010: 18). Instead, we should accept that we fetishize facts as much as we fabricate fetishes and treat both fact and fetish as one and the same—as “factish.” After all, none of us is absolute or consistent in what we think, say, and do (Lewis 1986: 431). We live in a world where advertising creatives, bankers, businessmen, doctors, fashion designers, lawyers, marketers, politicians, and others discussed in the chapters of this book, invest what they do with a power that extends beyond them, as they unselfconsciously “pass back and forth every day, at all hours, between [...] artificial construction and [...] precise truth” (Latour 2010: 23). Magical practice and rational (theories of) reality are one and the same. It is in this sense and this sense only, that we can speak of a “magical world view,” the dynamic of which is power (Wax and Wax 1963: 501).

Scenario 2: Brexit and Grexit

In March 2016, the then Prime Minister of the UK, David Cameron, called for a referendum to be held in late June of the same year on whether the UK should stay in or leave the European Union (EU). During the first weeks of campaigning, arguments for and against a so-called Brexit focused on immigration and the economy (in particular, on whether the UK could successfully negotiate new tariff-free trading agreements with EU countries once it had opted out), although fears were also expressed about the potential break-up of the UK (since a majority of voters in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and possibly Wales were believed to support staying in the EU, while a majority in England wanted to opt out). At the other end of the spectrum and in what appeared even then to be a carefully planned long-term political move, the Conservative politician and former Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, came out in favour of “Brexit,” highlighting various “ludicrous rules” laid down by the EU, claiming (in a large part incorrectly) that children under the age of eight, for example, were forbidden to blow up balloons and their parents banned

from recycling teabags (which nobody in their right mind, unless they were English, would ever dream of doing in the first place).

Many of the comments made seemed—and still seem—typical of the “moan and groan society” for which the English are well known. They certainly muddied the waters of clarity, as old “arguments” were rehearsed (“British money used to subsidize French farming”) and new ones twisted to fit the task at hand (“ending UK border controls in Calais”—not an EU membership issue as such, but one related to a separate treaty between France and the UK). Both sides seemed intent upon undermining their opponents with what *The Daily Telegraph* described at the time as “a barrage of hints, threats, obfuscations and obstreperous confrontations.”

Indeed, what came across most clearly during the period leading up to the Referendum was the substitution of scaremongering for reasoned argument in what was dubbed “Project Fear” (magic’s uncertainty principle again). The uncertainty surrounding the Referendum’s result explains the prevalence of “spins,” “smears,” “threats,” “stunts,” “propaganda,” and “conspiracies” which dominated media reports at the time. Cabinet ministers and Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) 100 company chairmen, as well as Parliament backbenchers and small companies, vied to persuade people through attention-grabbing one-line sound bites (“Sleepwalking out of Europe”; “It’s like Halloween come early”). They then contributed to the uncertainty by asserting that other people’s claims were “hypothetical,” “desperate,” or “unsubstantiated”; their modes of thought “heretical and dangerous”; the misuse of data “scandalous”; and dossiers “highly questionable.” In short, they all *performed* the EU Referendum.

Just how successful was the performance of those arguing for the UK to leave the EU can be seen in the fact that many people voted to leave for no other reason than that the Vote Leave campaign promised to use EU taxes to support the country’s national health system (“Let’s give our NHS the £350 million the EU takes every week”)—a promise performers like Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson disavowed immediately after the referendum result.

In another example of magical performance in that same late spring of 2016, Eurozone finance ministers agreed to extend further loans to Greece in what was then called “a major breakthrough” in an ongoing crisis. Or did they? It seemed at one point that nobody was quite sure.

What people *are* now sure about is that Greece's entry into the Eurozone was surrounded by a bit of "creative accounting," or "magic," performed by the head of the country's statistical agency, who made inflation and the budget deficit disappear in order to meet Maastricht Treaty requirements that in future all members should have a budget deficit of below 3 per cent.¹⁰ Once accepted into the "EU club," the country enjoyed lower interest rates and was able to borrow exorbitant amounts of money. Public debt ballooned to 113 per cent of GDP in 2009 and by April 2015 was estimated at around 175 per cent (and in May 2016, at 180 per cent!). Instead of reforming public finances, the Greek government borrowed more and more money to meet the deficit. In retrospect, it seems astonishing that banks queued up to lend. The markets did not believe there was a risk of default because Greece's currency, the Euro, was locked into that of Germany and Germany has been the economic powerhouse of Europe—a situation which then led to calls for Germany, not Greece, to leave the Eurozone. One of two extremes had to go!¹¹

Further magical thinking was performed when a new government, under Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, threatened an exit from the currency union in order to get more of a pro-growth programme from its creditors, even as it undid some of the reforms those creditors had agreed with previous governments in return for Greece's first two bailouts. When this failed, a new magical performance took place, as Tsipras and EU officials tried to stretch the limits of their audience's rational calculations by conjuring the possibility of the country's revitalized economic performance in the future. Arguments against further debt relief were supported by the idea that Greece's borrowings, while astronomical, came with such good terms, at below-market rates, that what appeared to be a debt level of 200 per cent of GDP was really more like 150 per cent of GDP in net present value terms. In other words, the debt load was actually quite manageable if those concerned pretended that Greece could pay it all back *right now* at the time the bailout was offered.¹² This time, in an "economy of appearances," politicians and bankers engaged in a performance that was both economic and dramatic, just as the Bre-X gold strike in Indonesia, described by Anna Tsing, was "a drama, a conjuring trick, an illusion"—a "self-conscious making of a spectacle" that was "a necessary aid to gathering investment funds" (Tsing 2000: 118).

Performing Magic

Bre-X, Brexit, and Grexit¹³ followed a script seemingly based on rational arguments rather than on what were in fact magical premises. Politicians, economists, analysts, regulators, and media all participated in a conjuring trick in which spectacle and mystery played with reality as the charisma of the performers (Alexis Tsipras, Angela Merkel) moved their audience (financial institutions, the Greek people) beyond the limits of rational calculation (Tsing 2000: 118, 127) in an attempt to shore up the financial, and with it the organizational, uncertainty of the EU and its future. “Magic, rather than strict description, calls capital” (Tsing 2000: 120).

What this second scenario shows is that magicians *perform* their rites and representations. If we say, with Appadurai (2015: 49), that not just financiers, but advertising agencies, architects, CEOs, consultants, entrepreneurs, fashion designers, heads of state, lawyers, marketers and NGOs, among others, channel the workings of uncertainty so that they can become winners in what is a game of risk, then just *how* they do so needs to be examined (Holmes 2014; Moeran 2015; Vangkilde 2012). In other words, as well as asking how magicians become recognized as such, we need to examine how magic is *performed* in contemporary capitalist societies.

Let us start with the way in which language (or rhetoric [McCloskey 1998]) is used to perform an action by being spoken (what Austin [1975: 5–6] referred to as an “illocutionary act”). Here, our concern is with how, both *in* and *by* saying something, campaigners also *do* something (Austin 1975: 94), or, in Searle’s words (1998: 115), “saying something makes it true”—an approach taken by Douglas Holmes (2014) and Arjun Appadurai (2015) in their accounts of central bankers and traders in derivatives, respectively, as well as rather more generally in his discussion of markets and the economy by Michel Callon (2009).¹⁴

As Holmes (2014: 13) points out, performative utterances may be analytical (“access comes with obligations and costs. And securing the maximum benefit from any access depends on having influence over the rules”), representational (“greater power for our own Parliament”), or instrumental (“no existing model outside the EU comes close to providing

the same balance of advantages and influence that we get from the UK's current special status inside the EU").¹⁵ Designed to manage expectations, they are the tools of every magician's trade as they work in a "magical space" (Appadurai 2015: 19). At the same time, given that words uttered by a magician have both intended and unintended consequences on both speaker and audience, they may also be considered "perlocutionary acts" (Austin 1975: 5–6).

In contemporary societies, magical performances are presented to the public by the media. This, perhaps, is what differentiates magical capitalism today from magic in "primitive" societies. Television, newspapers, radio, magazines—and now Twitter, Facebook, and other social media—report on, and act as the mouthpiece for, everyone who would be magician: businessman, celebrity, media "personality," politician, sportsman or woman, scientist, or terrorist. Somewhat like a shaman's familiar or tutelary spirit, or a fashion designer's muse, the media enjoy primary status in every would-be magician's communication (DuBois 2009: 72). Indeed, the latter comes to view the relationship with media "as a kind of marriage" (ibid.: 77). Mass media, then, make the magician, in particular, because they tend to favour sound bites over reasoned argument. Social media take this to an extreme by creating a form in which *only* sound bites are possible and so become reality. This heralds the emergence of more and more—and hitherto less likely—magicians (in the form of fashion, food, beauty, travel, photography, and other bloggers).

Magic understood as performance is not independent of culturally (as well as technologically) specific human experiences but neither can it be explained away as a "psychological projection," "cultural belief," or simply "a representation of one's experience." Like religion, magic as performance can be a type of "truth generator." Like a speech act, it is "a way of preaching, of predicting, of enunciating truth in a certain way" (Latour 2010: 101). Successful magical speech, like the "love-talk" that Latour uses as an example in his discussion of religion, "brings us close and transforms us" (ibid.: 110–111). Such types of transformations occur as two qualities: first, for their performative abilities (i.e., do they produce the thing they talk about? Are they felicitous?); second, for the way their ability as "performatives" shifts how space and time are inhabited and flow (ibid.: 103).

Scenario 3: The World Economic Forum, Davos

Not for nothing is Davos still referred to as *The Magic Mountain*. Every year, in those conditions of transparency and opacity, secrecy and publicity, revelation and concealment which characterize all magical acts,¹⁶ senior executives of global corporations, heads of state, NGOs, Nobel Prize winners, Forbes List billionaires, pop singers, private-equity hedge fund managers, human rights activists, an occasional “royal” or Pope, and various other selected leaders of civil society gather at the World Economic Forum (WEF) for a few days in order to “improve the state of the world”—a mission statement that is sometimes interpreted as “don’t offend anyone.”¹⁷

Each meeting has its theme: “The Fourth Industrial Revolution” (2016), “Resilient Dynamism” (2013), or “The Great Transformation” (2012)—the last a magical (and, in the context of Karl Polanyi’s book by the same title, somewhat ironical) attempt by government and business magicians to face the fact that “capitalism no longer fits the world around us.”

WEF now publishes a selection of “inspirational quotes” every year. These include banalities, such as “Innovation is an inexhaustible engine for economic development” (Li Keqiang, Premier of the People’s Republic of China) and “Higher education is the strongest, sturdiest ladder to increased socio-economic mobility” (Drew Faust, President, Harvard University), and somewhat more surprising lines, such as, “Coming out has made me a better leader” (Beth Brooke Marciniak, Global Vice Chair of Public Policy, EY) and “We’ve heard a lot about the Internet of things—I think we need an Internet of women” (Christine Lagarde, International Monetary Fund Managing Director). We would probably underline such statements heavily in red ink if our students were to write them in their term essays, but in the context of Davos our suspect students are indeed transformed into wizards.

What emerges most strongly is the fact that “Davos” (a metonymic substitution characteristic of magic [Tambiah 1985: 36]) is a “talkfest”—“an exercise in corporate speed dating” where “the faster you walk, the

more important you are”¹⁸—where words, thoughts, power, and the occasional deed come together in an annual rite, or tournament of values (Moeran 2010a). The language used at Davos is “a mixture of corporate jargon, future-fixation and deployment of airy concepts intended to convey prescient wisdom.”¹⁹ Thus, do we read about “drilling down,” “catalysing multi-stakeholder value,” “playing in every vertical,” and “navigating a circular economy.” We learn, too, of “the resilience imperative,” “equality,” “unrecruitment,” “global burnout syndrome,” and “hardwire competitiveness”²⁰—phrases designed through their obscurity to make ordinary people think that those participating must be smart and know what they are doing—even though, by many accounts, it is the participants themselves who have caused the inequality that they proclaim must be overcome.²¹ Their words, then, are sacred and “possess a special kind of power not normally associated with ordinary language” (Tambiah 1985: 22) because—like Buddhist monks using the dead Pali language in rituals in northeast Thailand—they violate their communicative function by creating neologisms out of the dead language of Latin (and occasional Ancient Greek). Even though they are uttered by the anointed high priests of government, politics, business, and pop culture, their magical power should not be attributed to the speakers themselves (however elevated their status). Rather, it resides in their words, which become effective only because they are uttered in a very special context of other action—the WEF at Davos (Tambiah 1985: 18).

Magical Words

One critical element in the performance of magic, as Malinowski (1935) went into in great detail in his ethnography of the Trobriand Islanders, is the use of language and spells, the power of which stems from being uttered in a special context. Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah (1985: 18–22) uses the example of a Sinhalese healing ritual to show how sacred words, and the sequence in which they are uttered, possess a special kind of power not normally associated with everyday speech. Another contemporary capitalist activity in which this kind of magic takes place is advertising (Williams 1980; McCreery 1995). One of us (Moeran 2010b) has shown

how contemporary beauty advertisements also progress from word to thought, thence to power, and finally to deed, as they make use of an identical linguistic sequence of phrases when creating a magical aura around cosmetics products (with closing mantras like L'Oréal's *Because you're worth it*).²²

As in many magical practices found among tribal peoples around the world, beauty advertisements isolate and enumerate “the various or constituent parts of the recipient of the magic” (a woman’s eyes, hair, lashes, lips, nails, skin, etc.) and then make a magical transfer that enables them to become *dazzling, healthy, luscious, kissable, soft, natural*, and so on. By building up these parts, we are able to form a realistic picture of the whole—a metonymic technique that lends realism to the rite of make-up, transmits a message about beauty through redundancy, and allows the storing of vital technological knowledge in an oral culture of women’s gossip (cf. Tambiah 1968: 190).

We may say, then, with Tambiah, that in both ritual and advertising three notions form an interrelated set. First, there are deities—or their magician mediums—in the form of cosmetics manufacturers (and the advertising agencies who create their campaigns), who institute speech and classifying activity. Then there are the people—in this instance, fashion magazine women readers—who act accordingly. Last, there is language, which has an independent existence and the mystical power to influence the reality of beauty. Advertising in capitalist society is a heightened use of language that aims to combine word, image, and deed (the persuasion to purchase and make use of a product) by using spells especially constructed to effect a magical transfer.

So, like the Azande, modern magicians make use of material substances—ranging in the chapters in this book from fan charts to fabrics, by way of written legal contracts, architects’ conceptual three-dimensional models, bank logos, a steerable catheter, and a gate to some Bolivian archaeological ruins—to perform their spells, for “in the substance lies the mystical power which produces the desired end” (Evans-Pritchard 1937: 441). Hence, we find Bank of England pronouncements like “the forecast represented by the MPC’s fan chart is a key input to policy decisions” (Holmes 2014: 22) and fashion magazines proclaiming the merits of *frivolous chiffon* or *sexy silk*, while *distressed fabrics and handcrafted*

detailing are the latest in survivor chic. Such magical phrases, like the rites in which they are uttered, are aimed at achieving practical results (Tambiah 1985: 83).

This helps us understand why, in the Sinhalese rituals described by Tambiah, verbal formulae are often accompanied by the manipulation of objects of one sort or another, which then become charged with special potency. As Gell (1977: 25) remarks, “there is a complementarity between (standardized, formulaic) spells and *magical substances*.” In capitalist societies, we find the same processes in cosmetics advertisements, which make use of highly charged images of beautiful women who show that the intended effect of the magical formulae can be achieved (Tambiah 1968: 190–191). What is clear from these contrasting examples is that magical words are used by politicians, businessmen, advertisers, and others to effect their will over their publics. Words are perceived to have attributes and values which “give meaning to and act on the encounters that individuals have with each other” (Weiner 1983: 692). Like participants at Davos, everyone is projecting talk (in the form of magical spells disguised as “talk”) into everyone else’s space. Success or failure depends on the sound bites used, and on how strong the “teeth” are in the words used. In the full knowledge that revelation is powerful but extremely dangerous (ibid.: 693), those concerned enter into a game in which they both reveal things to, and conceal them from, their opponents (witness Donald Trump’s implied threat to former FBI Director, James Comey, and the ensuing hoo-hah, when he tweeted the possibility of their conversations having been taped in the Oval Office).

In her discussion of magic and the nature of words and things on Kiriwana in the Trobriand Islands, Annette Weiner (ibid.: 702) points out that the actions of spells used by people are ineffective unless spoken into a material form that “will transfer knowledge from one domain to the other.” In other words, “it is the object, rather than the spell, that is the active carrier of intention and desire. Even with magic, the object is weightier than words” (ibid.: 704). This leads us to reflect once more on the role of the media in contemporary magical practices, since it is they who must be persuaded to transmit interesting ideas outside the magician’s domain to a potential public. Politicians, businessmen, celebrities, and others interviewed by the mass media literally speak their magical

words into an object: the microphone. Together with the camera, the microphone transfers knowledge from one domain (of politics, business, fashion, and other forms of cultural production) to another (public spaces like restaurants and bars, and the privacy of home) and creates “buzz.”

Perhaps the media’s current obsession with Donald Trump can be understood from the fact that he is bypassing traditional magical practice and investing his words in a new material form: not the microphone, but Twitter. Certainly, the current President of the USA has understood that “speech acts have the power to disrupt and destroy, or to persuade, influence and convince others” (ibid.: 705). He knows, too, how repetition of the spell (“Fake news,” along with words like “dummy,” “loser,” “hoax,” etc.), accompanied by changes in rhythm (a fake CNN wrestling video), are the most “effective force in causing words to enter the appropriate object” (in this case, mass media) (ibid.: 703). What is interesting is how, as objects, the mass media enter into and empower the President’s words by accepting them at face value and fighting back rather than ignoring them totally.

Scenario 4: Global Positioning System and a Smartphone

In February 2016, an American tourist in Iceland, Noel Santillon, directed the global positioning system (GPS) unit in his rental car to guide him from Keflavik International Airport to a hotel in nearby Reykjavik. Many hours and more than 250 icy miles later, he pulled over in Siglufjordur, a fishing village on the outskirts of the Arctic Circle. Although he had “an inkling that something might be wrong”—on the way north, he had seen signs showing that Reykjavik was in the other direction—he later said that he had “put his faith in the GPS.”²³ Although his error was initially one of spelling (an extra letter *r* in the name of the street in which his hotel was to be found), Mr Santillon is not the only person who has placed absolute faith in GPS technology. A group of Japanese tourists in Western Australia wound up in the middle of Moreton Bay at high tide, when they insisted on following their car’s GPS

instructions to turn onto a submerged causeway (only visible and possibly passable at low tide) rather than drive across a bridge (visible at all times) to their island destination. Other drivers have ended up in a swamp, a river, a pile of sand, and a cherry tree by obeying their GPS.²⁴ A woman in Belgium, who asked the GPS in her car to take her to pick up a friend at a station near Brussels less than two hours away, turned up in Croatia two days (and 900 miles) later.²⁵

Also in February 2016, a court case was brought by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation requiring Apple to create new software that would enable the FBI to unlock an iPhone 5C recovered from one of the shooters involved in a terrorist attack in San Bernardino, California, and who had himself been killed. While Apple argued for the greater ideal of maintaining human rights by keeping personal devices encrypted and therefore locked, the US government sought legal access to the terrorist's phone (the owner of the phone) by claiming national security protection. Apple refused to provide the government with the code needed to unlock the phone.²⁶ The proposed solution to resolve the stalemate was through the use of magic. The Washington Post editorial board suggested that “with all their wizardry, perhaps Apple and Google could invent a kind of secure *golden key* they would retain and use only when a court has approved a search warrant.”²⁷

Technology/Enchantment

What is going on here? Even though Walter Benjamin (1969) famously argued that mechanical reproduction made possible by technological advances took the magical aura away from works of art, the examples in this scenario suggest that such technological advances themselves have a magical aura which enchants their users (something that Benjamin himself recognized). From the introduction of movies on a flickering screen to the inhabitants of the town on Macondo in García Márquez' novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, to the magical aura of a portable phonograph when first heard by both the “primitive” Other and Americans and Europeans (Taussig 1993: 193–211), new technology has enchanted us.

According to Alfred Gell (1988, 1992), one way human beings distinguish themselves from other species is by their technological capabilities. We use—sometimes simple, sometimes complex—technical means to form a bridge between a set of “given” elements (the body, for instance, or a base material, or environmental feature) and a goal that we want to achieve by making use of these givens (the achievement of beauty, for instance, or the perfection of alchemy, or saving the rain forest).

One of the technologies that we often use is that of *enchantment*. The technology of enchantment, he says, is probably *the* most sophisticated psychological weapon we use to exert control over the thoughts and actions of other human beings because it “exploits innate or derived psychological biases to enchant the other person and cause him/her to perceive social reality in a way favourable to the social interests of the enchanter” (Gell 1988: 7).²⁸

Clearly, technology enchants; it has the power to cast a spell over us (Gell 1992: 163). In this respect, there is no basis for an opposition between the technical and the magical (Gell 1988: 6) for all the car drivers mentioned in the scenario above were enchanted by their GPS to perceive reality the way in which their GPS wanted them to perceive it (*ibid.*: 7). At the same time, the symbolic media commentary on their mishaps can border on magical thinking (“inkling,” “faith,” “blindly followed,” “distracted”). In this way, technology, together with its media reporting, sustains magic (*ibid.*: 9).

And yet the enchantment by GPS, unlike the Apple-FBI confrontation, described above does not fit Gell’s idea that the technology of enchantment is for *social* purposes, aimed at controlling the thoughts and actions of other people (Malefyt 2017). Rather, it is uniquely *personal*, involving individual people’s idiosyncratic ways of using the technology in their cars. A GPS is like IT—information technology whose implementation, it is believed, can transform an organization’s work practices. By purchasing the appropriate software programmes, both line managers and IT specialists are convinced that IT will magically bring about organizational change. What they fail to realize is that this “magic bullet,” does not—indeed, *cannot*—ensure that users will use IT (or a GPS system) as intended (Markus and Benjamin 1997: 59). No gun fires itself; it needs someone to pick it up, aim at a target, and squeeze the trigger.

Some people, as we have just seen when it comes to GPS navigation, are not very good at firing. They take aim, but somehow (through inattention or inadvertence) fire at the wrong target and, in so doing, allow their enchantment with technology to overrule common sense.

The enchantment of technology also plays a widespread social role today, affecting consumer attitudes, market trends, and audience preferences through conjuring imaginative ideals (Gell 1992) that appeal to others. If some technology like GPS is practised on an individual level through personal devices, then data analytics—including Big Data,²⁹ digital technology, and other large data-based applications—is another technology produced, maintained, and distributed in society through the broad use of associative realms within larger fields of cultural production.

Data analytics thrives not for its unimaginable calculative abilities over quantifiable numbers but for the way it transforms objective numbers into attractive subjectivities (boyd and Crawford 2011). It brings meaning out of chaos, tells compelling stories, and helps magically forecast events. It appears to inspire hope for solving *any issue*, even the most intractable problems, through its promise of generating unlimited possibilities and infinite solutions.

As a meta-discourse for progress and innovation, digital technology and other forms of data analytics become a “catchall for novelty” (Miller and Horst 2012: 5). Microsoft anthropologists, dana boyd and Kate Crawford, affirm that Big Data are impressive not for the size of facts collected or their ability to conjure *golden keys* (that magic bullet again!) but for their ability to reveal still other data and people. Digital data are far more than mere expressions of human intention; they comprise socialities, subjectivities, and practices (Miller and Horst 2012). In other words, they are “highly social even if the illusion of science is intellectual” (boyd and Crawford 2011: 1). Like magic, Big Data’s value comes from “seeing” social patterns that are derived through making empirical connections between other data, groups of people, or simply from the structure of information itself. Their magical effect sometimes predicts outcomes with astounding alacrity; like the mythical flying Kula canoe that Gell describes (1992), it achieves results instantly, effortlessly, and without the normal hazards of other social predictors.

Big Data's highly social quality also reveals how even "sure-fire" predictions, such as the winner of the US Presidential election in November 2016, can fail due to subjective bias. Political data collection, we learn, was aimed at places where Hillary-inclined voters were clustered: in other words, at white liberals and minorities in major cities and close suburbs, ignoring data clusters that were vague in regions far outside major cities. So while the data were correct, they missed smaller diffuse aggregates of people that added up to larger voting constituents (Allen and Parnes 2017).

Mauss, as well as Bourdieu, was aware of magic's social influence and ability to misinform. In the words of Pierre Bourdieu paraphrasing Mauss' observations:

The problem with magic is not so much to know what are the specific properties of the magician, or even of the magical operations and representations, but rather to discover the bases of the collective belief or, more precisely, the *collective misrecognition*, collectively produced and maintained, which is the source of power the magician appropriates. (Bourdieu 1993: 81).

In other words, Bourdieu continues, "it is impossible to understand magic without the magic group... because the magician's power... is a *valid imposture*... collectively misrecognized and so recognized" (ibid). The widespread imagined power of technology and its technical wizards (formerly Steve Jobs, now Jeff Bezos, according to Warren Buffett) is modern magic's conduit for disseminating social beliefs, sentiments, and social persuasion among others. Technical science as a magical network, then, exists as a form of cultural production relative to other social systems in a field of "strategic possibilities" and "position taking" (Bourdieu 1993). Ironically, while science "reaches the invisible world of beyond," magic is "local, objective, visible, mundane, non-miraculous, repetitive, obstinate and sturdy" (Latour 2010: 36). A change in the way we talk about one will have a knock-on effect on how we consider the other. So, as the science of data analytics forges new relationships with invisible, mystical, imaginary worlds, and beyond, it likewise affirms that magic is

visible, repetitive, ordinary, and real, and that ultimately it validates Arthur C. Clarke's famous aphorism: "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

Scenario 5: Good Luck Charms and Rituals

A recent article in *the New York Times* described how people in competitive situations, from college students to athletes, believe "luck" helps them perform better under stressful and challenging conditions.³⁰ College campuses, we read, are rife with good luck charms. Stuart Vyse, a former Connecticut college professor, conducted informal campus surveys where he discovered that 62 per cent of students have their "lucky pens," or wear lucky jewellery or clothing to exams; 54 per cent attempt to sit in the same seat for tests; and 38 per cent listened to their favourite pre-exam song—all various behaviours enlisted to influence luck.

The same *New York Times* article further informed us that when business professor Lauren Block of Baruch College in NYC was an undergraduate, she wore a lucky pair of Nike sneakers to exams and since she performed so well in them, her roommate asked to borrow them to wear to tests and also scored well. Convinced that shared academic success was due to a "magical transfer of intelligence through sneakers," she and another co-author later published a journal article, claiming "a ritual that lasted for the next 2 years was born" (Kramer and Block 2014: 215).

Malinowski (1954) affirmed that magical beliefs and specific rituals, in fact, support practical knowledge, or—as in this last example—enhance knowledge as a way to secure success. He found that, while Trobrianders were skilled gardeners who clearly demonstrated great knowledge of plants, soil types, and garden care, they also performed magical ceremonies over their gardens to ensure success. Belief in luck, therefore, is not mere wishful thinking but has tangible effects: it can improve one's performance in a specific skilled activity (Vyse 2013).

This phenomenon has also been observed in sports. George Gmelch, himself once a professional baseball player, has described the various rituals a pitcher goes through (touching the letters of his uniform; straightening his cap after every pitch; washing his hands at the end of every inning

in which he has given up a run). A batter will go through very much the same sort of mannerisms (like tapping the home plate three times before batting). Both pitcher and batter practice daily routines to overcome the fact that pitching and batting are ruled by luck and uncertainty (Gmelch 1985).

Belief in luck has been further tested by researchers who found that participants performed better at sinking golf balls when they were first told that their ball “had been lucky that day,” as opposed to merely being handed a ball (Vyse 2013: xi). In another golf study (Vyse 2013), researchers asked participants to perform putts from a prescribed distance. Just before carrying out the putt, half the golfers were told the club they were wielding had previously been owned by a professional golfer (even though it hadn’t), while the others were told nothing. The golfers who thought they were holding a professional’s club sank 32 per cent more putts.

We witness Frazer’s principle of “contagion” at work in these instances, when people believe a professional’s skills have “rubbed off” on a piece of equipment and helped them perform better when using it. David Graeber further reminds us that terms such as “fate” and “luck” are, in fact, ways of revealing ambiguities and dealing with conflicts of temporal existence that all humans face in one form or another. With an emphasis on their performativity, fate, luck, and chance—whether applied to “markets, genders, or scientific theories”—are not only socially constructed but must also be “constantly produced” and continually “maintained by human action” (Graeber 2012: 32). Luck, it seems, is one such enchanted social construct whose deployment offers us a magical means towards material ends.

Mimesis

Writing on charms used in magic, Sir James Frazer (1922) argued that there were two principle types of thought: “first, that like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause; and, second, that things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed.” The former principle he called the Law of Similarity, where “the magician infers that he can

produce any effect he desires merely by imitating it” (homoeopathic magic). This is the principle underlying Donald Trump’s own use of “fake news” (like the fake *Time* magazine cover hanging in his golf resorts), while attacking other media for their fake news reporting. The second principle outlined by Frazer is the Law of Contagion, where “the magician infers that whatever he does to a material object will affect equally the person with whom the object was once in contact, whether it formed part of his body or not” (contagious magic).³¹ Thus, does Trump, like a shaman, capture his opponent and create power by showing an image of his rival Presidential candidate, Hillary Clinton, with a Star of David.³² In the words of Michael Taussig (1993: 13): “the making and existence of the artifact that portrays something gives one power over that which is portrayed.” We see this principle at work in inverted form as the sneakers worn by one person to an examination are assumed to “work” for another if she wears them for her own exam, and as a putter (purportedly) used by a professional golfer instigates better results among amateurs than one not so used.³³

Together homoeopathic and contagious magic combine to form “sympathetic magic,” or mimesis which, many decades ago, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1979: 11) suggested was the means by which magic achieved its aims. For Michael Taussig (1993: 2), mimesis is “the magical power of replication, the image affecting what it is an image of, wherein the representation shares in or takes power from the represented.” It gives to a copy of something “the character and power of the original,” and to its representation “the power of the represented” (ibid.: xviii), so much so that the idea that the copy affects “the original to such a degree that the representation shares in or acquires the properties of the represented” (ibid.: 47–48)—an idea which takes us back to our earlier discussion of performance and the extent to which saying something makes it happen.

This is very much the case with media representations of celebrities and events, which find themselves “typecast” and virtually unable to escape the imagined straightjacket with which they have been tied, thanks to visual and linguistic images. That “the image becomes more powerful than what it is an image of” (Taussig 1993: 62) may also be seen in advertising—in particular, in that of brands.

Brands, comprising an amorphous collection of hybrid semiotic phenomena that span global and local markets (Manning 2010), rely on the fetishized commodity image to do their work, which is to generate *surplus value* in exchanges between consumers and producers (Nakassis 2013). Brands possess this excess value mainly in their semiotic form and are complemented by their adaptable material and sensual qualities, which allow them to be moulded to the contingencies of the market globally, shifting consumer demands, new trends, and so forth, and to encompass a whole network of modern economic, social, and political relations (Malefyt 2018). Their ability to adapt excess value (material, sensual, sentimental, and symbolic) to the particulars of time, place, and consumer, thus affords brands an ideal “magical” transference mechanism for their extensive use in advertising, fashion merchandizing, and other consumer-facing interactions. Promoting surplus value through the fetishized image is thus an effective means by which commodity producers confer sympathetic magic over and upon consumers, with a range of products that magically cast a spell over them.

In the Trobriand Islands, objects presented in specific kinds of exchange, like the *kula*, are like brands since they “speak’ a language of negotiation and appraisal” (Weiner 1983: 696). They “express a range of emotions” (ibid.: 697) and are seen to be part of oneself. This is so of commodities which appeal through naming to their users’ desires, as in Revlon’s series of cosmetic products: *Dazzling Eyes*, *Smashing Lashes*, and *Drop Dead Nails*; or make statements of their potential, as in DiorSkin Star’s claim to give you “lasting flawless protection.”

Nevertheless, this “mystical character” (Marx 1976: 163) of commodities is not as innocent as meets the consumer’s eye, since in capitalist societies social relations between persons (based on the exploitation of labour) are disguised as “the magical matrix of things” (Taussig 1980: 32). This is commodity fetishism, whereby “capitalist society presents itself to consciousness as something other than what it basically is” (ibid.: 31). Commodities make public statements about matters that are secret, or at least private and otherwise hidden: like status, wealth, sexuality, and power. In this respect, they reveal that “disguise is here the mechanism of revelation. The inner self is visible only to the extent that it makes invisible the outer body” (Marilyn Strathern, quoted in Weiner 1983: 697).

Scenario 6: Magical Beings

Popular culture has always had an interest in magical beings—as the fairly recent fad for *Harry Potter* books has reminded us. Here, however, we look further afield to illustrate this point.³⁴ Japanese popular literature has for many centuries incorporated magical beings into one or other of its numerous forms. From Kaguyahime (in the tenth century *Takekoto no Monogatari*) to the contemporary animation series, *Sailor Moon*, by way of medieval literature characters like Momotarō, we encounter magical beings, who come from or battle with other worlds and who transform themselves and/or others during the process.³⁵ Such transformations can be in terms of material well-being—as when the discovery of Kaguyahime and Momotarō leads to great wealth on the part of the poverty-stricken, childless, old couples who found them and brought them up. They almost invariably involve a transformation from childhood to adulthood—witness the girl heroines of contemporary *anime*, *Minky Momo* and *Creamy Mami*, who share the magical ability to morph into grown-up images of themselves (as a fairy princess and pop idol, respectively).

In one respect, such magical transformations focus on gender relations in Japan: Kaguyahime is a young woman beset by suitors (including the Emperor) asking for her hand in marriage, but whom she successfully rebuts; *Sailor Moon*'s magical warriors are Japan's symbols of "girl power," battling evil on their own, without the leadership of men. Many contemporary magical girl (*mahō shōjo*) *manga* and *anime* allow young girls not just to fantasize about adulthood but temporarily to experience it before returning to their childhood lives. Magic is used to bridge the gap between girls' real selves and their ideal of young womanhood as they "start coming to grips with social norms of feminine beauty and sexuality" (Sugawa 2015).

At the same time, the introduction of magical beings into popular culture often accompanies the uncertainties of major social change. The story of Kaguyahime, the moon princess who is courted by the Emperor of Japan, might be interpreted as an allegory of the arrival of Buddhism in Japan and its inevitable clash with the native religion of Shintō; the *manga* heroine, Sally the Witch (*Mahōtsukai Sarī* [1966]), who also

comes from another distant world, represents a potent metaphor for Japan's Westernization and modernization in its high-growth period, as Sally brings novelty and transformation to the world of humans (Japan) from a remote and magical realm (the West).

From poverty to wealth, from diminutive and nondescript schoolgirl to long-legged beauty, from pre-pubescent girl to eroticized super warrior, the magical transformations wrought on behalf of the socially underprivileged in Japanese popular culture extend into other areas of gender uncertainty: female empowerment, maternal nurturing, and the rejection of heterosexual relations in favour of lesbian-themed girls' love (*yuri*) (in, for example, *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*) (Sugawa 2015).

It goes without saying, of course, that female characters in Japanese popular visuals bear little resemblance to real-life women in Japan, even though "the magical girl genre has been an active site of contesting ideas surrounding gender roles and identities" (Saito 2014: 145). What is perhaps interesting is Saito's assertion that the magical girl genre is driven by the marketing strategies of major toy companies, like Bandai, which capitalize on gender-divided sales of character merchandise and gadgets used by characters in television anime programmes (ibid.: 144). In other words, the magical exploits of *Sailor Moon's* Tsukino Usagi (literally Rabbit from the Moon) and other magical girl characters at the level of popular cultural content are not used to reveal, but to skilfully conceal (Taussig 2003: 298), the trickery of another magical practice: that of marketing.

Transformation

This, maybe, is what magic is all about. Overtly about uncertainty and unpredictability, magical practices actually *conceal* more important issues, while partially revealing them. In this way, they effect transformation and change. Politicians in Western countries use magic to conceal the fact that democracy (or socialism or communism) does *not* work on behalf of even a majority—let alone all—of the people in their everyday lives. Cultural producers talk of magic in their practices to conceal the fact that in general they are beset by aesthetic, social, and financial constraints or

affordances that make it very difficult for them to work creatively. Their magical explanations also disguise the fact that the “culture” they produce is *only* made up of commodities. Governments perform “education” as a set of institutional measurements in order to cover up its primary aim: to move young people seamlessly into jobs at the expense of freedom of thought and untrammelled learning—both of which can be dangerous to a society’s status quo. Magic, in short, plays with the extent to which we have never been modern and our belief that the modern world, as Weber argued, is truly disenchanted (Latour 1993: 114). Like belief, we use magic to reinforce our *delusions*, by referring to:

The process that allows one to keep an official theory at the furthest possible distance from its informal practice, without any relationship between the two except for the passionate, anxious and meticulous care taken to maintain the separation. (Latour 2010: 24)

The thing about mimesis is that it is not only copying, it is also transformative. One of the qualities of magic, we learn, is how it transforms time, space, and the materialities associated with it. Ritual itself, we know, reformulates experience out of sensory qualities and symbolic meaning to re-create time and place for participants (Malefyt 2015: 12; Schechner 2002). But further, magical qualities follow Latour’s description of how religious (and magical) space is inhabited (materially) and time has a certain altered flow to it (2010: 103). This affirms what Shove et al. (2009: 2) claim: “time is about coordination and rhythm, but also involves material, emotional, moral and political dimensions.” Mauss describes transformed time and space as possessing liminal qualities, in Turner’s sense of the word, distinct from the normal world:

In this mysterious milieu, things no longer happen in the way they do in our world of the senses. Distance does not prevent contact. Desires and images can be immediately realized. It is the spiritual world and the world of spirits at the same time. (Mauss 1972: 132)

Malinowski similarly affirms that “magic and religion ... both exist in the atmosphere of the miraculous, in a constant revelation of their wonder-working power” (1954: 87–88). This inhabited quality found in

rites not only “suppresses linear time,” as in a type of “time machine” (Miller 2009: 165–166), but redirects our attention from the “far away” to the “close and present” where transformation occurs. In this space, “possibility arises; fate is overcome; you breathe; you feel enabled; you hope; you move” (Latour 2010: 103).

Miracles occur because the performance of magic dramatically alters experience itself for participants. Jon Mitchell (2015) discusses the emergent, contingent, and transformative quality of religious ritual as a type of *mimesis* in which participants relate embodied practices of magic to outcomes of transformation that occur as a result of their practice. Performing *mimesis* then is not copying, as in reproducing a particular “likeness or image,” but produces new entities in a “feedback loop” between performance and the nature it represents. Magic of mimetic transformation in performance then has the capacity, as Mitchell remarks, “to create a new presence...and to transform subject, object, space, time, and society ... in short, it is *generative*, rather than merely representational” (2015: 14). The generative effect of transformation is evident, for instance, in Marleen de Witte’s (2011) description of religious Ghanaian Pentecostalism. Celebrants in religious performance join discourse of sermons with feelings of spiritual forces at work in their bodies, so that spiritual conversion does not magically precede a new sense of self from text alone but is produced *in and through* ritual enactment. The performative role thus has a “sensational form” extending the sensorium (Howes 2015: 155) so that body, environment, and social world are culturally transformed.

In the examples in this volume, the transformative effect of magic creates an emergent “presence” carved out in materials, time, space, and society, and is what we see practised in the range of magical enactments of advertising, fashion, law, and so forth that are highly dependent on occasion, context, uttered words, performance skill, and feelings of change. The generativity of actions in the mimetic process of magicians, rites, and formulas then moves our analysis from magic as a form of repetition, to magic as creativity and innovation, which “produces new entities” (Bull and Mitchell 2015: 8). For Taussig (1993: 78), *mimesis* is creatively transformative, in that it *joins* copy and contact in the “space between” sameness and otherness so that copying isn’t mere imitation but

rather purposeful appropriation which empowers the appropriator, and hence produces the “actual presence.” Bourdieu’s discussion of habitus likewise asserts not an act of copying but of generating anew, so that “the body believes in what it plays at: it weeps if it mimes grief. It does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life” (Bourdieu 1990: 72). We are claiming, then, that magical transformation is not mere representational enactment, but rather that it generates ontological versions of reality in its own right.

Thus, through networks of magical words, practices, and deeds, what is often little more than authoritarian rule is transformed into “democratic” (or “socialist,” or “communist”) government; capitalist exploitation into a “free market”; and self-fulfilling prophecies of the future of the economy, with the aid of graphs (Holmes 2014: 22–24), into “rational forecasting.” So, too, with the products of human labour (an automobile, raincoat, or perfume), which are transformed into animistic fetishes or commodities endowed with life (a Jaguar car, Mac computers, or opium perfume), while what is little more than formulaic cultural production in the fashion, film, and music industries is similarly transformed by policy-makers and participants alike into “creativity” and “innovation.” In other words, we are saying that magic evidenced in the events, episodes, performers, bodies, words, deeds, and practices of this volume do not simply “represent” another reality; they generate their own versions of realities.

Last Word

And where has the Introduction taken us, with its real-life scenarios and theoretical tangents circling around one another and occasionally pulled by their gravity to meet in authorial space, as we have sought to reveal the hidden forces of magic in contemporary capitalist societies? By illuminating some of the realities of political and economic behaviour, we have “in some way replicate[d] its ruling ideas, its dominant passions, and its enchantment of itself” (Taussig 1980: 7). What we hope to have achieved, then, is little more than the “negative criticism” espoused by Taussig: a form of criticism that hopefully makes us all more self-conscious of the phenomena that began our enquiry: a magical network of magicians,

rites, and representations, together with their professional skills, ideas, conditions, contexts, media, and meanings. If we have somehow succeeded in this endeavour, we might then claim a “magic of mimesis” in our writing. For that, though, we probably need to launch an academics’ tweet!

Notes

1. See, for example: Holmes (2014) and Appadurai (2015) on central banking; Zaloom (2006) on trading floors; Garsten and Sörbom (2016) on the World Economic Forum at Davos; Yelle (2001) on law, Westbrook (2016) on legal contracts, Suchman (1989) and Leach (2012) on intellectual property and Assaf (2012) on trademark law; Whitehead et al. (2002) on magical practices in operating theatres; Stevens (2001) on alternative and Farquar (1996) on Chinese, medical practices; Johnson (2010); on the relation between magic, morals and health and Hsiao (1994) on the marketization of health systems; Markus and Benjamin (1997) on information technology; Williams (1980) and McCreery (1995) on advertising; Arnould et al. (1999) and St. James et al. (2011) on marketing and consumption practices; Dion and Arnould (2011) on luxury goods; and Moeran (2015) on fashion and fashion magazines.
2. Similarly, contrary to Adorno and Horkheimer’s vision of enlightenment, “the disenchantment of the world” is *not* “the extirpation of animism” (1979: 11).
3. Witness the “almost inconceivable mystery” of the disappearance of Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 on March 8, 2014.
4. Caitlin Zaloom (2006) and Laura Grindstaff (2002) have written perspicaciously on financial trading and television talk shows respectively. Katz (1981) and Whitehead et al. (2002) have commented on ritual behaviour in the operating theatre, while, several decades earlier, Hortense Powdermaker (1951: 281–306) outlined ways in which she saw Hollywood film production as being imbued with magical thinking.
5. See also Smith (1989) on auctions, Anand and Watson (2004) on the Grammy awards, and Anand and Jones (2008) on the Booker Prize.
6. See Katz (1981: 336–337) for an example of how ritual space is divided up in a hospital surgical area.

7. Suzy Menkes, “#SuzyPFW: Lanvin—Magical realism.” October 1, 2015. http://www.vogue.com.tw/suzymenkes/content_en.asp?ids=22294.
8. Tata Christiane, “Magical realism chapter 1.” December 10, 2011. <https://www.behance.net/gallery/2655981/Magical-Realism-Chapter-I-editorial>.
9. Although first brought to public attention as “magic realism” by the German art critic, Franz Roh, “magical realism” was later applied to the work of South American writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Isabelle Allende and was first enunciated in the field of fashion in a series of iconic photographs taken by Melvin Sokolsky in the mid-1960s. Sokolsky’s influence can be seen today in the work of contemporary fashion photographers like Craig McDean, Steven Meisel, and Ryan McGinley.
10. Alan Little, “How ‘magic’ made Greek debt disappear before it joined the Euro.” BBC News, February 3, 2012. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-16834815>.
11. “Why it’s time for Germany to leave the Eurozone.” *The Daily Telegraph*, May 28, 2016. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/economics/11752954/Why-its-time-for-Germany-to-leave-the-eurozone.html>.
12. Tim Fernholz, “How to magically erase Greek debt with one simple trick.” *Quartz*, August 17, 2015. <http://qz.com/480987/how-to-magically-erase-greek-debt-with-one-simple-trick/>.
13. We might here note the magical quality of the letter X which signifies, among other things, the Christian cross, the mark on a ballot paper, an illiterate’s signature, a mathematical variable, and television programmes with mystical contents or outcomes, like the *X Files* and *X Factor*.
14. Given that Austin’s analysis of performative utterances took into account both speaker and audience in what Holmes (2014) refers to as “a communicative field,” we find it hard to accept Callon’s (2009: 19) neologism of “co-performation,” which, however much he may argue to the contrary, strikes us as redundant.
15. Quotations taken from *Alternatives to membership: Possible models for the United Kingdom outside the European Union*. HM Government, OGL, March 2016. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/504661/Alternatives_to_membership_possible_models_for_the_UK_outside_the_EU_Accessible.pdf.
16. See Garsten and Sörbom (2016), and Taussig (2003).
17. “A few truths about Davos.” *Davos Newbies*. <http://www.davosnewbies.com/posts/a-few-truths-about-davos/>.

18. Nick Paumgarten, "Magic Mountain: What happens at Davos?" *The New Yorker*, March 5, 2012. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/03/05/magic-mountain>.
19. A.McE. "The language of power. The World Economic Forum has its own distinctive language." *The Economist*, January 26, 2014. <http://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2014/01/davos-speak?fsrc=scn/fb/wl/bl/languageofpower>.
20. Ibid.
21. "Davos geniuses ill-equipped to recognize economic structural problems, address inequality." Interview with Curtis Ellis, *RT*. January 22, 2015. <https://www.rt.com/op-edge/225039-economy-davos-switzerland-rich/>.
22. Semi-meaningless mantras like this are used all the time by politicians and their spin/witch doctors (Geschiere 2003): witness Theresa May's "Brexit means Brexit" and Donald Trump's "Make America great again."
23. Dan Bilefsky, "GPS mix-up brings wrong turn—and celebrity—to American in Iceland." *The New York Times*, February 4, 2016. http://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/05/world/europe/iceland-american-tourist-gps.html?_r=0.
24. Robert Wabash, "Nine car accidents caused by Google Maps & GPS." *Ranker*. http://www.ranker.com/list/9-car-accidents-caused-by-google-maps-and-gps/robert-wabash?var=5&utm_expnid=16418821-201.EEIZkBsZS3O1rZiBcoCRjg.2&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com.hk%2F.
25. Sara Malm, "Belgian woman blindly drove 900 miles across Europe as she followed broken GPS instead of 38 miles to the station." *Mail Online*, January 14, 2013. <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2262149/Belgian-woman-67-picking-friend-railway-station-ends-Zagreb-900-miles-away-satnav-disaster.html>.
26. Later, other "hackers" came forward with plans to unlock it.
27. "Compromise needed on smartphone encryption" *The Washington Post*, October 3, 2014. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/compromise-needed-on-smartphone-encryption/2014/10/03/96680bf8-4a77-11e4-891d-713f052086a0_story.html.
28. Witness fashion, which is little more than the enchantment of appearances. Its language is full of references to the realm of magic: *alchemy*, *allure*, *aura*, *bewitchment*, *captivation*, *charm*, *enchantment*, *glamour*, *illusion*, *sorcery*, and *spells* (see Moeran 2015).

29. Big Data just means “data sets large enough to require supercomputers” (Manovich 2011).
30. Daniel McGinn “Why I wrote this article on Malcolm Gladwell’s keyboard.” *The New York Times*, June 2, 2017. <https://nyti.ms/2sxijlI>.
31. Source: Frazer, *The Golden Bough*, Chapter 3. <http://www.bartleby.com/196/5.html>.
32. Note, too, the power of Trump’s appearance that is frequently remarked upon: his hair, his hands, and his extraordinarily long (and limp) phallic ties.
33. Frazer’s distinction between homoeopathic magic founded on the association of ideas by similarity, and contagious magic based on that of ideas by contiguity, is virtually the same as the distinctions made by Roman Jakobson between metaphor and metonymy, and by Ferdinand de Saussure between paradigmatic (or associative) and syntagmatic relations. It bears resemblance, too, to the distinction in music between harmony and melody (Leach 1976: 15).
34. We have here included a non-Western scenario because Japan is an advanced capitalist society where many of the scenarios provided here are also to be found. The same may be said, to some degree at least, of China, South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, and other Asian countries. What we need to research is whether the degree to which magical practices are found there is the same as in Europe and the USA, and in which sectors of society they are prevalent.
35. Kaguyahime appears in various media forms: manga (*Kimimaro Kaguya*), anime (*Kaguya Sumeragi*), computer games (*Kaguya Hōraisan*), and video games (*Kaguya Nanbi*). Momotarō was a popular character representing the Japanese Government in Japanese World War II films, as it fought against “American devils” (*oni*). The character is also found in contemporary anime (*Mahō no Princess Minky Momo*) and video games (*Momotarō Densetsu*).

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2

Magical Contracts, Numinous Capitalism

David A. Westbrook

One suspects that anthropology's long preoccupation with magic has much to do with the widespread sense, famously articulated by Weber, that becoming modern involves disenchantment, literally losing the sense that life is magical.¹ This chapter takes issue with that suspicion and suggests that magic itself is a shifting thing, strangely hard to lose, perhaps more durable than often feared. Very mundane and seemingly secular things, legal doctrines and jurisprudence concerning contracts, require rather breathtaking faith in the efficacy of words to shape reality. ("Contracts" here means nothing more exotic than the economic transactions that inhabitants of contemporary society engage in daily.)

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Functioning at all in our very commercial society requires something akin to enchantment, or perhaps enchantment without the wonder.

While this chapter is about the magic that suffuses law and makes commercial life possible, it is also and conversely about law and understanding law (and so economic life) to be magical. In order to approach the law, the chapter rehearses a great deal of orthodox legal doctrine, indeed law that all US law students are taught. If such law is approached not from within but from without—in some sort of transmogrification of Malinowski, as it were—then the law comes to seem a very strange thing indeed. That is, for lawyers, examining legal doctrine with the peculiar gaze familiar from traditional ethnography renders the familiar strange, and interesting therefore. For anthropologists, on the other hand, this chapter may suggest how law can be used as a kind of found material, grist for their mills, with which to examine their own society.

Following Malinowski and later Tambiah, it seems fair to say that for classical anthropology “magic” is an instrumental practice, a practice that presupposes a world upon which the magician can, by following the right procedures, effect his will. The magician calls upon powers to which the world must bend.² Thus magic assumes a rationality, a logic or procedure, or grammar, even though such logic may not be understood, or even clearly discerned, by the uninitiated. Turning to the topic of obligation specifically, Marcel Mauss³ demonstrated how “the bond of obligation itself independent of sanctions (which ancient Roman law called *the nexum*) was purely magical in primitive society.”⁴ Mauss saw obligation in gift-giving economies as a form of magical sanction surrounding the potlatch and the kula ring.⁵

But it is one thing to understand obligation in “primitive” societies in terms of magic—surely that is one way to distinguish between “the primitive” and “the modern”? To use examples from this book, however, neither the actors nor the activities of the fashion industry, nor the “not yet” of modern architectural firms, nor even—at the heart of money itself—central banks lend themselves to objective assessment, confident accounting. The contemporary economy, even at its most modern, comprises weird, one might even say uncanny spaces, *unheimlich*, in the Freudian sense of both familiar/strange.⁶

Approaching present situations with an eye to their uncanny aspect runs a risk of exoticism (and scholars of all sorts are understandably prone to dramatize their subjects). Study of contracts suggests, instead, that magic should *not* be seen as a function of this or that arcane activity—architectural design or fashion or central banking, for example—that delineate a special, mystical, space within an otherwise rational, commonsensical, global economic order. Magic is also inherent in market activity, and hence global political economy, *per se*.

Why? Not least because contracts are magical, or nearly so:

Legal persons (not just anybody, indeed often not a person)
can use words in certain ways (not all ways)
to invoke an invisible power (the law)
in order to change local facts.

And if the words have been spoken or written properly, and the law acts, that is, “the contract is binding,” then failure to obey (“breach”) may result in evil to the malefactor (“legal remedies”), potentially escalating into violence.

Perhaps “magic” is too much, at least for some readers. We generally associate the word with fantasy, with the untrue and wish fulfillment, and with powers that are “outside” the normal order. Of course, the same things can be said of law. Similarly, we tend to think of magic as special, as in “a magical moment,” or the powers of a fairy or a wizard, very rare beings. “Law,” in contrast, is relatively familiar, even if its speech and process are formal, and in that sense, elevated. And our understandings of “the law” help us define our selves, our relationships to the world and to one another. But perhaps that is only to say that we live in a culture soaked in law, as it is soaked in that related fiction, money, and so the magical of other cultures is marvelous, or disbelieved. We believe in corporations, not elves. In a culture infused by (what we would call) magic, however, bureaucracy might be wondrous.

Perhaps a principled difference is that magic is thought to work directly upon the physical world, whereas law generally assumes human agents. But even here, notions of justice, or who really owns this or that, are thought to be true even if not realized in the world, even if humans do something else altogether. Theft does not transfer title. More generally, criminal activity happens all the time, that is, is true, but is not therefore law.

Though we may attempt to distinguish law from magic, it seems unlikely that any such distinctions would divest the law of its mystery. So, for example, William Dicey, the nineteenth-century English constitutional theorist, wrote: “The authority or the sovereignty of the nation, or even the conception of the national will, is a sort of political or metaphysical fiction.”⁷ Turning to our particular topic, contracts, Holmes—who styled himself a hard-headed pragmatist—wrote: “For to explain how mankind first learned to promise, we must go to metaphysics, and find out how it ever came to frame a future tense.”⁸ And to make matters worse, it is hard for a Western academic, in our intensely legalistic imaginary of the self and the social, to even pretend to have a clear view of the matter. For a conference on theories of the corporation (a related and similarly durable mystery), I wrote that “if we understand legal doctrines to be formalized and often enforceable articulations of the social, and if we perceive that here and in a few other places, doctrine requires the turn to ontology, then maybe the very word “theory,” implying the detachment of the theorist, is misleading.”⁹ For present purposes, it seems enough to say that law is our magic, or at the very least, requires our faith, generally inchoate.

To return to contract law: different times and places enable individuals to form binding obligations in different ways, with different rituals. Romans used scales; medieval Europeans put contracts under wax seal, and there are various ways to make promises, or even naked intentions, legally binding in this time and place. But by way of example and for the sake of clarity, let us start with the superficially familiar, a plain vanilla contract as popularly understood in the contemporary United States, which not incidentally is roughly how contract was understood in the Anglo-American (or “common law”) jurisprudential tradition for most of the nineteenth century, and perhaps more importantly, how the idea of contract is taught today.

As an aside, England from the Middle Ages forward had other legal traditions: church courts, admiralty courts, courts of the chancery and the exchequer, nobleman’s courts, and there were more. Traces of such courts and their jurisprudence remain in both the United States and England (Scotland is another matter). But the royal courts (“common” to

all England) came to dominate, and in the United Kingdom and the United States in the nineteenth century, a great number of courts (not all) were unified into courts of general jurisdiction. And, as already suggested, there are other legal traditions. Notably, in “civil law” countries (most of the rest of Europe and many of the places colonized), the imagination of the law stems from periodic revivals of the “Roman” law, variously understood in different times and places. Comparing how, for example, contracts are handled within these strands of the Western legal tradition (no longer limited to any geographic idea of “the West”) is perhaps the core preoccupation of traditional “comparative law” but far beyond the scope of the present chapter.¹⁰

To return to our example: consider a contract for the sale of a house, which is an important and ubiquitous type of contract in the common law tradition. A owns a house and has the right to exclude B from the house, by force if necessary. A agrees to sell B the house, and B agrees to pay a “sum certain” in cash on a given date. This is a “bilateral contract.”¹¹ A and B have what used to be called “a meeting of the minds.” They have also exchanged something, a *quid pro quo* (Latin for “this for that”). In this case, the *quid pro quo* is a promise (to sell the house), exchanged for another promise (to buy the house for cash).

Doctrinally, this *quid pro quo* is called the “consideration” for the contract. B’s consideration for A’s promise makes A’s promise binding; A’s consideration for B’s promise makes B’s promise binding. In short, consideration makes the agreement between A and B binding, a contract. Without consideration, and absent other special circumstances, there is no contract. And since this is a house, real estate, there must be a signed writing, setting forth the agreement.

Why, one may ask, must there be consideration? What does it mean to say that consideration “makes” a promise binding and the agreement a contract? And why a signed writing, one might also ask? Because those are the rules for real estate. If the rules are not followed, generally speaking, the law does not happen. Law is performative speech; not just any performance counts as law but creates binding obligation.¹²

In our consideration of a simple real estate sale, let us first assume that everybody performs their contractual obligations, and the deal “closes.”

Now B is a homeowner, with all that implies, including the right to exclude A, by force if necessary. So, in our example, individuals have used words, in specified “legal” fashion, that constituted a contract, a contract that changes the social fabric in ways that the state, the neighbors, everybody recognizes.

Second, let us assume that A, the seller, “breaches,” that is, does not perform his promise, and refuses to sell the house. Litigation ensues. Since this is real estate, the successful buyer is likely to get specific performance as a remedy, that is, a court order compelling the performance of the contract as agreed (the usual remedy for breach of contract is money damages). A court compels sale of the property. The recalcitrant seller’s resistance to the court order may lead to physical eviction by the local sheriff’s deputy.

Why, one might ask, does the sheriff’s deputy care? He feels obliged to enforce the court’s order, because that is the law. Or, perhaps, the sheriff enforces the order because that is his job, and if he fails to do his job, he will be fired, and one does not want to be unemployed in America. But that just pushes the question back: why will the deputy be fired? Why does the sheriff who fires the deputy care so much about some house sale, or for that matter, about the court order? Because ... the law is an infinite regress, an image immortalized by Kafka’s gatekeeper.¹³ Authority stands behind authority; we obey authorities we cannot see.

Contracts, evidently, are very powerful. Executed properly, they can summon the police, with guns. So, one is driven to ask, how is such power exercised? What starts the process? How do people invoke the power of the law to change the social order, and with it, much of the material world?

In law school, professors work hard to train students how to use language in the right ways to make things happen. For most students, this is enough: how do I file a motion, draw up a contract, or otherwise invoke the power of the law to accomplish my purposes, or serve the interests of my clients? That said, the rather practical concerns of most students—to which we respond by teaching them how to read the book of useful spells, as it were—raise more philosophical questions. Why do some forms, rituals, work, and others do not? Can we describe, in some more general and theoretical way, legal processes such as contracting?

As already suggested, for much of this country's history, contract was understood in terms of a "meeting of minds." Two different people, with different minds, would think the same thing with regard to some future action, and commit to this thought, and—for reasons not entirely clear—the state and the population at large were believed to be obliged to think such agreement was important, even enforceable. In the late nineteenth century, however, courts—and Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., not yet of the US Supreme Court but already influential—became uncomfortable with the "meeting of the minds." What does the phrase actually mean?

Bear in mind that courts deal in contracts that are disputed. Party A says "we agreed to X." Party B, of course, says, "that's nonsense, we agreed to Y." If party A was right, and there was a contract, then Party B should lose. And vice versa. And sometimes, A and B were both honest, that is, there was a mutual mistake, and no contract, and then what was to be done? This problem is classically taught through the old "chestnut" (a case long and widely used for teaching purposes) *Raffles v. Wichelhaus*.¹⁴ This was an English case involving multiple ships named *Peerless*, and has been discussed at great length by Holmes and many others since.

Or suppose one or the other party sensibly believed there was a contract, even if there was not, and acted accordingly, to his detriment? This led to doctrines of promissory estoppel and then "reliance," which were used to enforce agreements without consideration at all, which was hardly satisfactory, at least for those who wished to see a unified theory of contract. In law schools in the United States, tales are still told of the epic early twentieth-century battle between scholars (and friends) Arthur Corbin and Samuel Williston for the soul of contract law, at least as seen by the American Law Institute. Corbin argued for reliance, articulated in section 90 of the Restatement (2d) of Contracts;¹⁵ Williston argued for consideration, now in section 71 of the same restatement.¹⁶ The law of contract stubbornly refused to become rational, Weber notwithstanding.

As a practical matter, of course, houses are sold all the time, without benefit of theory as it were, but the problems began to vex not only academics but judges and other practical men. In response, judges began to say (and still say, in many business situations), we are not going to inquire into the minds of the contracting parties, not going to ask what the parties truly intended. Instead, we are going to enforce the contract *as*

written. It is not the party's subjective agreement that makes "a contract" happen, it is the objective agreement, that is, the document that is legally binding. This came to be called the objective theory of contract. Holmes, discussing *Raffles*:

The law has nothing to do with the actual state of the parties' minds. In contract, as elsewhere, it must go by externals, and judge the parties by their conduct...The true ground of the decision is not that each party meant a different thing from the other, but that each said a different thing. The plaintiff offered one thing, the defendant expressed his assent to another.¹⁷

Although an attractive approach for judges who must resolve cases somehow, merely insisting that the contract, beyond the assent to be bound, is actually "objective," to be discerned by reading the text, does not clarify the nature of the institution much. Put to one side the idea that in broad swaths of the humanities and the social sciences the idea of an objective text is risible. (In law, there is a funny and famous case involving the meaning of "chicken."¹⁸) Let us just assume that, at least sometimes, the meaning of a contractual text is not disputed and can be "objectively" discerned. In such cases, the parties come together to construct a textual object, and this object summons the power of the law. That is, the textual object jointly constructed rules, and must be obeyed by the parties and even respected by third parties. Sort of like a sword or a ring, no?

As noted above, the objective theory was very useful to courts because it helped to move the proceedings beyond Party A said "_____" / Party B said "_____" , sometimes called a "swearing contest." The objective theory, however, also clarified contracting in at least two additional and important ways. First, as the commercial republic grew, the parties to transactions increasingly were not people, but firms, notably corporations. It was and is not clear what is meant by "the mind" of a corporation. A group of people authorize, through complex processes, institutions to "agree" with other institutions, similarly authorized to take action. In other words, the "meeting of the minds" is difficult to understand in cases involving natural persons, with minds. It is somewhat jarring when

considering large institutions, perhaps a manufacturer and a supplier. On the other hand, such institutions are still inevitably thought of as legal persons, which may even be criminally liable. Be that as it may, the language “meeting of the minds” seems too naturalistic for a corporate world, which needed, and perhaps thought it enjoyed, an “objective” understanding of obligation.

Second, commercial contracts, especially among corporations, became very long. The idea that two people had the entire contract in mind, and understood it in the same way, became impossible to sustain. A modern contract can run to hundreds or even thousands of pages. Experts of various kinds—arbitration, banking law (and banking interests), corporation law, employment, environmental law, intellectual property, real estate, securities law, regulations of various sorts (depending on the nature of the deal), tax, and so forth—contribute this or that to the text. No individual reads all of it, much less is an expert in all of it. Yet the text is binding.¹⁹

Suppose that the parties conclude the contract and undertake to do business under its terms. In the ordinary course, businesses modify their arrangements, which is fine until a conflict arises, and recourse is had to the contract, which says something, but clearly does not articulate the actual agreement among the parties. At such junctures, courts are left saying things along the lines of “had you thought about it, you would have contracted . . . ”

So now the law is “contractually” invoked by:

a textual object
 constructed by legal persons
 who are treated as if they were people (even if they are not)
 who have agreed to the substance of the text (even if they cannot have)
 as the text might be rewritten by a court.

Or, to put it slightly differently:

The parties come together
 to construct a text to rule their relations
 and assent to that text
 as they might later be understood to have intended it
 and the text rules them
 with the power of law.

Why does all of this matter? First, and perhaps most importantly, understanding contracts to be magical gives a numinous—one might also say surreal—quality to what is usually regarded as “ordinary” economic life. Why do we regard contracts as binding, when we know that the text is not what we, nor anyone else, intended? Because we must, or else give up on the rule of law. Analogous arguments can be made about legislation, about international law, and so forth. Our social worlds are constructed out of commitments to unseen authorities that tell us what we said and make it so.

For daily life, of course, this may not matter too much, especially for those with other things on their minds. In law and business, we suppress the nature of contract as easily as we suppress the mysteries surrounding property or especially money. It is convenient, perhaps even necessary, for members of a pragmatic and sometimes ostentatiously secular culture to tell themselves that the ordinary *cannot* be magically constructed. Contracts are how businesses do deals, and what could be more down-to-earth? Of course we do speak of the social contract, but that is a fable, told by philosophers for heuristic purposes, easily forgotten after college.

Which brings me to the second large reason that understanding contract as magic is important, which the remainder of this chapter will only be able to suggest. This chapter has argued that the warp and woof of a commercial society, who owns what, result from transactions that are implicitly magical, instrumental invocations of “the law” to accomplish local changes in the social world, and collectively enforced. We use the law to cast spells upon ourselves. This begs a rather theological question: does the law have a character? What sort of world does this power, or the exercise of this sort of power, work to bring about?

The question is posed in queer fashion, but an answer is ubiquitous, indeed orthodox. Widely held notions of “progress”—liberal modernity broadly construed—are understood in terms of autonomy, and by extension contract. Liberalism, civil rights, feminism, and so on, all assume the rights bearing individual as a *telos*, and the legitimate society as one which fosters realization of that *telos*. Self-actualization, as they say in California. The rights bearing individual may of course obligate herself. Obligation, agreement, constructs complex relations with educators and other vendors, life partners of various sorts, landlords, tenants, health

care providers, and most importantly perhaps, employers. To quip, the social contract of the philosophers is, for the sociologist, a web of contracts. Conversely, society, including its legitimate hierarchies, is reducible to contract or other individual action. Most famously, “The movement of the progressive societies has hitherto been a movement from Status to Contract.”²⁰ That is, autonomy and so the power to contract, to form social bonds, runs through not only political and moral philosophy (the Kant of the Second Critique) but through our identities as modern.

But what if contract is not really about human autonomy? Suppose our magic—even in the sale of a house, even in a commercial contract—is not what we think it is? Before trying to articulate that possibility, let us recapitulate the argument thus far. In our first understanding of contract, the “meeting of the minds,” individuals were thought jointly to invoke the transcendent power of the law to change local circumstances to their liking. In the second understanding, the “objective theory,” legal persons, who may or may not be flesh and blood humans, jointly constructed texts that embodied the power of the law, and assented to be ruled by such texts, even if the details of rule were obscure. That is, the power of the contract came to be understood as independent of the actual knowledge, and so the will, of the contracting powers, beyond the assent of the parties to be bound.

The objective theory remains a dominant doctrinal understanding, what we teach, but it is not the whole truth, and hardly obvious that it is the heart of the matter. An amusing story suggests another possibility. Early in the twentieth century, Thomas Edison, inventor of the light bulb, the phonograph, and much else beside, found himself in a contractual dispute. Edison’s manager (Fuller) had been told to hire a well-known opera singer (Mary Carson Kidd) on rather specific terms, as part of Edison’s promotion of his new invention, the phonograph. Instead of doing precisely what he was told, Fuller hired Kidd on the terms customary in the music industry. Edison subsequently refused to pay Kidd, saying he had no “contract” with her because his agent, Fuller, had no authority to make such a contract on his (Edison’s) behalf. Therefore, argued Edison, he was not bound. Kidd sued Edison and won.²¹

The judge, the renowned Learned Hand, first decided the case on the ancient and rather technical grounds of apparent authority resting on estoppel, which need not concern us here. But then Hand did an about face: while estoppel and the law of agency provided adequate grounds on which to decide the case, such doctrines did not articulate the issue deeply enough. The case was not really about estoppel, Hand maintained, it was about who should be responsible for employees. Clearly, the answer was employers, but why? In what seems like a nod to Maine's famous book, Hand noted that in Roman law, the master is responsible for his household, including his slaves. But in a United States with the Civil War not far behind it, women's suffrage in full swing, and the Civil Rights movement ahead of it, one cannot argue from a law of persons. So, it was and is said, the employer's responsibility stems from the contractual relationship between employer and employee. But this, Hand acknowledged, is nonsense. In this case, Edison was correctly held responsible for acts that were the opposite of what Edison agreed. Indeed, courts routinely hold employers responsible for the torts (harms) committed by their employees, and of course employers do not want their employees hurting people, nor do employers want to be held liable, pay, for the harms caused by their employees. So employer responsibility for employees is based on his (its, in the case of a company) status as employer, not the contractual obligations of the employer. "Contract," here, is essentially a fiction that allows members of contemporary society to talk in (superficially) liberal terms about the complex and hierarchical arrangements on which modern mass markets depend. More of this anon.

Since Edison's day, "contracts" unilaterally articulating rights and responsibilities have become ubiquitous. The back of a lift ticket at a ski resort claims to be a contract, as does the fine print on a credit card application, waiving rights to trial in favor of arbitration. Consider an application for a smartphone, or an airplane ticket, or signing a swipe pad, or any of the myriad "contractual" things a consumer does every day, online and offline. Consider the documentation for a car or a mortgage. Such "contracts of adhesion" are completely non-negotiable. The form is the form.

Signing the form is taken to mean that the consumer "has read and understood" the terms of the contract. This, too, is nonsense. Not even an educated non-lawyer would understand the specific and often arcane

senses in which words are being used. On the other hand, a lawyer, or at least a good one, would recognize that many of the words are contested in fact, or might be, and so what the contract means is subject to subsequent litigation, if any. None of this matters, however, since virtually nobody bothers to read the verbiage. Nor is it necessary for a party to even pretend to have read the words. In so-called shrink-wrap and click-wrap cases, courts have held that consumers who purchase software can be bound by licenses, “contracts,” that they do not see until the purchase is complete.²²

By this juncture, it is clear that the contract should no longer be understood under the objective theory, that is, the joint construction of a governing if perhaps somewhat obscure text to which the parties assent. Most obviously, most consumer contracts are written by a single party, and not negotiable. In theory, of course, one might refuse to assent. The consumer may decide not to buy the application, not to have a phone, not to get on the plane to go to the business meeting, and so forth and so on. Most contractual rituals still have an identifiable moment of assent, whether it is the handing over of a piece of plastic, the click on a touch screen, or some scrawl with a pen or even a finger that produces a cartoon, instantly shipped off to the cloud. That said, this theoretical possibility is socially irrelevant. If an individual or other legal actor is going to participate in a range of activities integral to contemporary markets and therefore society, the actor must acquiesce to the usual arrangements, submit to the status quo—“doff the cap,” to use the language of another era.

The contemporary liberal desire to understand the social as a consequence of presumptively autonomous individual choice is central to the discipline of economics, where it is viewed as an intellectual virtue, namely, “methodological individualism.” In “The Nature of the Firm,” however, Ronald Coase remarked that price mechanisms among firms (contracts in the loose sense of the word used by economists) coexist with hierarchy within firms, especially in the employment relation. If markets were so efficient, Coase asked, why not price everything? Conversely, if hierarchical institutions, notably firms (but also the Soviet Politburo), were so efficient, why price anything? Coase’s answer was transaction costs. Where parties could not efficiently negotiate agreements, that is, contract, then it

made sense for firms and similar hierarchical institutions to develop. Ideally, such institutions would arrange human affairs in the way that markets would, should a market have been possible. Conversely, in situations where contracting was relatively inexpensive, we might observe markets. Thus was the subdiscipline of institutional economics remade.²³

Two aspects of the Coasian understanding of institutions seem salient for our purposes. First, what ultimately limits the scope of employment, that is, the extent of permissible hierarchy, the power that the boss might exert over the worker? Can a worker indenture herself, even sell herself into slavery? Nothing in the nature of contract prevents this, by hypothesis, since we see employment, that is, hierarchical arrangements, in situations where contract does not work well. Evidently troubled, Coase consulted a legal expert, who said that the law of employment is ultimately limited by the British prohibition of slavery. That is, the hierarchies we observe in firms, and in commercial societies writ large, are limited by social commitment, not the contracts of the parties. This is fine, unless one wishes to found society itself on the institution of contract, as liberalism classically does.

Second, the Coasian understanding of institutions is based on the idea that transaction costs are too high for parties to reach agreement on specifics, and so the parties adopt social, often hierarchical, relations. Thus institutions, and so a great part of the social order, are constructed *vis-à-vis* virtual, imagined, contracts.

But this is all very strange. In a hierarchical institution, there is no marketplace transaction, and therefore no observable transaction cost to the transaction. Coase's argument is a matter of logic: there must be some cost, and presumably the cost is too high, or else the matter would be handled through contract, that is, the price mechanism, as other matters are. Albeit with a patina of materialism, the idea of transaction costs (like equity and goodwill) is profoundly speculative; transaction costs exist because they must. The idea has been so successful (Coase received a Nobel Prize in economics for it) because of the "deep comfort, widespread in a commercial society, with both the idea of money as a unit of account and the arithmetical consequences of accounting."²⁴ Coase thus understands and even legitimates institutions in terms of contracts, but

the contracts do not actually exist as such. Instead, contracts exist as the spirit of institutions that are, by their terms, non-contractual.

In passing, one may also describe any social transaction in terms of an exchange (even if only “social capital” or other intangibles). Thus, where Coase saw hierarchical institutions that required explanation in a world of real and virtual contracts, others have simply looked harder, and found contracts. In either case, society is understood to be founded on contract, that is, in liberal terms. As with social contract stories in philosophy, institutional economics allows us to tell liberal stories about contemporary life, in which individuals would have agreed to the institutional order in which they find themselves, had agreement been possible. How comforting.

To conclude: contracts are magical, but it is not entirely clear how the magic runs. Contracts have been understood as (1) a way for parties to invoke law to change local circumstances (cast spells); (2) the joint construction of a textual object that rules relationships (forge the ring); (3) acquiescence in customary relations (bow to authority, fealty); and finally, (4) the form in which law chooses to present itself at the present juncture.

Conversely, the parties to contracts may be understood in terms of diminishing agency, from (1) using law to change local circumstances; (2) invoking law to govern future relations; (3) acknowledging the authority of the status quo; (4) understanding that agreement to be persiflage, and by extension, liberalism as the good manners of the sovereign. So the words of the contract, which at the beginning of our inquiry seemed to be spells cast by individuals, invoking the power of law, are now also seen to be spells cast on individuals by this transcendent force we call law. And this too is an old idea: magic affects the user, usually badly.

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Notes

1. II Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* 641-900 (Guenther Roth & Claus Wittich eds., 1978) (1921–1922). See also, Duncan Kennedy, *The Disenchantment of Logically Formal Legal Rationality, or Max Weber’s Sociology in the Genealogy of the Contemporary Mode of Western Legal Thought*, 55 *Hastings Law Journal* 1031, 1044–1047 (2004).
2. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion and Other Essays* (1948); Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, *Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality* (1990).
3. Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (expanded edition) 2916 (1921).
4. Georges Gurvitch, *Magic and law*, 9(1) *Social research* 104, 110 (1942).
5. I thank Gustaaf Houtman for this point.
6. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (James Strachey ed., W.W. Norton & Co. 1989) (1930). See also Roberto Unger, *Knowledge and Politics* 200 (1975).
7. Albert Venn Dicey, *Introduction To The Study Of The Law of the Constitution* 60 (Reprint. 8th ed. 1915).
8. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., *The Collected Works of Justice Holmes, Complete Public Writings and Selected Judicial Opinions of Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Holmes Devise Memorial Edition, Vol. 3.* (1995).
9. David A. Westbrook, *A Shallow Harbor and A Cold Horizon: The Deceptive Promise of Modern Agency Law for the Theory of the Firm*, 35 *Seattle U. L. Rev.* 1369, 1373 (2012).
10. Harold J. Berman, *Law and Revolution: The Formation of the Western Legal Tradition* (1983).
11. The word “bilateral” raises the specter of a party being contractually bound by her unilateral actions. Let us whistle as we hasten on.
12. The binding character of legal language is ““at the very foundation of order and reliability in human relations.” ... Malinowski’s exposition anticipates notions of performative speech - that “saying is doing” when done by the properly accredited persons according to the proper convention under the right conditions.” Tambiah, *supra* note 3, at 80.
13. Franz Kafka, *The Trial* (1998).
14. *Raffles v. Wichelhaus*, 2 H. & C. 906, 159 Eng. Rep. 375 (Ex. 1864).
15. *Restatement (Second) of the Law – Contracts*, § 90 *Promise Reasonably Inducing Action of Forbearance* (1981).

16. Restatement (Second) of the Law – Contracts, § 71. Requirement of Exchange; Types of Exchange (1981).
17. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., *The Collected Works of Justice Holmes, Complete Public Writings and Selected Judicial Opinions of Oliver Wendell Holmes, The Holmes Devise Memorial Edition, Vol. 3.* (1995) 273.
18. *Frigalment Importing Co. v. B.N.S. Int’l Sales Corp.*, 190 F. Supp. 116, 117 (S.D.N.Y. 1960). Plaintiff said “chicken” meant a young chicken, suitable for broiling and frying. Defendant said “chicken” meant any bird of that genus that meets contract specifications on weight and quality, including what it called “stewing chicken” and plaintiff pejoratively termed “fowl.”
19. A longer and perhaps painfully lawyerly version of this essay would discuss the “battle of the forms” and the Uniform Commercial Code §2-207, Additional Terms in Acceptance or Confirmation, at this juncture.
20. Sir Henry James Sumner Maine, *Ancient Law* (1861).
21. *Kidd v. Thomas A. Edison, Inc.*, 239 F. 405, 406 (2d Cir. 1917).
22. In *ProCD, Inc. v. Zeidenberg*, the United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit held that shrink-wrap and click-wrap contracts were enforceable. The Court reasoned that “pay now, terms later” contracts were an accepted method of forming a contract. *ProCD, Inc. v. Zeidenberg*, 86 F.3d 1447 (7th Cir. 1996).
23. Ronald Coase, *The Nature of the Firm*, 4 *Economica* 386 (1937).
24. David A. Westbrook, Ronald Coase (1910–2013), *World Economics Association Newsletter* (2014), available at <http://www.worldeconomic-sassociation.org/files/newsletters/Issue3-5.pdf>.

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3

Exorcising Leverage: Sleight of Hand and the Invisible Hand in Islamic Finance

Daromir Rudnyckyj

In November 2013, deep within Sasana Kijang, a sparkling new structure constructed at the behest of Malaysia's central bank, a spirited debate enlivened the proceedings of the Islamic Financial Intelligence Summit. The event sought to highlight the rapid growth of Islamic finance and to bring together "senior executives, regulators, *shariah* scholars and other experts" to examine "current and future trends in demand for, and supply of, Islamic finance." In framing Islamic finance as subject to the liberal economic logic of supply and demand, the event posed a central problem that this chapter seeks to address. What would make Islamic finance an alternative to the norms and rationality of the established principles of liberal economics and global finance? This problem became apparent later in the day as two prominent leaders in the field aired differences over the extent to which Islamic finance was an alternative to what they refer to as "conventional finance."

During the question period following a morning presentation on "finance for industry," Badlisyah Abdul Ghani, the CEO of CIMB

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Islamic, Malaysia's second-largest Islamic bank, was asked what he saw as the biggest challenge facing Islamic finance. Without hesitation he confidently replied, "The biggest challenge is that people assume they know what it should be. Some people are bent on making Islamic finance what it is not, which is equity financing!...Equity is just a small component of Islamic finance!" Later, after lunch, Badlisyah shared the stage with Syed Alwi bin Mohamed, the head of Islamic finance for BNP Paribas Najmah (the Islamic arm of the global French banking giant BNP Paribas), for a panel discussion on "the next big opportunities for Islamic finance." Syed Alwi pulled no punches in immediately disagreeing with Badlisyah. He said, "if we look at the *Islamic Finance Stability Report* of the IFSB¹ from May 2013, almost 95% of assets are concentrated on debt-based structures. There has to be a move away from debt to equity based!...I know that Badlisyah doesn't like this, but there are infrastructure opportunities. Issuers will have to figure out how to use equity-based instruments to raise funds!" Thus, the two executives staked out opposing positions on one of the central points of contention in contemporary Islamic finance: whether it should continue to rely primarily on debt instruments or whether it should shift to rely instead on investment and equity devices. Elsewhere I have described how this shift aligned with changed state development prerogatives and the efforts of the state to foment a moderate Muslim entrepreneurial self (Rudnyckyj 2017a).

Since 2010 I have been documenting plans to create a standard, transnationally valid definition of Islamic finance and efforts to position Kuala Lumpur as the "New York of the Muslim World." A central question in this work has been to try to understand what a large-scale alternative to the global financial network might look like (Rudnyckyj 2014: 2017). Work in the anthropology of finance has for the most part focused on the centers of the existing conventional financial system (Ho 2009; Holmes 2014; Lepinay 2011; Miyazaki 2013; Riles 2011; Zaloom 2006). Previous ethnographic work on Islamic finance has represented it as a marginal alternative to global finance (Maurer 2005). In contrast, I have sought to document efforts to devise a large-scale Islamic alternative that aspires to eventually rival conventional finance. As this effort has unfolded, it has been marked by a raucous and sometimes acrimonious debate, like that

in which the two CEOs engaged, over whether Islamic finance could continue to rely on “debt-based” instruments or whether it should instead seek to develop instruments grounded in investment and equity.

While most scholarly work on Islamic finance has been written with the goal of improving the economic performance or religious authenticity of Islamic finance, there is a growing social scientific literature that approaches Islamic finance within broader social, political, and historical contexts (Pitluck 2008; Pollard and Samers 2007; Tobin 2016; Warde 2010). This literature is characterized by two main themes. On the one hand, scholars have criticized Islamic finance for its failure to achieve the moral prescriptions of Islam, such as greater equality and social justice. These scholars point to the implicit and explicit values of Islam and show how Islamic finance has, in many cases, failed to meet them (Asutay 2012; Tripp 2006). On the other hand, scholars contend that it is little more than a second-rate imitation of conventional finance with a religious veneer (Rethel 2011). Arguably, the prevailing question in qualitative approaches to Islamic finance in the human sciences has been the extent to which Islamic finance offers a genuine alternative to conventional finance or merely a superficial façade (Bassens, Engelen et al. 2013; Malik, Malik, and Mustafa 2011; Maurer 2005; Pitluck 2013; Pollard and Samers 2013). One tendency in these approaches has been to argue that Islamic finance is little more than a second-rate imitation of conventional finance adorned with a religious veneer (El-Gamal 2006; Kuran 1997). These approaches disparage Islamic finance for replicating conventional finance but using Arabic terminology and Muslim religious symbols to conceal this underlying orientation (Kuran 2004). This has precipitated what El-Gamal calls “shariah arbitrage”: obtaining approval from an Islamic jurist for a financial instrument superficially altered to be shariah compliant and charging a premium for it (El-Gamal 2007). The orienting frame of this work has been to assert that Islamic finance is insufficiently Islamic and only deploys Islamic religious symbols and Arabic language to lend credibility to what is essentially conventional finance. My goal here is to take efforts to shift from debt to equity seriously and in so doing move social scientific work on Islamic finance beyond this question by showing how Islamic finance experts themselves are posing the problem of the

alternative potential of Islamic finance. In making this move, I build on work that has shown how contemporary Muslims are actively working to adapt modern institutions and practices to the imperatives of Islamic action (Fernando 2014; Hoesterey 2016; Rudnyckyj 2010; Silverstein 2011; Walton 2017). My goal here is not to come to a conclusion about what constitutes authentic Islamic finance but rather to show how Islamic finance is subject to debate, problematization, and in formation.

A Global Islamic City

Efforts to make Kuala Lumpur a global hub for Islamic finance began in the early 2000s when the former Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, successfully lobbied the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to locate the headquarters of the Islamic Financial Services Board in Kuala Lumpur. The board is responsible for developing global standards for Islamic finance and is analogous to the Basel Committee in conventional banking. The Central Bank has also made a massive investment in the knowledge infrastructure of Islamic finance, spending over \$200 million to establish what are arguably the world's preeminent institutions for research and postgraduate education in Islamic finance. This has enabled the establishment of two prominent institutions: the International Centre for Education in Islamic Finance and the International Shariah Research Academy, most often referred to by Islamic finance practitioners by their acronyms INCEIF and ISRA. ISRA was founded in 2008 and conducts "applied research" on shariah and serves as a repository of *fatwa* (rulings) on Islamic finance to redress differences in shariah opinions across the Muslim world. INCEIF, with which I was affiliated as a visiting researcher during the tenure of my fieldwork, was established in 2005 to redress a chronic shortage of professionals with specialized training in Islamic finance. The Central Bank expected that it would become the premier global institution for the creation of knowledge and professional experts in Islamic finance. Furthermore, the country has sought to spur growth and innovation by opening its borders to competition from Islamic financial institutions headquartered in the Persian Gulf region and elsewhere and it is easy to

find Saudi-, Kuwaiti-, and Qatari-held banks offering retail Islamic banking services, even in some of the cities, most nondescript shopping malls, and suburban neighborhoods.

Nonetheless, amidst the rapid growth of this sector in Malaysia and beyond, a vigorous debate has emerged regarding the religious authenticity of Islamic finance. Islamic finance is a relatively new initiative that seeks to comply with religious injunctions for economic action: the core tenet, based on repeated Qur'anic injunctions, is that any financial transaction involving interest-bearing debt is prohibited. A central concern is the extent to which Islamic finance relies on what some experts refer to as "tricks" to transform conventional financial contracts into ones deemed "shariah compliant." I analyze contours of this debate by contrasting two commonly invoked contracts. The first is viewed as a trick and is dependent on a literalist approach to Islamic texts and doctrine that focuses on the formal properties of the economic exchange. This contract remains largely within the existing paradigm of debt-based contracts. In contrast, the second contract discussed is viewed as Islamic not only in form but also "in substance" due to the fact that it is equity based, rather than debt based. Favored by those seeking to reform Islamic finance, this contract is considered exemplary of what one Central Bank regulator referred to as "pure Islamic finance from the time of the prophet Muhammad." Importantly, the debates over these contracts and their respective zones of permissibility reveal some of the obstacles toward achieving the global integration of Islamic finance.

In anthropology, "magic" has been taken to include a range of supernatural orientations, as well as in superstition, illusion, trickery, miracles, and fantasies (Malinowski 1935; Mauss 1990). Nonetheless, in analyzing these competing visions of Islamic finance, I treat magic not as an occult or supernatural practice that indicates the supposedly mystifying nature of capitalism (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999, 2000). Rather, I draw on Graham Jones' ethnography of magicians in France (Jones 2011). In this culture of expertise (Holmes and Marcus 2005), Jones understands magic as the tricks and "sleight of hand" techniques deployed by professional magicians. In their efforts to move beyond magical capitalism, I argue that reformers in Islamic finance are creating what I referred to in previous work on Islamic corporate management practices in Indonesia as a

spiritual economy: a regime of production and capital circulation grounded in the ethical principles and ascetic pieties of Islam (Rudnyckyj 2010).

This argument is primarily based on observation of, and interviews and participation with, four key groups of experts active in Malaysian Islamic finance that took place between 2010 and 2015. These experts included: banking regulators, practitioners, shariah scholars, and Islamic economists. These groups are “native categories” insofar as this is how members would identify both themselves and others who worked in the industry. Regulators are primarily employed by either the Malaysian Central Bank or the Islamic Financial Services Board, and create the laws and standards that govern Islamic finance in Malaysia and around the world. Practitioners included executives and employees of actually existing banks and financial institutions, such as the ones I mentioned earlier. These experts faced the often daunting challenge of reconciling Islamic prescriptions for economic action with the pragmatics of modern, institutionalized finance. Shariah scholars, the third category of experts, generally hold specialized training in the discipline of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and are hired by Islamic financial institutions to sit on specially ordained committees that evaluate and approve the products offered. These jurists must be fluent in Arabic and hold degrees in Islamic sciences, often from institutions of higher education in the Middle East, such as Medina University or Al-Azhar in Cairo. The responsibility and actions of shariah scholars perhaps most distinguishes Islamic finance from its conventional counterpart, as it would be somewhat analogous to having a group of Christian clergy and theologians tasked with approving the products offered by Citibank. Finally, I interacted with self-described “Islamic economists” who typically had advanced degrees in conventional economics from departments in the United States or Europe and hold positions at universities or work in institutions such as the World Bank or IMF. Islamic economists emphasize the compatibility of Islam and secular economics but were generally more comfortable deploying the theories and mathematical models of economists such as Keynes, Friedman, and Irving Fischer, rather than the hermeneutic methods deployed by the shariah scholars.

Legal Tricks

Given their responsibility for ensuring that the instruments and contracts deployed in Islamic finance are concordant with Islam, shariah scholars occupied a pivotal position in debates over the authenticity of Islamic finance. Despite the presence of shariah scholars on the boards of Islamic financial institutions, increasingly a vocal and increasingly influential cadre of reformers is raising doubts about the religious permissibility of some of the most commonly used contracts in Islamic finance. Invoking the Arabic word “hiyal” which refers to “legal tricks” deployed by shariah scholars to evade religious prohibitions, reformers claim that Islamic financial institutions rely on contracts and instruments that, in their words, are Islamic only in “form, but not in substance.” These critics further contend that these tricks create a system that simply “replicates” what they call “conventional finance” and the debt-based capitalism on which it is premised. In contrast, these reformers, who have garnered the support of powerful officials in Malaysia’s influential and well-respected Central Bank, are working to abandon such “tricks” and reformulate Islamic finance around investment and equity rather than debt.

In describing these tricks and the responses to them, I seek to correct dominant scholarly approaches that have represented Islam as incompatible with capitalism. Recent events in the Middle East and North Africa, such as the so-called Arab Spring and the rise of ISIS, have often resorted to materialist interpretations for the wave of discontent that appears endemic to the Islamic world. A number of scholars, the Duke economist Timur Kuran perhaps most prominent among them, have argued that Islam is inimical to economic growth because Islamic law has hindered the emergence of large-scale firms and the ability of entrepreneurs to mobilize the capital necessary for capitalist economic action (Kuran 2011). Kuran’s argument has been widely covered in the popular press, with such venerable organs as the *New York Times*, the *Economist*, the *New Yorker*, and Public Radio’s “Marketplace” enthusiastically covering his explanation for economic underdevelopment in the Muslim world. As a counterpoint to this influential analysis, I contend that Islamic finance experts are seeking to redress the very problem that Kuran

identifies. Rather than seeing Islam as an obstacle to development and modernization, I seek to show how some Muslims today are seeking to create an alternative financial infrastructure to mobilize capital for economic growth.

The central feature of Islamic finance is a prohibition on the payment and collection of interest. Indeed, Bill Maurer has argued that Islamic finance is characterized by “the debate over its own origins and the debate over *riba* [interest]: how it is defined, how it is avoided, and how it has become the absent center of IBF [Islamic Banking and Finance] practice today” (Maurer 2005: 39). Indeed, the practices of applying this rule vary and have precipitated current debates over religious authenticity. In the 1980s, the first Malaysian Islamic bank, Bank Islam, created a “shariah-compliant” contract that met the letter of Islamic law, but today the mechanisms of validation are increasingly viewed as legal “tricks.” Today, most Islamic financial institutions, both within and outside Malaysia, primarily rely on devices which critics claim might be Islamic in form but they contend are contrary to the religion “in substance.”

In part, this is due to the global diversity of Islam and the different traditions that characterize distinctive schools of legal reasoning around the world. Virtually since the inception of the industry, elaborate invocations of Islamic juristic precedent were mobilized to justify a formalist approach in Malaysia. Most shariah scholars identify with one of four major fiqh schools of thought or “doctrines” (*madzab*). While there is general consensus on most matters among these schools, there are slight differences of methodology that distinguish them. In Malaysia (and indeed the rest of Southeast Asia), the Shafi’i tradition is the predominant jurisprudential tradition. Shafi’i scholars have typically emphasized form over substance and avoided legal decisions that ascribe intent to actors, asserting that only Allah can discern individual intentions. Thus, when evaluating the permissibility of an act, they have sought to judge the act on its own terms and external appearance, without ascribing motivations to the actor.

In contrast, jurists (*fuqaha*) from the Hanafi school, which is common in South Asia and parts of the Middle East and North Africa, take a different methodological stand. They generally emphasize substance over form and aver that intentions can be deduced from actions. In practice,

this has led to a situation in which certain financial and banking instruments endorsed by scholars in Southeast Asia have been explicitly prohibited by scholars in South Asia and the Middle East. These differences have led to somewhat surprising interventions, such as cases in which bankers have weighed in on matters of religious scholarship. For example, Badlisyah Abdul Ghani, the publicly outspoken CEO of CIMB Islamic bank (Malaysia's largest Islamic financial institution), was particularly vocal stating that while other fiqh traditions emphasize form over content "only the Hanafi School of Law advocates for 'the substance over form' outlook, putting emphasis on the intention of both parties" (Abdul Ghani 2009: 14).

Islamic Finance in Form or Substance

In Malaysia, the formalist emphasis in the knowledge economy of Islamic finance facilitated an approach in which the replication of conventional instruments was enabled and few questions were asked about the content of the resulting Islamic devices. Thus, as a strategy of state subjectification, formalist Islamic finance was directed more toward facilitating an Islamic identity that could be readily governed by the state and was conducive to the creation of an economically prosperous population. This population was to a large extent dependent on public largesse due to efforts to enhance the economic well-being of the Malay Muslim majority. Because this majority was perceived to have been disadvantaged during the colonial economy especially in comparison to citizens of Chinese descent, they had been given special privileges under race-based affirmative action policies in everything from consideration for civil service positions to university admissions to receiving government contracts (Peletz 2002: 7–9). However, efforts to reform Islamic finance marked a departure from making Malay Muslims dependent on the state and instead to making them independent entrepreneurs.

These practices of formalist Islamic finance were increasingly viewed as a legal trickery, a fact that was vividly illustrated to me in early 2014, when I was discussing Islamic finance with Nuraini. She was formerly a high-level Islamic banking executive and had helped to create some of the

early infrastructure for Islamic finance in the Malaysia, but by the early 2000s was disillusioned with the industry. Much of Nuraini's discontent derived from her conviction that Islamic finance was, in her words, Islamic "in name only" because it "reverse engineered" interest-bearing contracts by deploying "paper sales" of tangible assets to replicate the debt contracts that are commonly used in conventional finance. In Malaysia, the most commonly used contract of this type is called *bai al inah*: a "sale and buy back" transaction in which a customer sells an asset to a bank for cash on the spot and then buys the asset back shortly thereafter at a markup on a deferred payment basis. Thus, shariah-compliant contracts were synthesized through the roundabout means of two sales, the markup and the deferred payment, essentially mimicking interest-bearing debt contracts. Indeed, the rate of the markup over the payment period mirrors the prevailing interest rates established on KLIBOR, the Kuala Lumpur Interbank Offered Rate. This is the interest rate at which banks extend loans to other banks and is analogous to the Federal Funds Rate in the United States or LIBOR in the United Kingdom. However, due to the fact that the *bai al inah* contract complies with a literal interpretation of Islamic scripture, from a strictly formal perspective it can be accepted as "shariah compliant."

With no shortage of sarcasm, Nuraini described an example of how such an arrangement would work in practice. In the 1990s, she was working in an executive capacity at a state-owned development bank, which was seeking to raise capital to provide financing for small- and medium-sized enterprises. She described how the capital was generated:

We [owned] a building that was priced at 600 million...then we sold the building to the Ministry of Finance. Then, the second transaction was when the ministry sold the building back, at say for example 700 million [on a deferred payment basis]. So it became a transaction of sale and purchase...The shariah part was, they said that you cannot have two contracts in one...it has to be two clean contracts...so what we did, in order to have...a separate agreement, was have two distinct events. At the first event we had representatives of the bank and representatives of the Ministry of Finance. Here we had the chairman of the Islamic development bank and here we had the vice president of the ministry. They came and met and

exchanged the key to the building. They were shaking hands and they were transferring the key. One said 'I am selling you the building for 600 million,' the other one said 'I accept this transaction.' So we did that in one room witnessed by the muftis!² We had the mufti of Penang, the mufti of Selangor, the mufti of Perak, and we had the mufti of Perlis.³ They came to witness the whole ceremony. Then the whole transaction was adjourned... We went for tea. Later we came back again and we did the reverse! It became like a show! And this, we called it Islamic financing.⁴

The asset used to facilitate the transaction was the headquarters of the bank, which still stands in central Kuala Lumpur. Referring to such contracts in Arabic (*bay al inah*) and the presence of Islamic scholars further enhanced the Islamic authenticity of these transactions. Contracts like this are considered "debt based" because they create an obligation to repay funds previously extended through the paper sale of an asset. Today many reformers and critics argue that contracts such as the *bai al inah* are "hiyal" or "tricks." As one self-described Islamic economist stated at a public forum, "the problem with these instruments [is that they] are hiyal...(tricks): they obey the letter of the law but not its spirit." Such references to the formalist strategies of Islamic financial forms as tricks were perhaps some of the most extreme forms of criticism, but they reflected a pervasive sense that the existing system of Islamic finance in Malaysia was in need of revision.

In response, reformers seek to substitute investment-oriented contracts for the "debt-based" ones that predominate in Islamic finance but rely on what are increasingly considered legal tricks. Reformers and critics most often invoked a contract called a *mudaraba* as the epitome of investment-based Islamic finance. These are profit-sharing contracts that were commonly used on the Arabian peninsula even prior to the revelation of Islam and were standard commercial arrangements in the classical Islamic world (Udovitch 1970: 170-248). A *mudaraba* is a contract between an entrepreneur (or in Arabic *mudarib*) and an investor in which the latter provides the capital for a business venture and then is granted a pre-agreed percentage of the profits from the enterprise, while the entrepreneur provides only his or her skills, labor, and managerial expertise. Proponents of *mudaraba* liken these contracts to the venture capital arrangements that

have financed Silicon Valley firms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Google and argue that they could facilitate similar entrepreneurial dynamism in the Muslim world. One Islamic economist extolled the virtues of this contract, saying “I became aware of venture capital in 1982, when I learned about *mudaraba*. Venture capital has been applied with enormous success...but it turns out we are talking about a classical Islamic partnership that was practiced by Muhammad. And today, twenty-first century California, Silicon Valley is doing the same thing...They learned it from us, but we have forgotten it!” Thus, he likened the fundamental contractual instrument of the golden age of Islam to the venture capital agreements, which, so we are told, have underwritten the halcyon age of the internet.

Reforming Contractual Form

Calls to abandon legal tricks in favor of practices that are considered more authentic to Islam, such as the *mudaraba*, have not been in vain. State institutions have gradually sought to transition from debt-based contracts to investment-based ones. The first indication of success on the part of reformers was apparent in late 2012, when the Central Bank required Islamic banks to remove the interconditionality clause for *bai al inah* contracts. The head of one Islamic bank provided a dramatic account of how Islamic banks were notified of the change, “It was December 2012 and all CEOs were called away from their London homes at Christmas by the Central Bank. We were told that we had to revamp our contracts to account for the new structure. It ruined our holidays!” Prior to this removal, Islamic banks were permitted to require that the first of the two sales in a *bai al inah* transaction be conditional on the second. But the new regulation broke this link, thus there was now a period of time when the bank would have to hold the asset. This raised the possibility that the customer would sell an asset to the bank and then abandon the deal without buying it back from the bank at an increased price leaving the bank holding an asset that it had no real interest in owning.

Syarif, a shariah scholar for a major Islamic bank, told me that the rationale for moving away from interconditional sales was due to the fact

that Malaysia had frequently been “criticized by [shariah] scholars” from the Arabian Gulf region. They viewed the clause as contrary to shariah on the premise that “there should be no conditions on a sale...[because this] affects the free will of the buyer or seller.” The interconditionality clause contributed to the opinion that the validity of bai al inah was based on legal trickery because it bent Islamic prescriptions on economic action to enable Islamic banks to act in essentially the same manner as conventional financial institutions. He attributed the removal of the clause as part of an effort to deploy “universally accepted contracts” in Malaysia as part of a broader effort to make Kuala Lumpur a central node in international Islamic finance. He reasoned that only by eliminating contracts that were viewed with suspicion in the Gulf region, would it become an appealing destination for Middle Eastern capital, intoning “if they [Malaysia] want to be the hub, they have to do things the right way! There can’t be any questions.”

The second example of moving beyond the magical capitalism dependent on legal stratagems occurred in mid-2013 when the Malaysian Parliament passed a new Islamic finance law, the Islamic Financial Services Act (or IFSA), which created and defined a type of equity-based partnership account premised on the risk calculating and profit-sharing principles of the *mudaraba*. The creation of this account was interpreted as an endorsement of investment-oriented Islamic finance. As one shariah scholar who sat on the board of HSBC’s Islamic bank said to me, the redefinition of *mudaraba* was “a big change” because it moved to “a true risk and profit sharing model of Islamic finance.” This sentiment was echoed by another shariah scholar who said that the revisions to rules regarding *mudaraba* showed that the Central Bank sought to abandon the use of legal tricks in Malaysia and make Islamic finance “more truly representative of shariah contracts.”

An Islamic City of Gold?

Analyzing what in retrospect appears to be the heyday of globalization, another contributor to this collection, David Westbrook, identified what he termed “the City of Gold” (Westbrook 2004). The City of Gold refers

to a unified global market space in which supranational finance operates without physical limits. In this configuration, people, things, and knowledge were effectively knit together through a commitment to liberal economic values. However, Westbrook noted that contemporary capitalism “could not (and today still cannot) explain the City of Gold to its inhabitants” and therefore capitalism “is an inadequate ideology for the polity created by supranational finance” (Westbrook 2004: 3). Westbrook reads discontent with globalization, evident in the so-called anti-globalization movements (Juris 2008), not so much as reactions against material conditions but rather as a manifestation of frustrations with “contemporary political life” (Westbrook 2004: 3). This is a discontent with the fact that the City of Gold offers no rubric for identity beyond the homo economicus of liberal capitalism and certainly no sense of collective belonging. Previous “imagined communities” based on religion, dynastic succession, or nationalism had offered a sense of membership in a broader collectivity, but the City of Gold offers no such respite (Anderson 1983).

In the wake of recent events, especially the British referendum on the European Union and Donald Trump’s unexpectedly successful presidential campaign in the United States, Westbrook’s analysis looks surprisingly prescient. These events, and the growing popularity of right-wing populist moves more generally, appear to confirm Westbrook’s thesis. Both appear to be nativist reactions against globalization, or what Trump’s advisor Stephen Bannon calls the “globalism” of the “Davos class.” Indeed, recent events suggest that those on the political left who saw globalization as the prevailing problem facing modern human beings may have been woefully off the mark. More threatening even than globalization and the liberalism on which it was based was the backlash against it. However, perhaps the shortsightedness was misguided. As early as 2000, Douglas Holmes identified the chauvinistic defense of ethnic identity at the very heart of the project of European integration (Holmes 2000). Holmes called the political disposition characteristic of hardline populism evident in France’s National Front party “integralism.” He astutely observed that this disposition could be readily deployed to amplify a sense of alienation and powerlessness—an effect of the transnational “fast capitalism” enabled by European integration. Thus, Holmes

showed how European integration and cultural nationalism, far from being opposed, were intimately linked to one another.

Scholars such as Timur Kuran and Mahmoud El-Gamal have argued that Islamic finance is little more than a second-rate imitation of conventional finance adorned with a religious veneer (El-Gamal 2006; Kuran 1997). This literature disparages Islamic finance for replicating conventional finance, by using Arabic terminology and Muslim religious symbols to conceal this underlying orientation (Kuran 2004). This has precipitated what El-Gamal calls “shariah arbitrage”: the practice by Islamic banks of obtaining approval from Islamic jurists for financial instruments that are only superficially altered to be shariah compliant and charging a premium for them (El-Gamal 2007). The orienting frame of this work has been to assert that Islamic finance is insufficiently Islamic and only deploys Islamic religious symbols and Arabic language to lend credibility to what is essentially conventional finance.

Due to its perceived inauthenticity, scholars such as Kuran have denounced Islamic finance as an inauthentic imitation of conventional finance. Indeed, he suggests that Islamic finance achieves little in the way of economic growth and is merely an identity-building project designed to resist globalization. Kuran takes the City of Gold at face value, endorsing globalization as an indicator of progress. From this vantage point, Islamic finance as a project of identity formation can be nothing less than a backward-looking project. However, if Westbrook is right, and contemporary events such as Brexit, Trump, and the resurgence of far-right political movements certainly seem to confirm his analysis, then perhaps the identity-building project of Islamic finance should not be so readily dismissed. Even as a form of magical capitalism, a capitalism that deploys tricks and sleight of hand techniques to make it seem like something that it is not, Islamic finance offers the prospect that one can participate in a specific religious community and global capitalism simultaneously.

However, Islamic finance as a spiritual economy is not simply a response to the problem of political identity endemic to the City of Gold. In seeking to shift from a debt-based to equity-based financial system, it offers a potential solution to the economic problems endemic to the City of Gold. A number of analysts have pointed to the role of leverage in

financial instability, including former Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan himself (Stein 2010).

Leveraging refers to the practice of purchasing assets with a combination of equity and borrowed funds under the presumption that the income generated by the asset will exceed the cost of borrowing those funds (the interest). During the rapid escalation of real estate values in the early 2000s, many Americans “leveraged up” by using the equity in their homes to take out a second mortgage and sometimes used these borrowed funds to purchase additional property. During an economic boom, leveraging can be so profitable that it appears magical, as it was for homeowners who used debt to purchase rapidly appreciating properties. However, during a downturn, leverage can lead to devastating losses. This was evident during the 2008 crisis when real estate values suddenly suffered acute drops and the sleight of hand of leverage suddenly became all too apparent. In several cases, this left homeowners and other real estate investors owing more to banks than the value of their properties. Forced sales of real estate led to further declines in property prices, pushing more homeowners “under water.”

Islamic finance experts argue that creating a spiritual economy centered on equity investments will lead to greater economic stability. They argue that promoting equity investment will exorcise leverage from capitalism because, in the words of one interlocutor, “you can’t invest what you don’t already own.” In the reformed pious capitalism exorcised of leverage, investors will not be able to leverage the equity they already have to borrow even larger sums. To clarify by a counterfactual example, during the run up to the 2008 crisis, an equity-based Islamic financial system would have inhibited the volume of capital available for leverage. Such a limit, some Islamic finance experts argue, would have constricted the rise in property values and thus inhibited the formation of a real estate “bubble.” Those seeking to reform Islamic finance hope to delink debt and equity. In advancing this position, these experts find allies among prominent economists who have likewise identified debt-fueled leverage at the root of recent economic crises (Reinhart and Rogoff 2009). As several of my interlocutors were eager to point out, these economists also posed equity finance as an antidote to economic turmoil, albeit in decidedly secular terms.

Leverage has the potential to create instability in debt-based conventional finance, but Islamic finance experts contend that equity-based operations put limits on leverage. As one Malaysian central bank employee, Nazmi, put it in a workshop I attended, “What caused the crisis is excessive leverage..., but the [an Islamic contract] minimizes excessive leverage...[In an Islamic system] if the banks fail, there is no need to step in to bail them out.” This was due, he argued, to the fact that in an equity-based system, depositors, rather than banking institutions, bear a larger share of the risk in the provision and circulation of capital. Nazmi argued that a financial system based on equity would not be subject to the same wild fluctuations that plagued debt-based economies. In a financial system, operating according to principles of equity investment, one can only venture the capital that one already has in hand. In contrast, in a financial system where the provision of capital occurs through debt, interest-based borrowing to chase financial returns can easily become speculative. The US mortgage crisis of 2008 was a paradigmatic example of this, as banks made massive amounts of loan financing available to homebuyers, who borrowed under the presumption that real estate values would continue to rapidly escalate. Homebuyers speculated that the increase in home prices would outpace the loans they were taking. While for a time, the increase in home prices exceeded the cost of borrowing, as house prices increased, borrowers became overleveraged and ultimately when the housing bubble burst, these homeowners had no recourse but default. In an equity-based Islamic system, in contrast, one cannot invest what one does not own: investment is much more closely tied to what Islamic finance experts call “the real economy.”

Equity-based Islamic contracts put limits on leverage because a depositor makes a deposit to a bank, which the bank then invests. The depositor and the bank are effectively partners. Thus, the two share any proceeds from the investment based on a previously arranged profit-sharing agreement, while the depositor is strictly responsible for any losses. The bank's profits are limited to the funds it can attract through investment and the depositor/investor is limited to investing money already earned. Neither party can resort to credit markets to invest borrowed funds speculatively and, similarly, leverage is absent because neither party can invest funds that it does not already hold.

When pressed, proponents of equity finance freely admitted that economic growth in a financial system based on equity investment would likely be more modest, but they felt that this would be a small price to pay for greater social stability. Nazmi argued that in a debt-based system risk was also distributed across society, such as when taxpayers were compelled to bail out large banks. However, he noted that the benefits of such an economy were not distributed evenly, “the taxpayer doesn’t get to enjoy the upside in the debt-based model of ‘too big to fail.’” From his point of view, the crisis demonstrated that in a speculative, debt-based economy, profits were individualized, but losses were socialized because large banks threatened to bring down the economic system as a whole if taxpayers did not bail them out. Debt-based economies were more prone to “systemic risk” than equity-based ones in which there would be less speculative investment and a lower likelihood of financial crisis.

Exorcising leverage and the conviction that equity-based financial arrangements reduce volatility is not only limited to those seeking to reform Islamic finance. Indeed in Malaysia, reformers were heartened by the 2009 publication of *This Time Is Different*, by the Harvard University economists Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, which argues that financial markets “reliant on leverage... can be quite fragile and subject to crises of confidence” (Reinhart and Rogoff 2009, xxxix). During my fieldwork, Reinhart and Rogoff’s argument that recessions are caused by widespread debt and high levels of leverage was often invoked as evidence supporting equity- and investment-based Islamic finance. Furthermore, Islamic finance experts were emboldened by such an influential economist as Rogoff taking a strong position over the course of his career against debt and in favor of equity finance (Rogoff 1999). Although Reinhart and Rogoff do not refer to Islamic finance, the endorsement of equity finance and critique of leverage by prominent Harvard economists greatly emboldened those seeking to reform Islamic finance according to equity principles. One Islamic economist suggested to me that the endorsement of equity by Reinhart and Rogoff proved that the Qur’an was correct in preferring risk sharing and equity finance and enjoining against debt.

Conclusion

A century ago Max Weber demonstrated how modern capitalism was the unintended and contingent effect of the ethics of worldly asceticism characteristic of Protestantism. As has been well documented, Weber saw rationalization and disenchantment as characteristic of modernity. The Protestant reformation had exorcised the magic that had characterized the Catholic Church. At the conclusion of his greatest work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, he wrote “No one knows who will live in this cage in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification, embellished with a sort of convulsive self-importance” (Weber 2001 [1920]: 124). Islamic finance entails the rationalization of Islam to create an economic form that simultaneously adheres to religious principles and is capable of serving to structure the flows of capital critical to contemporary capitalism.

Nonetheless today Islamic finance is characterized by two central problems. On the one hand, experts seek to abandon magical capitalism and its legal tricks in favor of what I have elsewhere called a spiritual economy by improving the religious credentials of Islamic finance. Thus, experts and reforms sought to create a means for the circulation of capital grounded in the ethics and ascetic principles that they viewed as characteristic of Islam, rather than seeking to recreate conventional financial forms with an Islamic veneer. A key part of this project has been to exorcise the leverage that has been responsible for the seemingly magical gains of finance capitalism. On the other hand, even as these debates raged over the authenticity of Islamic finance, these experts are working to make Islamic finance a viable alternative to conventional finance. In so doing, Islamic finance experts are developing a response to the global financial predicament that differs from that offered by both Wall Street and the Occupy movement. In the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, major financial institutions requested loans and other financial guarantees from government to maintain the solvency of the financial system. The Occupy movement called for forgiveness for those mired in debt and those

adversely afflicted by the sharp decline in the value of real estate. However, both of these interventions continue to take debt for granted as the central tool of finance. In contrast, experts seeking to reform Islamic finance challenge the epistemology of finance by posing investment and equity, rather than debt, as the central mechanism for the mobilization of capital today.

At stake here are questions that move far beyond debt and equity. As I have demonstrated elsewhere, the emphasis on equity as opposed to debt, dovetails with neoliberal development strategies (Rudnyckyj 2017b). Islamic finance experts see an equity-centered economy as a means to elicit a risk-taking, entrepreneurial subject capable of calculating risk according to a logic of investment-costs-profit. Whereas the older debt-based version of Islamic finance used sleight of hand techniques to create a pious Islamic subject dependent on state patronage, the new spiritual economy in which leverage is exorcised embraces the invisible hand. It takes market competition as a norm to which pious Muslims should be subjected. Magical capitalism, in this sense, is no longer legal trickery, but instead morphs into the alchemy of market competition in which the objective is to elicit active, risk-bearing agents who take responsibility for their own fortune.

Notes

1. The IFSB is the acronym of the Islamic Financial Services Board, an international body based in Kuala Lumpur that is developing global standards for Islamic finance. With its global headquarters in Sasana Kijang several floors above where Syed Alwi was speaking, the organization is analogous to the Basel Committee in conventional banking and counts over 60 central banks as members.
2. A mufti is an Islamic scholar qualified to give legal opinions or fatwa.
3. Penang, Selangor, Perak, and Perlis are all Malaysian states. Nuraini was remarking on the fact that the chief Islamic authorities from each of these four states were all in attendance at the transaction.
4. This phrase literally means “glory be to God,” but Nuraini meant it more as “for goodness sake” with no small measure of exasperation.

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4

Trickster's Triumph: Donald Trump and the New Spirit of Capitalism

Jakob Krause-Jensen and Keir Martin

Donald Trump's election has provoked widespread debate, particularly amongst those for whom his victory was an unimaginable horror right up until the moment of its arrival. Trump's victory seems particularly strange to many given the remarkable lack of consistency of his public statements and the extent to which he openly contradicted himself and his previous declared beliefs throughout the course of his campaign. Yet in many respects, it is Trump's ability to hold contradictory and mutually exclusive positions together that is at the very heart of his appeal.

New York. My city. Where the wheels of the global economy never stop turning. A concrete metropolis of unparalleled strength and purpose that drives the business world. Manhattan is a tough place. This Island is the real jungle. If you are not careful it can chew you up and spit you out. If you work hard, you can really hit it big, and I mean real big...My name is

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Donald Trump, and I am the largest real estate developer in New York [...] About 13 years ago I was seriously in trouble. I was billions of dollars in debt. But I fought back and I won. Big league. I used my brain. I used my negotiating skills, and I worked it all out [...]. I have mastered the art of the deal, and I have turned the name Trump into the highest quality brand...

This is how Donald Trump presents himself in the introduction to his reality show *The Apprentice*. The show picked up on his reputation as an entrepreneurial guru gained decades earlier through his business best-seller *The Art of the Deal* (Trump and Schwartz 1987). Pitched as “the Ultimate job interview,” over each season candidates vie to become managers in one of Trump’s business organizations. Every episode ends with one of the contestants being eliminated by Trump, the boss, who points his finger at them and says: “You’re fired!” But why did so many people from the rust-belt and elsewhere, who have lost their jobs and seen the base of their livelihoods dwindle during the past decades vote for a man who embodies a ruthless, “winner-takes-it-all” capitalism? How does a tycoon become a “working-class hero?”

Trump is “the entrepreneur” par excellence, but his vexing triumph is at odds with existing analyses of “enterprise culture,” and the paradoxical position of Trump is a challenge to classical theories of capitalist development and ideology. We argue that his strong person-centred, anti-establishment politics can be conceptualized through Weber’s notion of charismatic authority with its curious invocation of “das ewig Neue”—and that his political rise demonstrates a growing connection between contemporary finance capitalism and charismatic forms of authority. We also argue that Trump embodies Polanyi’s double movement, and as such he may be fruitfully analysed as a late modern version of the North American trickster.

Enterprise Culture

The election of business man Donald Trump as president of the United States came as a surprise to most observers. He is not a product of the political establishment. Trump was the least politically experienced candidate

in US history, and he was running against Hillary Clinton, who was the most politically experienced candidate ever to have run for president. He is a celebrity “business guru” whose political success depends on having turned himself into an entrepreneurial brand name. It is tempting, therefore, to see the election of Donald Trump as a grotesque but also somehow “logical” consummation of neoliberalism and a concomitant “enterprise culture” as it has been analysed by sociologists for the past three decades.

From a Marxist point of view, David Harvey and others have explored how over the past 50 years global capitalism has evolved from Fordist to flexible forms of accumulation helped by political and technological change. It became possible to communicate and move things across the globe faster and at decreasing costs. Combined with policies of financial deregulation, these technological possibilities have facilitated outsourcing and subcontracting—moving labour-intensive production to low-wage areas—which has allowed employers to exert stronger control over labour. At the same time, capital has looked for ways to accelerate capital turnover through changing fashions and ever shorter product lifespans (think of the difference between a Ford motorcar and a piece of software) and through a rapid increase in ways of generating profit, which are increasingly not based on production of goods but on “paper entrepreneurialism” (Harvey 1990: 156–157 and 169).

Meanwhile from a Foucauldian perspective, sociologists have analysed the rise of “enterprise culture.” They have looked at the “production of enterprising subjects” by identifying the discourses and “technologies” through which people are encouraged to subscribe to deregulation and support the demolition of the welfare or “nanny” state and engage in the free-market economy by viewing themselves and acting as “enterprising individuals” (Dugay 1996; Heelas and Morris 1992; Rose 1990, 1999). From this theoretical vantage point, it is important to analyse the “pragmatics” and the way words like “freedom,” “flexibility,” “enterprise,” and “citizen” worked in conjunction and thereby achieved particular meanings, and how associated forms of expertise and knowledge (scientific, psychological) were used to “govern” people, in order to refashion “entrepreneurial work as a *responsibility*, not just as a privilege for a select few” (McWilliam et al. 1999: 58).¹ However, we want to argue that the

phenomenon of the business guru in general and the rise to power of Donald Trump in particular suggest that it is much “too early to cut off the head of the sovereign” (Sørhaug 2004: 86).

The analysis of the structural changes underlying global capitalism and the investigation into the “enterprise culture” and the scrutiny of the subtleties of government technologies are crucial—but it seems to us that the surge of populist politics in general and Trump in particular are also reminders that the person-centred and symbolic dimensions of power have not evaporated. The “theatre state” (Geertz 1980) is not limited to eighteenth-century Bali but is a contemporary reality made possible by modern communication technology—public spectacle and performance is as much a part of contemporary capitalism as the kinds of disciplinary power that “covers for itself.” As we point out later, there is a growing connection between charismatic leadership and authority and finance capitalism. It is in this context in which the spectacular performance of entrepreneurialism as a form of heroic and stereotypically masculine energy that reveals the underlying truth behind the surface appearance of bureaucratic facts that the “business guru” emerges. The business guru is a particular kind of expert who often proclaims his disdain for the kind of numerical verifiable data produced by professional experts. The “uber-guru” Tom Peters built his career upon attacking the “bean-counting” number-obsessed experts of previous generations of management thinkers such as Frederick Taylor and Robert McNamara. He instead emphasized the underlying and unquantifiable intuitive truths of “culture” and individual energy that lay hidden beneath their distorting veneer. The rise of Trump takes this disdain for scientific evidence and even “facts” themselves into the very heart of global power, replacing them with an intuitive “smartness” that likewise speaks to a desire to access deeper non-evidence based truths.

The Business Guru and the Spirit of Capitalism

Attempts to scientifically analyse and improve business and management go back at least as far as Frederick Taylor. His book *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1967 [1911]) with its measurement and stopwatch

ideas of management promised to uncover the “one best way” of organizing production. His ideas inspired politicians and industrialists far beyond US and Henry Ford’s assembly line, and his followers counted Lenin and Mussolini. However, most observers use the term “management guru” in a more restricted sense and point to the beginning of the 1980s, when organizations started to become interested in “things cultural” (Jackson 2001). In particular, the book *In Search of Excellence. Lessons from America’s Best Run Companies* (1982) by Peters and Waterman (the “best-selling business bestseller of all times”) is often mentioned (see McKenna 2006: 192; Guest 1992) as the neo-classic that set off this development by claiming that “culture” was the “essential quality” of excellent companies (Peters and Waterman 1982: 75). As *Publisher’s Weekly* put it, “Dieting, sex, whimsy, food and gossip are no longer first in the heart of bibliophiles. With no near competitors, business was the strongest selling subject in the United States in 1983” (Huczynski 2006: 62). What was behind the emergence of the “gurus” and what significance can we attach to their rise to prominence?

The term “guru” is a Sanskrit term that means “dispeller of ignorance” and, in Hindu tradition, it is used to describe a “personal teacher of spirituality” whose teachings are “based on experiential and not only intellectual knowledge” (Mlecko 1982: 34). To connect the term “guru” with the “profane” world of business and management resonates with an old trope of anthropological cultural critique—that of making the familiar “strange.” The term “management guru,” however, is not the brainchild of anthropologists. It is coined and used by the business press. In his book *Management Gurus* (2006), organization researcher Andrzej Huczynski writes that the word describes “the active search by business people for hidden knowledge or secrets, and [...] the preparedness of individuals to carry out, sometimes uncritically, the recommendations or direction of the guru” (ibid. 69). He also calls attention to the fact that the “management guru” is an almost exclusively Anglo-Saxon phenomenon and lists a dozen best-selling authors ranging from Harvard business school academics such as Rosabeth Moss-Kanter, consultants like Peters and Waterman—and “hero-managers” like Donald Trump. What ties the gurus together across all their differences is a belief that “the only object of business is to compete

with others for the favor of the customer as King,” and the underlying claims that “innovation can’t be planned” and that an organization should be managed through values and culture rather than rules and command (Huczynski 2006: 63). As McWilliam et al. (1999: 59) argue, “The effectiveness of Peters... and similar ‘gurus’ in setting current trends in management fashion is undeniable,” before going on to also observe the ways in which, “they resonate with the wider political programmes, such as those which have been associated with the Thatcher and Reagan administrations.” Indeed, this points to the gurus as being amongst the most high-profile proponents of “the new spirit of capitalism” that emerged in the 1980s.²

In their book *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, French sociologists Eve Chiapello and Luc Boltanski attempt to analyse the ideology that justifies engagement in capitalism. They take suggestions from Max Weber who described the spirit of capitalism as a “set of ethical motivations which, although their purpose is foreign to capitalist logic, inspire entrepreneurs in activity conducive to capital accumulation.” What they get from Weber is the idea that “people need powerful moral reasons for rallying to capitalism” (Boltanski and Chiapello 2007: 8). Their work is based on a careful reading of management literature like the best-sellers authored by the “gurus.” They identify the same historical juncture as the sociologists mentioned above and point out that from the middle of the 1970s onwards, some businesses appeared to, at least partially, abandon hierarchical Fordist work structures and develop new network-based forms of organization. The success of this “new spirit of capitalism” rested on the capitalist system’s remarkable ability to absorb what Boltanski and Chiapello call the “artistic critique” which, after May 1968, attacked the way capitalism and bureaucracy worked on the grounds that they alienated everyday life. This critique of establishment is reflected, for instance, in the consistent appeal to “corporate culture” mentioned above, which is an implicit claim that organizations should cater to their members’ need for meaning. Simultaneously, “social critique” was disarmed by the appearance of the flexible modes of employment (outsourcing, short-term contracting, etc.) and the weakening of the unions and their bargaining power.

The Business Guru as Revolutionary Defender of Status Quo

In light of Boltanski and Chiapello's characterization of management thinking, however, Trump's *The Art of the Deal* (1987) is a curious "guru" book: There is no organization to be managed, no advice packaged in acronyms, no edifying allegory, no models to be applied, and no moralistic fable. It is all about Donald Trump as an individual dealmaker: He calls people, hangs out with them, praises them and condemns them—not according to some higher moral principles, but according to how effective they are in "getting the deal done." At one level, then, Trump represents hard-nosed pragmatism and, at another level, he does share in the performative extravaganza that is the hallmark of many other prominent "gurus": The attraction of management gurus like Tom Peters and Donald Trump often seems to rest on shocking the establishment by breaching moral conduct and upsetting conventional codes.

The title of Peters' best-selling follow-up to *In Search of Excellence* sums up the new orthodoxy that emerged in the 1980s. *Thriving on Chaos: A Handbook for Managerial Revolution* was, appropriately enough, published on the day of the great stock market crash of 1987, and honed further Peters' attack on the allegedly innovation-stifling number-crunching bureaucracies that had dominated the US economy of the postwar boom (see Martin 2010). Revolution had been in the air in the aftermath of 1968 and Peters and his guru colleagues harnessed its anti-structural energy, not in the direction of the destruction of capital but to help its accumulation—a process that was now seen as being hindered by formal rational bureaucratic structures rather than enabled by them. For Peters and Waterman (1982: 54), a key task was to "stop overdoing things on the rational side," a claim described by McWilliam et al. (1999: 65) as an "incitement to disorder."³ Although the similarities may not have been at the forefront of every cultural commentator's mind at the time, they have not passed entirely unnoticed in academic circles, with some scholars observing the similarities between Peters' desire to unleash the creative energy of the masses through the destruction of conservative bureaucracy and the cultural revolution launched by Chairman Mao Zedong in the

1960s (e.g. Clegg 2012: 65; Carter et al. 2008: 92). Mao's public animosity towards bureaucracy is notorious and articulated in his pronouncement, "Twenty manifestations of bureaucracy" made in 1967 at the height of the "Cultural Revolution." Twenty years later, Peters headed the "culture revolution" in the management of US corporations, seeking to replace bureaucratic structures with an attention to cultural values that would enable individual talent to flourish.⁴ Chapter 1 of *Thriving on Chaos* is simply entitled "Pursue 'Horizontal' Management by Bashing Bureaucracy," a pronouncement that in its structure and style is strikingly reminiscent of key slogans of the "Cultural Revolution" such as "Smash the Four Olds." Mao's "Cultural Revolution" is predominantly understood as an attack on bureaucracy, motivated by a desire to avoid the Chinese Revolution developing in the same direction as the Soviet Union, and Mao's willingness to embrace the forces that would dissolve the stifling power of bureaucracy marked him out from other Communist leaders and Chinese political figures. According to Solomon (1971), most Chinese Communist leaders shared a terror that had deeper roots in Chinese political culture, of *luan* or "chaos" and the damage it might inflict if strict bureaucratic rule was not imposed on the people. What distinguished Mao, in this reading, was his very non-traditional view of the potential positive virtues of unleashing "chaos." No wonder that he, like his counterparts in the business guru community 20 years later, attracted a cult of personality around his own charismatic appearances, and that he seemed to do so by embodying within his very person contradictory tendencies, such as the ability to evoke the mass excitement of revolutionary fervour at public events, whilst constructing such total authoritarian control that his portrait appeared in almost every school, office, factory, and even private home in the nation.

The Guru as Agent Provocateur

Vague as it may be, then, the notion of "guru" points to frames of understanding contemporary capitalism and its politics that take into account its paradoxical, symbolic, and performative aspects often overlooked in studies of capitalist ideology and enterprise culture. The term "guru" does

resonate with the idea of “magic” and points to the central assumption of this volume and of this chapter that capitalism cannot be understood only as a Kafkaesque process of rationalization—a system of still more subtle forms of disciplinary power—but that enchantment, spectacle, and performance are simultaneously integral parts of the system’s mode of operation.

As mentioned above, “Guru” is not an analytical term but an “emic” one coined by the business press. But let us for a moment explore the notion of “the guru” as it has been developed in the anthropological literature. Norwegian anthropologist Fredrik Barth once made a conceptual distinction between “the guru” and “the conjurer.” Barth developed a conceptual “model of the guru” by contrasting this “tradition of knowledge” from Central Asia with the tradition of knowledge of Melanesia (the conjurer). One central difference between the “guru” and the “conjurer” is that whereas the conjurer’s knowledge is tied to specific contexts and particular performances, the guru: “influence the acts of others by means of abstracted, verbalized, capsuled and transportable injunctions...His characteristic product is composed of words—a highly decontextualized form of knowledge” (Barth 1990: 649–650). The guru thus: “transmits a message” and “[his] cultural reproduction [happens] through systematic and perpetual activity as an educator” (ibid.: 642). So, according to Barth, the guru is an educator who guards and transmits a “knowledge tradition.”

This model of the guru, however, seems to be much too intellectual and rationalistic to fit the contemporary “business guru.” As pointed out above, the business guru’s influence crucially depends not only on a careful transmission of a textual message but on bravura stage acts. The attraction of Tom Peters and Donald Trump rests on their provocative performance. It is through an anxiety-inducing unpredictability in their public appearances that they mesmerize their audience. Such spectacular person-centred performances and disregard for fact seem to run counter to current Foucauldian analyses of neoliberal discourse and the careful and subtle control through governmental technologies that they describe. The registers of power of the likes of Donald Trump and Tom Peters do not appear to depend on the “power-knowledge” nexus and discrete use of scientific expertise to “optimize” the population. On the contrary, it is

precisely the questioning of “expertise” that is their trademark. It is notable that despite its record book sales and wide influence, the “management knowledge tradition” does not have a very high public or academic esteem: It is seen to be superficial and faddish, and it is famous for making dubious claims. And this is even admitted by management thinkers themselves. As leading guru Peter Drucker once remarked, “people use the word ‘guru’ only because they do not want to say ‘charlatan’” (quoted in Micklethwait and Woolgar 1996: 11).

Tom Peters who has earned himself a reputation as “the business guru” par excellence (Thrift 2005), the “uber-guru” of management (*The Economist* 2002), or the “ur-guru” of management (*Fortune Magazine* cited in Collins 2008: 317), and whose best-seller *In Search of Excellence* is described as “a ground-breaking guru text,” is known for his “powerful” and “passionate” performances full of “demonic energy” (Clark and Salaman 1996: 87), for being a “master of rhetorical strategy” (McWilliam et al. 1999: 58), and for his provocative denouncement and outrageous “confessions.” For instance, Peters who as earlier mentioned built his reputation on the claim that “culture” was the “essential quality” (1982: 75) of excellent companies, a decade later, said that “We didn’t know what culture was then, and sure as hell we don’t know what it is now,” adding for the benefit of those who like it in hard figures: “About 90 percent of the training and consulting money that has been spent on culture change... has been thrown down the drain” (BBC video, 1995) (Bate 1997: 1149). And his confessions continued: “This is pretty small beer, but for what it’s worth. Okay, I confess: We faked the data” (Greatbatch and Clark 2003: 397). None of which seems to matter, much as Trump’s much-observed disdain for verifiable facts and his seemingly open embrace of the practice of changing the facts to suit the message does not seem to matter to those supporters who have a deeper belief in a charismatic authority whose power is enhanced rather than diminished by the ability of its holder to shrug off the mere inconvenience of being proved to be factually wrong or deliberately misleading. What matters is the self-cultivation of the kind of person who can convince others that he has the power to magically hold these contradictions within himself. For Peters this is the cultivation of an entrepreneurial, “new subject” who “is *self-centered*, flexible, adaptable, associated with winners, active and in need of intrinsic

rewards.” The parallels with Trump’s vision of himself could hardly be clearer. For Peters and Waterman (1982:11), the embrace of the irrational side of human nature, encapsulated in “soft” skills, in the service of economic rationality led them to proudly proclaim that “soft is hard,” a slogan whose resonances with the Orwellian proclamations “War is Peace, Freedom is Slavery, Ignorance is War” are clear.

It is the same disregard for consistency and fact that Donald Trump has repeatedly demonstrated in his political career, but that goes back a long time. In *The Art of the Deal* (1987), Trump lists 11 criteria of his success as an entrepreneur. Under the headline “maximise your options,” one of his criteria reads: “I also protect myself by being flexible. I never get too attached to one deal or one approach” (ibid. 50), and under another headline—“Get the Word Out”—he emphasizes how important it is to be “sensational”: “The point is that if you are a little different, or a little outrageous, or if you do things that are bold or controversial, the press is going to write about you” (ibid.: 56). Trump’s attachment to flexibility may appear to be in striking contrast to his rejection of the prevailing orthodoxies of flexible capitalism based on global free trade, the reduction of tariffs, and the flexibilization of labour to be replaced with rigid borders and controls on the movement of goods and people. But when viewed from another perspective, the ability to force through any seeming contradiction by force of will can appear to be another sign of his charismatic power. For those who wish to buy into it, every contradiction that he ignores can just as easily bolster this power as it might diminish it.

Make America Great Again: Trump’s Populism

In his book *The World Is Flat* (2007), New York Times columnist and pundit of investor capitalist globalization, Thomas Friedman, ventured that the date people would remember a hundred years from now was not 9.11, but 11.9—Not the attack on Twin Towers but the day in November 1989 in Berlin which inaugurated “The New Age of Creativity, When the Walls Came Down, and the [Microsoft] Windows Went Up” (Friedman 2005: 51). It is ironic that 27 years later, on the same date in November, people woke up to the news that Donald Trump was the new US

president—partly due to his promise to build a wall. The wall is a suggestive symbol and a strong reminder that globalization is not the result of irreversible market forces but the consequence of politicians signing free trade agreements and endorsing neoliberal policies of economic deregulation that worked to the disadvantage of the majority of Americans (Stiglitz 2011). Trump's promise to build a wall plays together with his protectionist policies to give hope to white workers. It reinstates a long-lost sense of agency in a "globalized knowledge economy," which had long been presented by the neoliberal establishment as destiny pure and simple.

As revealed above in his self-presentation and introductory framing of "The Apprentice," Trump endorses and epitomizes on the one hand a law-of-the-jungle Capitalism and on the other a contradictory position in which certain members of society who are victims of that logic are protected from its antisocial effects. Far from being a position that Trump simply adopted for his successful presidential campaign, this has long been a central component of his public persona. In the opening pages of *The Art of the Deal*, Trump boasts of the way in which he uses his fame and influence in order to bully a regional bank manager into not foreclosing the mortgage of "Mrs Hill," a recently widowed small farm owner. Trump held the banker responsible for the suicide of the husband and reports: "It was a very sad situation and I was moved. Here were people who had worked very hard and honestly all their lives, only to see it all crumble before them. To me it just seemed wrong" (Trump and Schwartz 1987: 4).

Trump's empathy stands in stark contrast to his response on the campaign trail nearly 30 years on when attacked by Hilary Clinton for saying in 2006 that he hoped that the housing market would collapse as it would be an opportunity for people like him to buy cheap and make money. Clinton's observation that this led to five million people losing their homes, left Trump strangely unmoved by comparison to the one widow on whose behalf he had threatened to launch a private prosecution for murder. "That's called business, by the way," was all that he could be bothered to offer in response. For defenders of a shrinking liberal political centre ground, such inconsistencies are fuel for attack, and it is often possible to sense the palpable frustration and amazement that such glaring contradictions do not render Trump unelectable. But what if the ability to

sustain and contain contradictions that other more conventional politicians are forced to negotiate is precisely the core of Trump's appeal?

Today the American Working Class Is Going to Strike Back, Finally⁵

With his tendency to push market logic to its limit whilst ferociously defending some of its victims against its effects, Trump personally embodies what the great mid-twentieth-century economic historian and anthropologist, Karl Polanyi, referred to as “the double movement” (1944: 136ff) of capitalist societies that simultaneously moved to deepen the rule of the market whilst also producing counter trends that sought to protect some of society's members from its most antisocial effects. According to Polanyi, before the current era of capitalist modernity, economies were largely based on values of redistribution and reciprocity in which the market logic that today dominates economic theory and practice took a secondary role. But in the course of the so-called Great Transformation that ushered in the modern age, market values came to be increasingly “disembedded” from other kinds of economic value and were allowed to play an increasingly predominant role in all aspects of social life, turning everything, including land and labour, into goods and calling upon individuals to become utility-seeking maximizers in a winner-takes-all competition with others on the market. Polanyi argued that this process would lead to massive social dislocation and inequalities that would inevitably cause public discontent and popular resistance. Movements such as trade unions and agitation to limit the length of the working day in the nineteenth century or environmental activism and debt cancellation campaigns today are examples of the kind of activities by which sections of society seek to push back against the damage that can be caused by unbridled competition. In Polanyi's account, this ongoing double movement tends to pit sections of society against each other, with pro-market forces including businesses and governments often being lined up against opponents such as unions or other activist groups (ibid.: 138).

This is a process of enduring social conflict over the relative importance that market values or movements resistant to their worst effects should

have in any context. What Trump offers is the fantasy that by virtue of his own charisma and personal strength one man can embody and contain that contradiction on behalf of those who suffer. The logic of competition, championed by Trump, that has led many middle-class Americans to fear that they are about to be cast into the ranks of the losers does not need to be fundamentally challenged at a social level for them to be protected. Trump can contain the contradiction of the double movement within himself. His ability to make contradictory statements that both celebrate and reject the intensification of a winner-take-all competition does not lessen his credibility among those who want to believe. Far from it. It is the implicit promise that his lack of coherence communicates underneath its overt message that is the heart of his appeal.— Others are limited to one side of the contradiction or another, but I alone can rise above and contain it within myself. I alone can intensify the brutal competitive game of winners and losers that leads to greater wealth whilst protecting those who believe in me from its effects. I alone can save you.

Trump the Tycoon Trickster

It is this ability to convince a section of the population that he is able to contain this contradiction within himself that is the source of Trump's charismatic appeal. In this regard, Trump operates as a kind of "trickster figure," a mythical figure whose attraction and fascination lies in their ability to embody two structurally opposed principles within their single person (Martin and Krause-Jensen 2017). Evans-Pritchard (1967) wrote about the Zande trickster "Ture" who was represented as a "spider" (incidentally also a favoured image of the capitalist Tycoon) who is seen as clever, but also as someone who is adulterous, who steals, and who does the opposite of what Zande morals prescribe—that he represents the Azande's unconscious desires. In every society, the trickster figure incarnates an oxymoronic mood or a "fooling around" that plays at the "unthinkable" and thereby *suggests* new (im)possible logics. The classic "trickster" figures best known in anthropology are those of North American native groups, most famously analysed by Claude Lévi-Strauss. For Lévi-Strauss (1963), trickster animals, immortalized in these groups' myths, gained their power from their embodiment of contradictory tendencies

whose incompatibility proved to be a source of discomfort in human life. For example, Lévi-Strauss analyses the power of archetypal trickster animals, such as the coyote or raven, to lie in the ways in which their habit of eating carrion means that they do not kill (like herbivores) but do eat flesh (like carnivores), thus embodying within themselves the opposition between practices such as horticulture that sustain life without killing and practices such as hunting that sustain life through the taking of other life. Hence, the trickster animal embodies within its very being the irreconcilable opposition of Life and Death fundamental to our very existence. Even many of those who have questioned the details of Lévi-Strauss' analysis have accepted the basic underlying premise that tricksters mediate and contain structurally opposed principles within themselves (e.g. Carroll 1981). The importance of Lévi-Strauss' intervention does not lie in the particular structural oppositions that he sees tricksters as mediating, but in the underlying principle that the trickster contains such difficult oppositions within his person in a manner that appeals to those struggling with those oppositions. The opposing tendencies encapsulated in Polanyi's double movement form a structural opposition as difficult to contain, and as much in need of a mythical figure to contain them, as any of the oppositions described by Lévi-Strauss for North American tricksters. Trump is a North American trickster of a very different and contemporary type but one whose fundamental character is not too far removed from Carroll's (1981: 310) description of the traditional North American trickster as "a selfish buffoon" who is also a transformer of the social relations that make society possible.

Trump's Charisma

Trump never held office and claims not to be part of the political establishment, although he admits that his initial breaks into the Manhattan real estate business were enabled by shady relations with local Democratic politicians, and as recently as 2005, the Clintons were guests at Trump's wedding and he had previously donated to their election campaigns. Nonetheless, he presents himself as coming from another world and as drawing on a different kind of charismatic power and authority.

According to the German social theorist, Max Weber, such charismatic authority often occurs in periods of social transformation. It promises change and distinguishes itself from bureaucratic and traditional forms of authority by being “inimical to rules,” renouncing establishment and “repudiating involvement in the everyday routine world” (Weber 1947: 362). Again, this has been central to Trump’s public persona from the early days. Echoing Tom Peters’ paean to “chaos” published in the same year, Trump announces: “Most people are surprised by how I work. I play it very loose... You can’t be imaginative or entrepreneurial if you’ve got too much structure. I prefer to come to work each day and just see what develops” (Trump and Schwartz 1987: 1).

Charismatic authority does not obey Aristotelian principles of logic, and it is foreign not only to rules but to everything that smacks of method, systematics, and calculative rationality. It doesn’t need to attend daily intelligence briefings because it is “smart enough already.” Such charismatic authority plays on being “extraordinary,” or, as Weber put it, the charismatic leader is “das ewig Neue” (Weber 1988: 481) (the eternal new), implying a double movement that at once appeals to some unchanging, essential, and often nativist understanding of “the people,” whilst at the same time promising to preserve that essential nature through the performance of permanent radical rupture. One curious feature of revolutionary movements is that in order to move forward, they must go back. Re-revolution means a deep, radical, qualitative change, but revolution also means turning around, moving back to a starting point (Krause-Jensen 2010: 128). It is characteristic of revolutionary rhetoric, then, that its argument is centred on reclaiming a healthy essence, assumed to be lost—*Make America Great Again*.

Bubbles

Weber emphasized that charismatic authority rejects economy and economic gain (1947: 362), and this seems to be at odds with Trump whose exploits as a business entrepreneur is the most obvious source of his charisma. The market economy, however, has changed since Polanyi and Weber wrote. In the first place, with the rise of consumer capitalism’s fetishizing

of the “brand,” the economic world has seen a “re-enchantment” that Weber did not anticipate. Secondly, the economy has been disembedded in a sense and to an extent that might have surprised even Polanyi. The financialization of the economy has meant a process where “paper entrepreneurialism” (rent-seeking) has supplanted goods production as the preferred mode of accumulation (Harvey 2005: 168). Indeed, rather than seeing economy and charismatic authority as antithetical, there seems to be a connection between the economic volatilities of “casino capitalism” and charismatic authority.

The term “casino capitalism”—Trump did earn much of his fortune from casinos—is originally attributed to Keynes, who also made a relevant distinction between “investment” and “speculation.” Investment is driven by an expectation in the rise of a company’s profit over an extended period, whereas speculation is motivated by an expectation in the rise of the company’s value within a limited period. Keynes famously captured the difference between the two in his “beauty-contest allegory”—also strangely appropriate in the case of Trump who has been the owner of the Miss Universe competition:

professional investment [speculation] may be likened to those newspaper competitions in which the competitors have to pick out the six prettiest faces from a hundred photographs, the prize being awarded to the competitor whose choice most nearly corresponds to the average preferences of the competitors as a whole; so that each competitor has to pick, not those faces which he himself finds prettiest, but those which he thinks likeliest to catch the fancy of the other competitors, all of whom are looking at the problem from the same point of view. It is not a case of choosing those which, to the best of one’s judgment, are really the prettiest, nor even those which average opinion genuinely thinks the prettiest. We have reached the third degree where we devote our intelligences to anticipating what average opinion expects the average opinion to be. (Keynes 1964 [1936]: 156)

Norwegian anthropologist Tian Sørhaug (2004) has pointed out the affinity between speculative economic “bubbles” and charismatic “authority bubbles.” Both rest on attribution: In speculative or bubble economies, the distinction between value attribution and value creation is blurred. Bubbles are built on speculation rather than investment. Trump

is the embodiment of “the name economy”—his name is a brand. And in branding the name’s value is the result of pure attribution: The brand is the good’s “charisma,” and charisma depends on continuously renewing itself. It depends on spectacular performance.

In an article about Trump’s rhetoric and performance before he was elected president, Karen Hall et al. point out how Trump’s performances and branding tactics should be seen in light of his close involvement with two forms of public entertainment. Apart from the Miss Universe competition mentioned above, Trump also has a long-term connection with World Wrestling Entertainment, and during presidential debates he was inspired from this particular performative genre: “Trump’s reduction of competitors to nicknames like ‘Low Energy Jeb,’ ‘Little Marco,’ ‘Lyn’ Ted,’ ‘Pocahontas,’ and ‘Crooked Hillary’ is a comparable branding tactic used for decades in this industry” (2016: 81).⁶

In his classic cultural critique *Mythologies* from 1957, French semiotician Roland Barthes analysed examples of modern myths, and the first essay in his book is about “professional wrestling.” Barthes starts by establishing that wrestling is not a sport but a spectacle which resembles theatrical forms like Commedia dell’arte with stock exaggerated characters, and he elaborates on the difference by comparing wrestling to boxing:

The public is completely uninterested in knowing whether the contest is rigged or not...it abandons itself to the virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences: what matters is not what it thinks but what it sees. This public knows very well the distinction between wrestling and boxing; it knows that boxing is a Jansenist sport, based on a demonstration of excellence. One can bet on the outcome of a boxing-match: with wrestling, it would make no sense. A boxing-match is a story which is constructed before the eyes of the spectator; in wrestling, on the contrary, it is each moment which is intelligible, not the passage of time... The logical conclusion of the contest does not interest the wrestling-fan... wrestling is a sum of spectacles, of which no single one is a function: each moment imposes the total knowledge of a passion which rises erect and alone. (Barthes 1972 [1957]: 15–16)

Wrestling is based on “grandiloquence” and “excessive gestures,” and Barthes adds: “Each sign in Wrestling is endowed with absolute clarity,

since one must always understand everything on the spot" (ibid.: 16–17). In his analysis of Trump's performance during the presidential debate, political commentator Judd Legum draws on Barthes to explain his performative effectiveness: "In the current campaign, Trump is behaving like a professional wrestler while Trump's opponents are conducting the race like a boxing match. As the rest of the field measures up their next jab, Trump decks them over the head with a metal chair" (Legum 2015). For his base of supporters, revealing the "facts" behind his performance is as potentially irrelevant as pointing out the "truth" that shamanic performance is "faked," famously discussed by both Boas and Lévi-Strauss (1963). As long as the performance is intended to have an emotional effect that mobilizes its audience, then its effectiveness is its own truth for those who participate.

The Full Magic Circle

Anthropologists today sometimes use their material and comparative analysis to upset common oppositions between "the West" and "the Rest." For instance, they might disrupt the distinction between magic and modernity (in this case read "capitalism") by pointing out, on the one hand, how occult and magical practices are products of modernity and, on the other, how magic is an integral part of capitalism rather than its antithesis—as is also a central theme in this volume. In an exemplary analysis of this kind, anthropologist and Africanist Peter Geschiere (2003) compared the roles of African witch doctors and US spin doctors. He first pointed out how common descriptions of the way witchdoctors and the "occult" are integral parts of African politics carried the implication that Africa was "the heart of Darkness" and consequently that "Western" politics were "transparent, scientific and rational" (Geschiere 2003: 162). He then used his comparative analysis of spin doctors in the US and witch doctors in Nigeria to sabotage such simplistic West/Rest::rational/irrational dichotomies. The necessity of making such an argument already seems a bit dated, however, as the triumph of Trump has effectively put a stop to any comforting illusions of rationality and factuality anyone might still have about politics in the Western world.

As pointed out in the introduction to this volume, the phenomenon of magic plays on a skilful interplay of revelation and concealment. In many ways it would seem misplaced to attribute the sophisticated dialectics of secrecy and revelation and the complex game of truth and falsehood to Donald Trump. Donald Trump presents himself rather like a postmodern version of Martin Luther. He comes forward as a politician who doesn't preach Latin from the podium but uses the street language of the common man. It is all surface. It is all "vulgarity" and, as in the semiotics of the wrestling match, there seems to be nothing behind or underneath it. But if we see Trump as a trickster and accept the idea that magic is concerned with concealment, it is pertinent to ask what sort of concealment can be found in Trump's permanent exposure and *ob-scenities*? As pointed out above the "fact" that "he tells it as it is" counts for more than "factual truth." However, his performance itself can equally be seen as one big diversion. While we focus on Trump—watch and describe him, satirize and analyse him—his administration proceeds with less scrutiny, and laws and policies are passed that endanger the climate and bring more power to the elite.⁷

Look Closer at the Audience, Not the Performer

The election of Trump is an eerie development into a post-factual world of show politics. How, so many people ask, could people vote for a racist, mysoginist, megalomaniac? Many commentators have pointed out how his buffoonish behaviour appealed to a working-class habitus. To some, his unpredictable TV appearances and his *faux pas* were like a breath of fresh air in a spin-doctored, tele-prompted, and opinion-poll political establishment, much as Nigel Farage's beer-swilling man of the people persona in the UK was on occasion enhanced by such confessions as his lack of knowledge of or interest in the contents of his own party's election manifesto. The fact that Trump "says what he thinks" came to represent a truthfulness, which to many counted more than consistency and factual truth. Trump's victory can be explained through his performative

charisma and his masterful deployment of showman tactics learned through his long-term celebrity and engagement in beauty contests, wrestling leagues, and reality shows (see Hall et al. 2016). But such insights bring us only halfway: focusing exclusively on spectacle and performance might prevent us from drawing the most important lessons. Putting our focus there would be comfortable, because we might then explain Trump's victory as sleight-of-hand—as deceit. Such an explanation might again lead us to embrace the view that “we” know better than “they” (Trump's voters) why they voted the way they did and that “we” can see the inconsistencies that “they” are incapable of grasping. But perhaps, as Norwegian commentator Terje Tvedt (2016) has remarked, it is not the world that is out of joint but our perspectives. Simply dismissing “the Trumpenproletariat” and their thoughts and actions as being those of people too backward, racist, or stupid to see that they are being conned only reinforces the message that those of us who are opposed to Trump do it from a position of elite snobbery and lack of concern for the all too real problems of those such as Mrs. Hill who Trump claims to protect and champion. Anthropologists and liberal academics have found it all too easy over the years to sympathize with Others whose difference to ourselves is refreshingly exotic and whose distance from who we imagine ourselves to be is reassuringly great. The real test of our ability to respect difference will be to take seriously those Others disturbingly close to home even while we try to advance a very different set of solutions to the political and economic crises of our times.

Notes

1. Foucault made a distinction between different modalities of power. One was “sovereignty.” Another was “discipline,” the continuous exercise of power through supervision, individualization and normalization—and the third was “governmentality,” a particular disciplinary modality playing on the desires and wants of the subjects to make them “want to do what they should” (Rose 1999: 23).
2. There is a wide body of academic literature analysing the so-called business guru. See, for example, Hilmer and Donaldson (1996), Micklethwait

- and Wooldridge (1996), Kieser (1997), Jackson and Carter (1998), Collins (2000), Jackson (2001), Huczynski (2006), McKenna (2006), Collins (2008), Canato and Giangreco (2011).
3. Peters' strong attachment to the idea of the liberating and productive power of disruption or the idea of a revolution against the established order, consciously drawing on tropes from counter-cultural social movements of earlier decades can be seen in the titles of many of his subsequent books such as *Liberation Management* (1992), *The Tom Peters Seminar: Crazy Times Call for Crazy Organizations* (1993), and *Re-Imagine: Business Excellence in a Disruptive Age* (2003).
 4. And the tongue-in-cheek flirt with left-wing rhetoric was not confined to Peter's bravado performances. For instance, the Danish producer of high-end electronics defined their seven Company Identity Components in a small booklet called "the little red" distributed to all new employees (Krause-Jensen 2010: 96–97).
 5. Donald Trump; final campaign rally. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 07.11.2016.
 6. It is common among professional wrestlers to patent particular signature body movements. In line with this Donald Trump has tried to attain copyrights to his notorious pointing-finger-"you're fired"-gesture that ended each episode of *The Apprentice* (Mogensen 2016: 77).
 7. Examples are legion, but here are a few from the last two weeks of October 2017—attempts to pass a law deregulating banks by giving them the right to demand of costumers that they sign non-litigation agreements before they issue loans; and eliminating environmental controls (fishing industry along the coast); efforts to prohibit scientists to talk at conferences, and so on.

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5

Fetish, Magic, Marketing

Eric Arnould, Julien Cayla, and Delphine Dion

Since Weber's ([1922] 2013) magnum opus, an immense literature has propounded a rationalist, universalizing, utilitarian theory of business, marketing, consumer behaviour, and society as a whole. Critiques come from anti-utilitarian social theory,¹ economic sociology (e.g. Zelizer 2011), and general social theory (Latour 1993, 2010; Miller 1987). Euro-American marketing scholarship has largely ignored these critiques. This chapter argues that magical thought and action, supposed by modernist theory to be in decline, is foundational in marketing practice. In

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this way, this chapter responds to calls to identify the specific forms of “the magic of modernity—those enchantments that are produced by practices culturally specific to modern ... economies, and societies” (Pels 2003: 5).

Many researchers have examined the relevance of magic to modern-day consumption (Arnould et al. 1999; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; Meyer 2003). Thus, Belk (1991: 17) pointedly observes that:

We reside in magic places and make pilgrimages to even more magical places. We eat magic foods, own magic pets, and envelop ourselves in the magic of films, television and books. We court magic in a plethora of material loci that cumulatively compel us to conclude that the rational possessor is a myth that can no longer be sustained. It fails because it denies the inescapable and essential mysteriousness of our existence.

We might substitute Belk’s term mysteriousness with fascination, which as Freud suggested is the mode of apprehension appropriate to fetishism. The presence of an object that is compelling but remains opaque fulfils our sense of fascination, unlike curiosity or scientific investigation that stimulates further action. Opacity is the key characteristic of the capitalist commodity that for consumer culture dissimulates actual social relations behind appearances (Mulhern 2007).

Ideas about fetishism and magic can be put together with conceptions of materiality and performativity to provide a revived magical theoretical template appropriate to market capitalism to show that magical thought and action is not only present in, but perhaps necessary to, contemporary social life (Meyer and Pels 2003) as well as marketing practice. In the sections that follow, we present briefly some theoretical ideas about magic from anthropology, link them to two examples, and finally offer a discussion linking fetishism, magic, performativity, and materiality.

The Consumer as Organizational Fetish

A good example of a magical object is a fetish. Previous theory argues that the fetish mediates incommensurate worlds, whether cultural (Pietz 1985, 1987, 1988), between humans and a transcendent environment

(Pels 1998) or between labour and capital (Marx 1974; Pietz 1988). Common to these uses is the idea of singular, material objects “believed to be endowed with purpose, intention, and a direct power over material life” (Pietz 1988: 106) and which can “deflect the course of human traffic” (Pels 1998: 95). How might these ideas relate to consumers?

The consumer has become the object of intense corporate interest, with scholars equating the hyper-centricity of consumer desires as the “cult(ure)” of the consumer pervading organizations (du Gay and Salaman 1992). Modern organizations are replete with talk, images, and tangible manifestations of consumers (Cayla 2013; Cayla and Peñaloza 2012; Mazzarella 2003). Beyond organizations, the diffusion of consumer-centricity has expanded to various spheres of contemporary society (Moor 2011; Kennedy et al. 2003). The consumer has become “a god-like figure, before whom markets and politicians alike bow” (Gabriel and Lang 2006: 1).

Instead of operating as an unproblematic translation of consumer needs into marketing actions, several scholars have demonstrated the nefarious effects of consumer hyper-centricity on societal welfare (Applbaum 2011; Moor 2011). Yet, beyond an institutional approach to understanding this phenomenon (Varman et al. 2011), we must also try to understand the affective hold that consumers, transformed into fetishes, can have on organizational actors.

Our research on the consumer as organizational fetish is part of a larger research programme to understand the way consumers live within organizations, particularly within the realms of advertising (Cayla 2013; Cayla and Peñaloza 2012), brand consulting agencies (Cayla and Eckhardt 2008), and market research (Arnould and Cayla 2015; Cayla and Arnould 2013).

As part of our research on the way commercial ethnography lives within the walls of corporations (Cayla and Arnould 2013), we became especially interested in understanding the power that the image, voices, and other representations of consumers could have on organizational members. Gabriel and Lang (2006) had already alluded to the current obsession with consumers in firms, government, and academia stating that “the consumer has become a cultural fetish, something that people get obsessed about to the point at which it can dominate their lives” (p. 187).

Our findings build on this suggestion to detail several parallels between the fetishization of consumers and the fetishization of objects (Ellen 1988; Pels 1998; Pietz 1985, 1987, 1988). Specifically, four moments in the fetishization of consumers appear: (1) the fetish as a material embodiment of the market; (2) the consumer-fetish as a boundary object mediating between the organization and an imagined market; (3) the animation of consumer-fetishes into sensuous enlivened objects; and (4) an agentic dimension of consumer-fetishes as they influence organizational members.

Organizations deploy various market research tools to bring the consumer materially into the corporation. Visualization, materialization, and personification are specific techniques. These techniques—which we term “making fetish,” following original seventeenth-century usage—produce autonomous commercial facts—“factishes”—whose making is soon forgotten (Latour 2010).

As part of this research, we were intrigued especially by the ubiquity and power of video as a market research tool. Organizational actors made recurring references to video’s ability to bring “consumers to life” and produce “real consumers.” Beyond the fact that video enables a more multi-dimensional and sensory rendering of consumers’ lives that facilitates narrative transportation (Green and Brock 2000), we saw, in their reactions to watching videos, something quasi-magical and powerful.

For instance, in an interview we conducted at a major household care company, a research executive talked to us about the way her team ritualistically and exhaustively videotaped consumer behaviours and encounters:

When I say we videotape everything, we videotape e-ve-ry-thing. Whenever we’re talking to a consumer, whether it’s in their home or in the grocery store, if we get permission from a store to do consumer work, we’re videotaping ... I purchased a video camera for our team, because we videotape everything now. (Janet, senior research manager, Upstate Care; emphasis in the original)

Consumer videography that produces material visual artefacts is ubiquitous in market research for market-oriented firms. No effort is spared to

produce “deep” narrative detail, materially captured and assimilated, as an executive involved in these projects shared with us below:

Then the baton passes to us and we say “we’re going to go deep on these segments now so we will go out to maybe five countries and we’ll spend a day and a half with each person who represents that segment. We’ll do a two-hour-long introductory interview and then we’ll come back and spend a whole day with them, sometimes from 7am to 10 o’clock at night. So we collect this very rich contextual data *and we bring it back to the office*. (Diana, manager of user experience, software company; emphasis added)

In the quote above, Diana emphasizes the necessity to “go deep on these segments.” Many of the projects that executives talked to us about involved working from existing marketing segmentation projects and trying to add narrative detail to these segments. The intensity of these projects (spending the whole day from “7am to 10 o’clock at night” with a particular person) is directly related to this organizational imperative of adding narrative detail to large quantitative survey-based results. Note though, that such research focuses on “each person who represents that segment” rather than trying to place that person in a larger socio-cultural context. The focus of commercial ethnography is often to materialize “the consumer” rather than the market relationships framing consumer culture.

While various technologies and artefacts (video, PowerPoint presentations, cardboard cut-outs, posters) enable organizations to bring the consumer materially into the corporation, videography seems to play a critical role in materializing the consumer. Many of our research participants shared their enthusiasm about the ability of ethnographic films to bring “to life” a specific type of consumer who is there to give “quotes”:

Recently we went into people’s homes for some research and we filmed everything from where they kept the product to what kind of glasses they served it in. We filmed them giving us quotes and the purpose of that is *really to bring the consumer to life* when we come back into the Brand team. (Janet, consumer planner, British Spirits)

Amalgamated video clips become ubiquitous artefacts of finished commercial ethnographies. Amalgamated snippets, like the heterogeneous nuts, bones, bits of string, nails, rosaries, mirrors, beads, fabric, and liquids that compose West African fetishes, and whose value escaped seventeenth-century European gold and slave traders (Pietz 1988: 10) are perlocutionary (Austin 1978). “Little individual clips which in and of themselves provide some sort of compelling evidence for the client” (Rick, ethnographer, Ethnographic Research Company). Videographic “quotes” provide evidence of, and materially shape, the imagined consumer.

Beyond visualizing and materializing, commercial ethnographers and their clients suggest that the research goal is to animate and enliven organizational spaces. Grace (consumer insights manager, American Bank) explained:

When the research company came back to present the findings, they had a PowerPoint presentation but embedded in the PowerPoint presentation were quotes *to bring to life* [emphasis added] what the consumer had said.

Similarly, Linda, an innovation consultant, talked about a project where the client asked her company to bring “a segment to life.” She mentioned the selective recruitment of exemplars and the careful staging employed to craft personas, as the client expected to widely circulate the end product (“show it to all their sales staff”):

If the objective is really about sort of *bringing a segment to life* we are going to be very picky about who we talk to, sort of *find the exemplary person* ... when clients explicitly state that they want a high end deliverable that they want to show it to all their sales staff, or to all their executive team, we’ll rent specialized equipment, we’ll work with a videographer, *we’ll stage it much more*. (Linda, VP of research, Upstate Consulting; emphasis added)

Video and consumer quotes help materialize the consumer by operating as sensuous forms of market figuration.

Beyond video as a particularly powerful technology to “bring the consumer to life,” persona-fication has become especially popular as a way to

materialize the elusive consumer within corporations. In Latin, the word *persona* refers to the mask an actor dons to play a character. In literary theory, *persona-fiction* refers to the narrative trope through which abstractions are given personalities (Paxson 1994). Advertising agencies use *persona* widely as shorthand narrative devices (Stern 1994). Within the walls of the firms we visited, we found that *persona-fiction* had become a standard organizational practice.

Hence, one ethnographer recounted how she became involved in a ritualized *persona-fiction* project in a high-tech company's drive to be "consumer focused":

So a VP comes in and says, "yeah, we need to be consumer focused, consumer-centred, and we need to use personas because they're really awesome" ... nobody really knows why you need to do it, or exactly how to do it or what you are actually supposed take from it. (Patti, user interaction researcher, Telecommunications Company)

In the same way that PowerPoint has come to occupy a central role in the process of strategy-making (Kaplan 2017: 320), *persona-fiction* has become an important technology to symbolize customer-centricity. What was especially surprising, though, was the way personas would often take on a life and a death of their own, detached from the process of meaning-making they were supposed to animate. Consistent with Patti's remarks above, a user researcher employed by a large American telecommunications firm talked about personas "floating" in the corporation and about organizational actors struggling to find meaningful uses for them:

Somebody had started the persona project a few years ago, so they were kind of floating but nobody really knows what to do with them. (Sabrina, user interaction researcher, Telecommunications Company)

Not unlike the *persona-fied* fetish created in mercantile West Africa, firms name consumer personas; detailed fictional narratives describe their lives, their likes and dislikes. The firms inscribe these details in booklets and posters that live inside company walls (Fig. 5.1) and appear in advertising as in the example of Antonella, the Ford factish (Fig. 5.2).



Fig. 5.1 Photo of persona developed in a corporate setting



Fig. 5.2 Ford factish

Animation and ambiguity of control are two final moments of fetishization (Ellen 1988).

Ambiguity of control refers to the ambiguous power relations between the animator and the fetish (Pietz 1988). Indeed, once personas are “brought to life,” they literally take on a life of their own. The visualization of the consumer through persona-fication triggers persuasive power that may trump other forms of knowledge, “because you can argue with what the words on the page say but you can’t argue with the video” (Matthew, vice president, market research company). Factishes become agentic boundary objects (Star 2010) that circulate in discourse and practice. Thus, Malcolm (VP of planning, advertising agency) described how organizational members identify with persona and how the factish’s circulation starts impacting on various company actors:

When we show the film, the client says [lowered voice] “Oh, I went to that ethnography, that’s my person. That’s my person, and I was there.” So there’s a real strong sense of identification.

Similarly, Coby (senior user researcher, American Bank) spoke of the bank’s personas “sitting” with other executives. Once consumer-factishes begin to circulate as boundary objects, they begin to anchor the action of partners and people outside of the groups that created them. Diana, a user experience manager at a software company, explained:

Personas are really powerful in our company. You take a consumer segment, and you give them a name and a face and you make that person come alive. For engineering teams this is really powerful ... everyone understands the consumer.

Hence at Diana’s firm, the persona has come to stand for “the consumer.” They have the “power” to direct product development teams. Once materialized and animated, the factish becomes part of a mutual entanglement with organizational members, where the factish’s vitality and power passes along to organizational members who feel “excited” and use the power of the fetish to “tell their other people about it.” Beyond fictional archetypes, persona become real, but they also become objects of

control. Employees should serve them; real people should behave like them. In the next section, we suggest that in consumer culture, other factishes also induce adoration and emulation.

Modern Magicians: Creative Directors in Luxury

As anthropologists have documented, magicians are undeniable figures of fascination who employ bodily techniques to modulate and attune words, sounds, objects, and other sensory elements of the environment to affect the behaviour and even the consciousness of their patients and targets (Novellino 2009). Magical intervention in material, immaterial, and social worlds has a number of characteristic features. First, magic provides evidence of contact with transcendent forces (Malinowski 1935; Mauss and Hubert [1902] 1972). Second, it incorporates ritualized, rhetorical words sometimes glossed as “spells” which are not unlike commercial speech (McCreery 1995) and clearly perlocutionary in intent (Austin 1978): that is, to do by saying. Third, magic entails non-discursive, embodied acts intended to persuade a particular audience of the efficacy of performers’ words and deeds. Fourth, it requires engaged performers with charismatic characteristics, that is, transformational abilities (Pels 2003; Takala 2005). Fifth, magic transfers qualities among objects, whether persons, things, or other beings, through relations of similarity and contiguity, but it also attunes them one to another (Novellino 2009).

At the helm of many luxury brands stands a creative director who is presented as art lover and artist, brand underscoring his/her links to the world of art and to an aesthetic vision. By building on its links with art, luxury branding strategy accentuates both the aesthetic gift of the creator and also the singularity of that genius (Lipovetsky and Roux 2003). The artist creates new things; he or she moves towards the unknown in this quest for novelty; and transgresses prevailing aesthetic norms and regenerates them. Management and various cultural intermediaries incessantly associate creative directors with claims of creative skills and exceptional, transformational abilities:

Galliano's imagination, storytelling and research trips are legendary. Each season he searches the globe, travelling through cultures, continents, literature, the arts, fantasy, and the unexpected to innovate and pioneer new ideas. He brings the future, fantasy, and romance to life.²

Besides offering an aesthetic vision and creating the singular and original, the artistic director has also the magical power of creation (Dion and Arnould 2011). We find here the concept of transformative power (Becker 1982; Heinich 2004). The artist has the magic power to turn any object into an artwork by the force of his name, sanctioned by his recognition as an artist, which in turn, is infused by belief in his authenticity (Becker 1982; Bourdieu and Delsaut 1975). Thus, any object can be considered a work of art on condition that it results from the action of an artist; an artist who has been recognized as such by society, generally via processes of framing and performing of actions in conformity with generalized notions of artistic behaviour. Similarly, for luxury goods to attain the status of artworks and thereby highlight their auratic qualities, it is crucial their creator be recognized as an artist. He thereby acquires the magical power to transform an everyday object into a work of art.

This representation of the artistic director as artist/magician is vital to luxury brands. As Kapferer (1998: 5) argues, magic “deals with the forces of intentionality and its transmutations that are at the heart of the creation by human beings of their social ... worlds.” In this framework, we see the artistic director who not only passes on his/her revelation but also “transmutes” (rewrites) codes of beauty and creates a distinctive world, a “style” (Bourdieu and Delsaut 1975; Dion and Arnould 2011).

“Not just anybody can be a magician: the magician possesses qualities which distinguish him from common men” (Maus and Hubert [1902] 1972: 19). Like magicians, artistic directors stand apart, but not only by singular artistic gifts. They tend to distinguish themselves by projecting transgressive images (Takala 2005). Alexander McQueen evoked sado-masochistic themes.³ Gaultier made lingerie into outerwear. Marc Jacobs tweets about orgies and appeared naked in a fashion spread. Eilish Macintosh shows models tied in leather and rope.⁴

Galliano practices shape-shifting, appearing as a sequence of mythic characters tied to his collections: a Mad Hatter, a Bonaparte pirate

grotesque, a French street tough with a brassiere, even a conservative banker, or a cavalier.

Transgressing expectations about reality is dramatically illustrated by the talking Jean Paul Gaultier mannequin in the recent retrospectives in Montréal, Paris, London, Brooklyn, and San Francisco. Similarly, Karl Lagerfeld's costumes are so iconic—dark glasses, white shirt, fingerless gloves, ponytail—that he photographed a model dressed up as himself for the Harper's Bazaar March 2010 issue,⁵ and often repeats this gesture. Gaultier and Lagerfeld evoke magical doubling—magicians' ability to project simulacra—noted by Mauss and Hubert ([1902] 1972: 42–44).

As with traditional sorcerers, creative directors sacrifice for their powers (Kapferer 1998; Mauss and Hubert [1902] 1972; Stoller and Olkes 1987). Thus, many have difficult personal relationships (Chanel, Dolce, Gabbana, Jacobs, Galliano, Lagerfeld, McQueen, St Laurent, Versace). Creative directors sacrifice everything for their passion, for their art, thus:

Printemps Haussmann featured window displays with artistic directors, living artistic directors! They were obliged to spend several hours in the windows. Well, Karl Lagerfeld played along. He spent many hours in the display window ... many hours in the window at 90 degrees. He played the game and he loved it. He really gave of himself. But, he has given his life to this. (Sophie, merchandising director)

This discourse mixes ideas of singularity, sacrifice, dedication, and force of will (“many hours in the window,” “90 degrees”), all Romantic characteristics of artists/magicians. Again, with Lagerfeld, as with Jacobs and Galliano, informants evoke the creative director's exceptional, even magical, persona.

Public consecration is integral to the magician's authority (Mauss and Hubert [1902]: 50). At the source of magicians' power are publically recognized actions where beliefs are rooted and whence charismatic figures draw their authority (Bourdieu and Delsaut 1975; Mauss and Hubert [1902] 1993: 50; Takala 2005; Weber 1915). Similarly, to establish the artistic director's charismatic authority, it is important for there to be a consecration that simultaneously legitimizes the creator and his or her creations (Bourdieu and Delsaut 1975). This consecration takes place

through collective rituals. Fashion shows constitute the most important collective ritual for luxury brands and they are a major symbolic moment for them. There we find the principal properties of magical ritual: repetitive formal and normative sequencing and a ceremonial cadence (Mauss and Hubert [1902] 1993: 63; Sackrider 2006). The whole thing is “bizarre, involving artifice and unnatural features” (Mauss and Hubert [1902] 1972: 62): staging, actors (the freakish models), strategically positioned celebrity spectators, décor, stage design, and dramaturgy (a tense period of anticipation, a very intense display accentuated by visual and auditory effects that are like an adrenaline rush). Successful shows conclude with a Durkheimian collective frisson: applause for the designer. This is one way the creative directors’ charismatic auras are transmitted to their creations, and these transformed into what Baudrillard would call “the model,” a pre-commodity, in fact.

The artistic director never secures his/her charismatic authority definitively. It is constantly subject to test. If belief is not confirmed periodically and materially, it risks evaporating (Weber 1915). This explains why the twice-yearly fashion show ritually mediates between artistic directors and their special publics, and through which their artistic genius and its imaginary “dream” is legitimized:

People buy the dream, the immaterial, the impression of becoming chic. It is an accession to the immaterial. The dream, it must rely upon the real, it must be legitimate. Haute couture is there to maintain the dream. People project themselves into the models that wear the clothes in the shows. (manager, luxury)

Artistic directors must be sanctioned by “the authorities in the art world” (Becker 1982), that is to say, cultural intermediaries (McCracken 1989) who are authorized to decide for others, who have the authority to appreciate the work of artists, and to authenticate the artistic character of their work. Such intermediaries are qualified to sanction luxury brands because they too have an innate gift for doing so (artists) because they are in the know (journalists), or else they are opinion leaders (celebrities) (McCracken 1989; Sackrider 2006). All have acquired the cultural capital that allows them to consecrate the work (Becker 1982). Social media

has turned fashion models into powerful digital publishers, some of whom have far larger audiences than brands or traditional magazines. For instance, fashion model Liu Wen, China's most successful supermodel has over 3 million followers on Instagram alone. During the 2017 Paris Couture Week, she didn't walk in a single show. Instead, she sat front row at Chanel as part of her ambassadorship for the house where she shot and posted a video on social media.⁶ Diffusing a selfie with Karl Lagerfeld (Chanel artistic director) on social media wearing Chanel jacket and bag, Liu Wen secures the charismatic authority of the designer and reinforces his aura at the same time.

Transferring the designers' charismatic aura to the fashion, the fashion shows, and luxury boutiques enlists two laws of magic: contamination by similarity and by contiguity (Dion and Arnould 2011). The law of similarity stipulates that sympathetic effects are transmitted by actions: absorption, touch, infusion, and so forth (Mauss and Hubert 1902/1993). Similarly, when a person recognized as an artist lays his hands on a product it can be transmuted into a work of art through his intermediation (Heilbrunn 1999; Honnèf 1990; Millet 2006). Contamination by similarity can be carried out by any intermediary who has the legitimacy to do so (Mauss and Hubert 1902/1993). Insofar as the artistic director is accepted as an artist, he or she enjoys the legitimacy necessary to manipulate objects and transmit new properties to them. In addition, consistent with the principle of sympathetic magic, luxury brands enlist other artists to create works based on the brand. Chanel worked with the deconstructive architect Zaha Hadid, the conceptual artist Daniel Buren, and the multimedia artist Yoko Ono. Displayed both in museums and in the flagship boutiques, the aura of art is transferred to luxury. Recently, Vuitton collaborated with artist Jeff Koons, remixes the iconic artworks of the old masters such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Vincent Van Gogh, Titian, or Rubens.

Luxury brands contamination through similarity with the art world is conveyed through the flagship boutiques' architecture, which themselves are conceived of as works of art (Joy and Sherry 2003). Flagship boutique is now considered a distinctive architectural project: the Maison Hermès in Tokyo (2001), Prada in Tokyo (2003) and Los Angeles (2004), and

so forth. Star-architects are called on to design these stores: Renzo Piano for Hermès, Rem Koolhaas for Prada, Frank Gehry for Vuitton.

Flagship boutiques set up additional mechanisms for fostering contagion through similarity between brand and fine art. In their substantive staging, luxury brands deploy a range of formal mechanisms derived from the world of museums so that the commercial luxury object obtains the aura of non-commercial art works. Sales items and items drawn from the designer collections are placed on pedestals, shiny display cases are ubiquitous, lighting is focused on the objects, clients are placed at some physical distance from the items, and so forth (field notes). These museological techniques have been identified in other contexts (Peñaloza 1998; Borghini et al. 2009; Hollenbeck et al. 2008), but their use in luxury retailing is part of a holistic strategy designed to sanctify the creative director's vision, at the limit his or her lineage, not primarily the brand as in other retail contexts. Thus, art is not only in the object: it is also a mode of display that uses similarity to transfer meaning (Melot 1994). It is not the properties of the work of art that have been transmitted to the luxury goods, but rather things associated with works of art such as cases, lighting, pedestals, and so forth.

The second sympathetic law of magic—that is, the law of contiguity—states that elements once in contact may continue to affect one another across time and space even after contact is severed (Mauss and Hubert [1902] 1993; Newman et al. 2011). Simple contact between luxury objects and the world of art means that the former may acquire the properties of the latter. With a view to this, luxury brands include art at their flagship sales outlets. Works of art are installed even in the best in-store locations and the focus is on the artist's imprimatur. Through the intermediary of works of art on display at the point of sale, luxury products bathe in an artistic ambiance so that artistic properties will infuse and contaminate them but more importantly will continue to emanate from them after sale.

Thus luxury products bathe in a mysterious and artistic ambiance so that mystery and art will infuse and contaminate them, and will continue to emanate from them after sale (Wunenburger 2001). Central to this world is the artistic director, a figure of fascination, who attracts the gaze while obstructing the vision. The bourgeois luxury market is the jewel in

the crown of capital, the site where money and genius merge. As fetishized objects of fascination and adoration themselves and as producers of objects of fascination and adoration, artistic directors are the apotheosis of the commodity fetish. Behind the irreducible, even undeniable, false appearance of their art, the commodified social relations at the heart of capitalism are magically concealed (Mulhern 2007). Lest there be any doubt of the latter point, consider:

Under Slimane, Saint Laurent sales revenues more than doubled in just three years ... While at Lanvin, during Elbaz's 14-year tenure, the brand expanded from just 15 stockists to over 400 worldwide and estimated revenues of 250 million euros ... At Valentino, Pierpaolo Piccioli and Maria Grazia Chiuri pushing revenues to exceed the \$1 billion mark for the first time in 2015. At Dior, Simons' intellectual, modernist designs were a hit ... a 60 percent growth in revenues since 2011.⁷

Ethnological Reflections

Whether due to anthropology's lingering guilty conscience about its orientalizing legacy (Pels 2003) or magic's relative inaccessibility to ordinary scientific language, scholars may disparage studies of magic relative to those dealing with "serious" topics: inequality, imperialism, or conflict. But according to the examples above, capitalist firms turn to fetishes and magical action to bend the world to their way. Magic too is serious business; magical belief is not merely part of consumer experience (Arnould et al. 1999; Fernandez and Lastovicka 2011; Meyer 2003). If consumer culture is a "phantasmagoria" (Lash 2007: 6), the world of modern corporations, as well, is a world of dream and magic.

Performativity

Performativity is concerned with perlocutionary effects—how actions both say and do something (Austin 1978). Moreover, many actions both "cite" a cultural template and perform that template. Actions entail both citational template and performance; the performance cites or evokes the

template, but overflows that template in the sense of enacting meaningful variation on that template (Hodgson 2005). From the perspective of the anthropology of magic, what we have are spells, a bricolage of words and actions that produce material effects (Kapferer 1998; McCreery 1995).

It seems to us that both consumer videographers and artistic directors in their own ways are producers of magical spells in this sense. The collections, fashion shows, and heritage stores are material manifestations of a claim to define beauty and style, and to assert the charismatic authority of the artistic director (Dion and Arnould 2011). Weber had to allow for the possibility of non-rational transformational power in including charisma in his taxonomy (Weber 2013/1922). So it seems artistic directors are modern magicians in their uncanny ability to transcend commodity fetishism by recapturing both their labour and its product, in the form of their unique style (Baudrillard [1968] 2005; Bourdieu and Delsaut 1975). Brands try to impose their offerings on the market, not by responding to customer demand but by developing an aesthetic ideology that can be diffused to the consumer. The aim is that the bewitched consumer becomes a willing adorer. He or she becomes receptive to the codes of taste, beauty, and fashion that are proposed because this is the way that the creative director, at once creative artist and magical being, has defined these codes (Dion and Arnould 2011). This kind of symbolic domination is about accession to an “emotional community,” that relies not on constraint but on enthusiasm (see Arvidsson and Malossi 2011).

For their part, consistent with the tendency to express ideologies as personae (Pietz 1988: 119), consumer videographers and their clients let loose their persona-fied factishes to reorder behaviour and priorities within organizations. They assert who and what the “consumer” is and what the consumer does.

Materiality

Miller (1987, 2005) has repeatedly argued that material forms constitute that which they create; they are not mere covers, symbols, or surfaces. He points out that making the immaterial manifest is also a practice of explanation and persuasion. As both our cases show, material practices play a crucial role in ideological consolidation in rendering objects—whether

consumer factish or luxury brand—both intelligible and opaque. Moreover, designers' and consumer videographers' practices are figurative gestures that assert something about the nature of the world and various actors' roles in it. Commercial videographers transform persons into consumer persona—not representations of them, but exemplars. Through ritual, creative directors simultaneously produce and reproduce themselves (Hodgson 2005), and exemplars of luxury in the objects they bring forth. Again, haute couture does not symbolize luxury: it is a claim to be the thing itself.

Conclusion

Consistent with the anti-utilitarian critique of contemporary economic life, we have shown that magical practices are constitutive of two central marketing constructs: the consumer and the human luxury brand. Thus, as Kapferer argues, magic “deals with the forces of intentionality and its transmutations that are at the heart of the creation by human beings of their social and political worlds” (1998: 5). Marketing magic enacts relations between man and the transcendent, bringing consumer persona “to life” and manifesting luxurious ideals of the beautiful (Tambiah 1990: 106). Marketing magic is a practice of power, a non-rationalist strategy for resolving intractable problems (de Surgy 1997; Evans-Pritchard [1937] 1975; Malinowski 1935), creating the manageable consumer interlocutor and concealing commodity relations behind artful luxury. Finally, magic “restructures and integrates the minds and emotions of the actors” (Kapferer 1998; Tambiah 1968: 202), producing a change of state in the marketers fascinated by the persona or the fashionistas fascinated by the creative directors' artful commodities.

Notes

1. See <http://www.journaldumauss.net/>.
2. <http://www.johngalliano.com/> (accessed 12 May 2009)
3. <http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/alltherage/2011/03/paris-fashion-week-at-alexander-mcqueen-dresses-fit-for-a-queen.html>. (accessed 12 December 2016).

4. http://www.omgblog.com/2013/03/omg_knot_to_be_missed_eilish_m.php/#axzz3weFLLICp (accessed 26 July 2017).
5. www.chanel-news.com/en/page/2/ (accessed 15 March 2015).
6. <https://www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/models-the-new-power-publishers> (accessed 21 July 2017).
7. www.businessoffashion.com/articles/intelligence/thebigparissshakeup-saintlaurentlanvindiorandvalentino. Accessed October, 19, 2016.

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6

Magical Names: Glamour, Enchantment, and Illusion in Women's Fashion Magazines

Brian Moeran

This chapter is about the role of women's fashion magazines in creating and sustaining the fashion industry as a magical network, primarily through naming practices.¹ Fashion magazines are an integral part of the fashion industry and adopt numerous magical practices to enchant their readers into desiring, if not buying, fashionable clothing of all sorts, together with the accessories and beauty products advertised in their pages (*Spin a magic spell in dreamy dresses, cool capes, and beyond-the-veil headpieces*). These practices consist of textual and visual enchantments enacted by editors, photographers, stylists, art designers, makeup artists, and hair stylists employed by fashion magazines, as well as by their fashion and beauty advertisers, and the fashion designers whose work they portray. As such, fashion magazine practices parallel those found in magical and religious rites in general: they tend to have different agents performing them; and their performances take place in different locations and in different circumstances (secretly, in the case of studio fashion

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shoots; or in public, as with the six-monthly cycle of fashion collections) (Mauss 1972: 24).

Fashion magazines make use of professional magicians, who perform a series of magical practices (*weaving magical effects*), whose rites and spells are behind the fantasies (*the fantasy of this gently distressed style*), seduction (*prints with a seductive touch*), and transformations (*vixens who transform a black le smoking with a slick of merlot gloss*) characterizing the fashion and beauty industries (Lipovetsky 1994; Entwistle 2000).² Together, they sustain a “magical worldview” (*the magical expression of a fragrance*) (Wax and Wax 1963), in which spells (*spellbinding seduction*), rituals (*the crucial ingredient of a complete cleansing and purifying ritual*), and elixirs (*potent elixirs*) charm (*charming silhouette*), bewitch (*bewitching femininity*), mesmerize (*mesmerizing beauty*), captivate (*captivating features*), and entice (*enticing choice*) readers of fashion magazines with an *alchemy of refined and powerfully addictive contrasts* designed to give them *irresistible allure* and a *mysterious or seductive aura*.

The fashion network makes use of two kinds of agents in the performance of fashion: fashion houses and their designers, on the one hand, and fashion journalists, editors, bloggers, advertisers, marketers, and publicists, on the other.³ While the former provide the clothes they wish to be seen as fashion, the latter create the images that make them so with the public. In order for designers to be known and become world famous, they need to be legitimated by those who, like Anna Wintour of *Vogue*, have the power and authority to influence (Kawamura 2005: 72–73, 78).

The consecration takes place through the “orgy” of the biannual collections.⁴ It is at the collections that the *illusion*—that is to say, the *social*, rather than simply visual, illusion—of fashion is produced and reproduced, as inherently ambiguous matters of taste are spoken of with absolute certitude by players who know, and play by, the rules of the game: “the positions and statuses within the field, as well as their own capacities to maneuver within it” (Mears 2011: 168).

Fashion designers and the fashion press have long been rivals over which produces the images that define fashion. For fashion designers (and the houses they work for), the defining images lie in the shows they put on in order to sell their collections of clothing every season and to produce items of dress that will be selected by fashion editors, forecasters, and buyers, before being promoted as trends (Crane 2000: 165). For

their part, fashion magazine editors broker these catwalk images, while adding many more studio and location photographs, which they then frame with textual matter consisting of magical phrases and names. In this way, they act as cultural mediators (rather than mere intermediaries) between sellers, buyers, and onlookers: between magicians and their audience. The tension between these two image-creating institutions in the fashion system has led to a creative alliance, allowing fashion images to grow all the more powerful in contemporary society.

Enchanting Visions

The production and reception of fashion is a product of social cooperation among those who form “a community of faith” based on a collective belief—or misrecognition (Bourdieu 1993: 138)—in the power of “style.” It is this faith that drives the fashion system, for “style” is a constant (*ageless quality, grace and style*) that is over and above the necessary ephemerality of evolving fashion trends (*our editors spot the trends as they happen in real time*). Although its meaning is constantly being renegotiated, style grants “fashion” its licence to continue.

Those working for fashion magazines are specialists and experts in a particular branch of magic (Malinowski 1922: 410–411). They *see*, while remaining themselves invisible to outsiders (*the invisible backstage insiders who shape our wardrobes*); they publicize the unseen, and in many ways secret, world of fashion design (*fashion’s dark angel takes flight*) (Pels 2003: 3; Geschiere 2003). All of those whose work I write about in this chapter at one point or another talked to me about their “vision”—of a magazine’s contents and its brand, its cover, its layout, or of a feature story to be published there. Although fellow workers might try to persuade, dissuade, or otherwise advise, those concerned did their utmost to ward off such interferences and hold onto their vision. They wrestled with the vagaries of chance (e.g., a rival magazine title using the same model on its cover in the same month); they placed clear emphasis on feelings and instincts, as opposed to rational thought and logical arguments (*a dazzling whirl of new ways of seeing, dressing, hearing, feeling, and being*).

The fact that a vision is always subject to serendipity means that the end result of any part of magazine production is rarely foreseeable (*She*

just has some sort of magic juju). This is the irony of “vision.” People pass back and forth between work and magical practices (Malinowski 1954: 33), between rational explanations and “gut instincts” (*And then there’s that thing where you have to repurpose what you have. It’s a pain, but it makes you think about your clothes in a new way, which might be when something magical happens*), operating according to rules of enchantment, rather than of Weberian disenchantment (*Enchantment. Dark florals, cool velvet, and ravishing Victoriana*).

In order to understand the values, myths, and beliefs found in fashion-as-magical network, I am going to follow Alfred Gell in considering fashion and beauty as “components of technology.” In other words, as a category, the fashion magazine is the outcome of technical processes (writing, editing, design, photography, styling, modelling, etc.) which, like certain forms of art, have as their unified aim the *making of beauty and style*. Together, they are part of a gigantic technical system formed by the fashion and beauty industries, which make use of what Gell calls *technologies of enchantment* (Gell 1992: 43).

The power of fashion clothing and accessories stems from the technical processes they embody (*cutting glamorous evening fabrics into simple daywear shapes*). This means that technologies of enchantment are founded on our enchantment with technology: “the power that technical processes have of casting a spell over us so that we see the real world in an enchanted form” (ibid.: 44). Enchantment is integral to all sorts of fashion- and beauty-related activities and is practised by an *assemblage* (Latour 2005) of magical actors (as well as of materials, skills, knowledge, rites, and language), who are both enchanted by, and who utter their spells of enchantment over, the magical world in which they operate. (*Play dress up in seductive party wear that pairs dazzling prints and glittering finishes for a spellbinding look. The bewitching hour is now...*). In other words, the power of fashion lies in the *symbolic* processes surrounding fashion items, rather than in the items themselves, even though it is these that are exhibited, commented on, bought, and sold (*Donna wanted her delicate silk and chiffon dresses to be seductive and feminine*).⁵

These magicians of fashion and beauty (discussed elsewhere in this volume by Vangkilde, and Arnould, Cayle, and Dion) use technologies of enchantment as a means of thought control, since they entice us to see what might (or again, might not) be a naked king wearing fine clothes (*disguise*

your flaws). Like the canoe prow-boards used by the *kula* flotilla in the Trobriand Islands, fashion is not dazzling as a physical object so much as “a display of artistry explicable only in magical terms, something which has been produced by magical means” (ibid.: 46) (*broad shoulders create the illusion of a small waist*). It is how a fashion has come into existence—its becoming, rather than its being (*wild-and-woolly shearling will be worn by leaders of the pack as the mercury plummet*)—that is the source of its power over us (*social types will flit from table to table in this embroidered tulle confection*).

This is partly because the costs of achieving such effortless glamour—in other words, the cost of people’s labour—remain unseen (Postrel 2013: 81), and so allow people to be “seduced” by fashion, beauty, and consumerism in general (*Prepare to be seduced by Episode’s new accessories range*). This is where the idea of magic comes in. Throughout history, magic has accompanied uncertainty of whatever kind, in whatever part of the world (Gell 1992: 57). People adopt magical technologies of enchantment when preparing to go offshore fishing, planting yams in their gardens, pitching and batting in baseball, or designing fashion garments and the technical means used to produce them (*the designer used trompe l’oeil to add a necklace to a sweater*). It is the ideal means of representing the technical domain in enchanted form (*sheer fabrics and delicate trimmings are so alluring*).

The fashion designer, then, finds him (or her) self in an ambiguous position—“half-technician and half-mystagogue” (ibid.: 59)—in the fabrication of fashion. Precisely because the ordinary technical means she or he employs point inexorably towards magic (*a miracle of construction*), fashion magazines present them as enchanted (*as though the dresses were emerging from some enchanted forest*). They make us stand in awe of fashion, seeing it as an idealized form of production because we’re at a loss to explain how it comes into existence in the world in the first place (*romancing the collections*) (ibid.: 61–62). A matter of *vested interests*?

The Grammar of Glamour

The idea that fashion (or clothing) is a form of magic is not new, as any reader of the Bible (Adam and Eve) or children’s fairy tales (Cinderella) can readily surmise. “Dress, like drama, is descended from an ancient religious, mystical and magical past of ritual and worship... Even today

garments may acquire talismanic properties” (Wilson 1987: 21). Initially, it was their magical, rather than ornamental or decorative, properties that gave articles of clothing a meaning beyond their functional use (Flügel 1930: 72).

It’s clear that those writing for fashion magazines also regard fashion as in some sense “magical.” We find the word used to title fashion stories (*White Magic; Animal Magic*); describe new fashion collections (*Here’s how the costume designers, hair stylists, and makeup artists make the magic happen*) and individual garments (*Sleeves are magic. Now you see them, now you don’t*); (Fig. 6.1) and generally account for designers and their work (*The name Dior is absolutely magical*). Magazines cast numerological spells: *5 spring must-haves, 49 wanna-buy-now swimsuits, 138 figure-fixers, 275 objects of desire, and 394 smart ways to look sexy*. They ensorcel with *sassy suits, slinky jerseys, bold collars, saucy stilettos, and adventurous*



Fig. 6.1 Sleeves are magic

lingerie in *sleek* satin. They enchant with *alluring* accessories, *charming* trinkets, a *captivating* dress, a *glamorous* blouse, a *bewitching* bustier, a *spellbinding* fragrance, and so on. The language of fashion is full of references to the realm of magic.

Glamour is the essential ingredient of fashion and celebrity (*sparkly sequins and lashings of Lurex add film-star glamour to this summer's wardrobe*)—both of which are based on an “enchanted fabrication of images of seduction” (Lipovetsky 1994: 182). Glamour is visual deception—an old Scottish word, *gramyre*, meaning “magic, enchantment or spell.” It came into English in the early 1800s to mean “delusive or alluring charm.” Since then it’s come to refer to “an enticing image, a staged and constructed version of reality that invites consumption” (Gundle and Cestelli 2006: 3–4, 8) (*Buy the glam*)⁶ (Fig. 6.2).

Fashion magazines, and the fashion world they depict in their glossy pages, are all about glamour (*high-octane glamour mixes with street style*). Just how glamour works, though, is never quite certain and those who



Fig. 6.2 Waiting at Hermès to buy the glam

would be glamorous recognize the inherent magical qualities that accompany the fame constructed about them. As one American singer, actress, and model once put it:

It's kind of degrading to think that you're just famous for singing, or just famous for acting, or just famous for dancing, or just famous for being funny. I want to be famous for the magic I possess. I've never happened before. (Angelyne, quoted in Gamson 1994)

The function of fashion magazines is to overcome this uncertainty, generally by one of two means. First, they make use of a language which refers either directly, or indirectly, to the realm of magic (*Magisch Anziehend* and *Magic in the Moonlight*). By bringing magic into the open, fashion magazines make it—and fashion itself—seem real and not illusory (*There is nothing quite as iconic as a classic Chanel tweed piece... Its texture, its weight, and its very aura are the things magic is made of*). In other words, they do not describe clothing or dress so much as *perform* fashion (Austin 1962) (*Fashion's mood is shifting—from touchy-feely soft to don't-mess-with-me hard*).⁷

Second, fashion magazines use *names* in support of their performative language and images.⁸ They allude to those who are already stars to comment on fashion items: *Madonna's name-check T-shirt*, *Sarah Jessica Parker's corsage—sometimes a star's look is so right it changes the way we dress*. They also turn fashion designers into celebrities by showing their readers who's wearing what, made by whom, for what occasion, where and with whom (who is also wearing what, made by whom, etc.). This process of osmosis is carried over into the rest of the fashion world, where photographers, models, makeup artists, hair stylists, and other “gurus” are all thrust into the celebrity spotlight. The photographs, the gossip, the clothes, the accessories, the makeup, the hair, and perfumes combine in glitterati mode (see Morin 1972: 79, 138–139). This is sympathetic *and* contagious magic at its most effective (Frazer 1922).⁹

Names fix meanings “by transposing them into terms of other significations” (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 172), so that:

What is in a name is a potentiality, not only to re-present reality to ourselves in a form that makes it less anxiety-provoking, less refractory to control, but

to act more confidently in situations that are unpredictable, dangerous and subject to a high degree of uncertainty. (Jackson 2005: 79)

Fashion magazines participate in naming processes in two ways: by creating equivalence between concept and form in the rhetoric of fashion (*The shoe du jour is the new flat*) and by bringing names from different realms together seamlessly in readers' minds (*Juliette Binoche in Jean-Paul Gaultier*). Illusion is employed in each.

The Language of Illusion

The rhetoric of fashion magazines makes arbitrary links between things that signify and those that are signified (*dramatic sleeves and strategic zips*). In so doing, it does its best to hide the fact that the links it is proposing have merely symbolic meaning by slipping easily between unclearly defined causality and finality (*soft cotton camisoles, delicate lace, and the sweetest embroidery come together in a sensual summer wardrobe*). In the process, it transforms “an arbitrary link into a natural property or a technical affinity” (Barthes 2006: 42) (*graceful gowns, elegant jackets, and exuberant colour*), by deploying such phrases “as if they were ‘motivated’ and non-arbitrary” (*dainty smocking gives romantic charm*) (Jackson 2005: 87). Moreover, in that many of these transformations are somehow disengaged from everyday life—either in lifestyle (*castaway girl stays chic in Chanel’s cascade of lace and ruffles*), or by price (*Chicly chained: Stella McCartney Falabella Embossed Fold-Over Tote, \$1445*)—fashion magazine rhetoric performs the role of spells in magic (ibid.: 83). It meets the requirement of what Malinowski (1935: 218) called “the coefficient of weirdness.”

Second, fashion magazines create a seamless web of names from different economic realms in a variety of ways. They can, as we’ve seen, link celebrity to fashion house (*Hillary Clinton in Oscar de la Renta*); fashion style to place, as well as fashion designer to occasion (*A sweeping ball gown from Dolce & Gabbana’s Alta Moda presentation at the famed La Fontelina Beach Club*); an item of clothing (and its maker) to an activity (*Fox Trot:*

those entwined, face-to-face interludes call for a silky, low-cut number that swings and tosses as you sway. Robert Cavalli silk dress); celebrity crossovers (*Suki Waterhouse [a model] transitions to autumn—and Hollywood—with retro flair*); and combinations of any, or all, of these (*Marella Agnelli in Givenchy, in the Chinese Gallery at the Agnelli family home Villar Perosa, 1962*). In this way, celebrities are made to move from a distant “horizon of individuation” so that they can be assigned to more general categories that are closer to our everyday lives (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 174).

This movement of names “travelling through the minds and speech of others” (Munn 1986: 105) makes fame a *transactional* process (ibid.: 107), thus linking the practices of classical “primitive” economies analysed by anthropologists with those of contemporary capitalism. In certain important ways, the construction of fame in the world of fashion parallels that in the world of *kula* in the Trobriand Islands, where armshells and necklaces are circulated from one island to another by men who achieve fame through the ability to receive and give away renowned shells. In other words, human fame is achieved through the handling and passage of material shells, so that references to a person’s fame and the shells are interchangeable (ibid.: 105–109). So, too, with couturiers and gowns.

In the fashion industry, a designer achieves a “name” in several different ways (education and training under the guidance of other designer “names,” employment by brand name fashion houses, etc.). One of the most important of these, perhaps, is the name of a celebrity or star who wears his or her clothes at media-covered events, or on the cover of a magazine (*Jessica Chastain in Dior Haute Couture*). It is this that enables a *material object* (silk jaquard dress), to be referred to as a *brand name* (Dior Haute Couture), which itself is indelibly linked with both a celebrity (Jessica Chastain) and a designer’s name (Christian Dior).¹⁰

It isn’t the dresses as such, therefore, that circulate among the stars of the fashion, film, and music worlds, but brand and designers’ names (as the fashion magazine makes clear). When a dress is lent out by a designer to be worn by a star (e.g., for the Oscars), the “self-decoration” is detached from him or her and made public by another. Just as shells decorate the person in Gawa, so the dress “refers back to the owner, adorning him through his capacity to physically adorn another. In this respect, the

wearer becomes the publicist of the donor's influence, as if she or he were mentioning his name" (ibid.: 113).

So the system of fame in the fashion world is made up of three elements: a (celebrity's) body which wears a dress; "an attached material décor" (the dress itself), which "adds a seductive intensification of beauty to that of the body"; and "a noise" which accompanies both body and material dress so that "what may be out of sight may nevertheless be heard" (ibid.: 114).

The "noise" (or buzz) is provided by fashion magazines and the fashion press, which necessarily make the exchange between celebrity and designer triadic by bringing in a single, anonymous, third-party observer: their readers, who read about and may themselves pass on news of each transaction. In this way, fame shifts from immediate effect to a discourse, which circulates beyond individual acts as a "*virtual form of influence*" (ibid.: 117), allowing names to become detached from their physical persons and fame to become "the circulation of persons via their names in the realm of other minds (or in the oral realm of the speech of others)" (ibid.).

Magical Transformations

The world of fashion is pervaded by a magical consciousness, which informs, shapes, and on occasion transforms both individual behaviour and the organization of the fashion world. We find this consciousness in brand name fashion houses and their seasonal collections, whose clothes provide occasions for enchantment, glamour, and illusion—allowing transformations of bodily awareness more typically found in societies characteristically studied by anthropologists (*the look is modern in an old-fashioned kind of way; a sleek tuxedo jacket lends Martine Sitbon's delicately distressed dress a structured edge; and when did coloured lingerie become chic rather than tarty?*) (Fig. 6.3).

Each fashion season presents fashion magazine readers with a cyclical dilemma. Or, rather, magazines first conjure up the dilemma which they then attribute to the season. What should women wear that will carry them seamlessly from day to night, dressing up or dressing down according to



Fig. 6.3 When did coloured lingerie become chic rather than tarty?

time, place, and occasion, as the weather warms up or cools down (*Suit of the season; Workwear now; and Evening Essentials*)? How to make that effortless transition from *cool and classic* to *colourful city chic*, as you *update your wardrobe, accentuate your assets, and maximize your look*? Fashion magazines reassure you that you can *cherry pick a personal style, picking up on an idea*

here and an item there rather than buying into a look wholesale, but they also consecrate by advising you in formulaic style what the ten *key looks* of spring or autumn are, as well as *what's in*, *what's out*, to help you toe the seasonal line

Magazines always provide hints to help readers cope with the seeming arbitrariness of change (*making the most of what you've got*). They insist that each item has its purpose, by alluding to the virtues of clothing transmitted through contact (*a delicate lace trim gives Chanel's white vest subtle sex appeal*), thereby suggesting that sympathetic magic is inherent in fashion (*create a vertical illusion with pinstripes*) (Mauss 1972: 58). The blouson dress *hides hips and flattens the tummy*; the pantsuit jacket *disguises a full bust and gives the appearance of a slim figure*, while the slit ankles on pants *hide the bust by drawing the eyes to shapely legs*.¹¹

Fashion magazines, and other elements of the fashion press, form an integral part of the fashion network. It is participation in this network that is key to an understanding of its magical practices (Greenwood 2012: 26). As intermediary between producers and consuming public, fashion magazines' main purpose is—by sleight of eye rather than of magician's hand—to *propose*: to make proposals about what in particular makes the latest clothes “fashion” (*Fashion's new take on black is all about strong, sexy femininity*); about what the latest trends are likely to be (*Designers are working between the extremes of girlie-feminine and powerful-masculine looks*); about the importance of the names behind them (*the delicate glamour of Gaultier's pleat-bust dress*); about reasons why fashion should be important in readers' lives (*As designers, we give people reasons to dream*); and about where the clothes themselves may be purchased (*Boots, to order, by Sonia Rykiel, at Browns*). Proposals like these effect transformations on what is basically mere material (*Distressed fabrics and hand-crafted detailing are the latest in survivor chic*) and, in so doing, legitimize fashion and the fashion world in cultural—and commercial—terms (Moulin 1987: 86). Fashion magazines make public fashion designers' belief in the effectiveness of their techniques, fashionistas' belief in the power of the designers, and the faith and expectations of the fashion world as a whole. This is what Bourdieu meant when he talked about “the consecration of belief.”

Fashion magazines make meaningful connections between things that seem to be essentially independent (*A tailored tux and a tiered pleated skirt meet in Balenciaga's brand of Gothic femininity*); they give them social lives by creating an imaginary world about them (*Romany wanderer meets urban chic at YSL*); they create awareness in participants of the field of fashion in which they work (*He's the only one giving us something interesting in the cut, the look, the fantasy, the imagination*); and they provide historical and aesthetic order in a world whose products, by their very seasonality and potentially chaotic quantity, are likely to go unnoticed (*Sculpted Fifties hourglass figures* or *Replaying classic Parisian chic*) (see Blumer 1969: 290).

With such semiotic transformations, fashion magazines help form a collective concept of what “fashion” is. At the same time, though—like art critics (Hauser 1982: 431)—they will bring in such aesthetically irrelevant forces as snobbery, elitism, trendiness, and a fear of lagging behind the arbiters of prevailing taste in what Pierre Bourdieu (1993: 135) once called a “dialectics of pretension and distinction.” So we find magazines proposing to their readers that *Sofia [Coppola] is a style arbiter whose face is worth a thousand words (or probably more)*. They suggest that they *forget the perfect handbag. This season, the ultimate accessory is the perfect boat*, and (with a nod to inverted snobbery) that *looking like your clothes matter to you is all wrong. In fact, the more you care, the less it should show*.

So the production and reception of fashion are interdependent, both in terms of communication and of their organization. Designers need mediators and interpreters of one sort or another to ensure that their work is properly understood, because “proper” appreciation—they’re convinced—translates into sales.¹² In other words—as in the worlds of politics, art, and academia—fashion is marked by a struggle to enlist followers, and one of the fashion magazine’s tasks is to convert the agnostic. This means that the reception of fashion involves social cooperation among those who believe in the power of *haute couture* and *prêt-à-porter*. It is this faith that drives the fashion world in its quest for magical transformations that enable clothes to become “fashion.”

Those working for the fashion magazine are its apostles, or “high priestesses” (Ferguson 1979: 119), who spread the word, who portray and interpret designers’ collections each season—proposing meanings

that readers can cling to, removing all the strangeness that accompanies novelty, reconciling what at first glance may be confusing with the already familiar, and thereby creating continuity between present, past, and future trends. Their job isn't simply to appreciate new stylistic trends—often by setting up a series of oppositions between these and the previous season's styles (*After equestrian chic, a pastoral mood is breezing into fashion*) (Entwistle 2000: 237)—but to suggest new discoveries, re-evaluations, and reinterpretations of styles that have been misunderstood and/or belong to the past (*Even Alpine knits are chic in a trim tank and mini-combo*). If designers create the form of fashion items, therefore, fashion magazines create their legend (*Patent Manolo Blahnik stilettos add a kinky edge to a Chanel classic*) (Hauser 1982: 468). In so doing, they fabricate mythical personages out of designers and the fashion houses they work for, as well as of other members of the fashion world (*Alexander McQueen gives the bustier a light touch for Givenchy*). As a result, collections tend to be judged not by their intrinsic worth but by the names with which they are labelled: *Bally high*, *Hedi times*, and *Model T. Ford*.¹³

And yet, the public needs fashion magazines since they help it distinguish what's "good" from what's "inferior" in the apparent chaos of each season's collections. In so doing, the magazines also help transform fashion as an abstract idea and aesthetic discourse into everyday dress (Entwistle 2000: 237). Thus, when reflecting on the passing of a season, they can proclaim that *surprisingly wearable looks leapt from the catwalk straight into women's wardrobe*, and so show that the magic it wrought is *effective* (Mauss 1972: 19).

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the role of fashion magazines in transforming clothes made by dress-makers into "fashion" created by "designers." This they do by means of language and visual images that make use of enchantment, glamour, and illusion. In one respect, my search for an understanding of fashion magazines has engendered its own form of magicity (Taussig 2003: 278). By revealing what is already known, but for the

most part not articulated by those in the world of fashion—that is, by bringing into the open “that which it is known not to know”—I may be said to have added to “the mysterium tremendum of magic’s magic” (ibid.: 297, 300). In other words, the rite of scholarly exposure enacted in this chapter—an exposure that itself may be seen as skilfully concealing the trickery of anthropological magic—may merely strengthen the magic of the fashion network itself (ibid.: 298).

My argument has been that fashion magazines are part of a magical network, which employs as its magicians, on the one hand, designers who transform ordinary items of dress into “fashion” in such prescribed rites as the fashion show and, on the other, fashion editors and fashion photographers who transform actual fashion items into images by means of fashion stories and their magazine’s fashion well. To help them in this task of metamorphosis and to consecrate them as “Fashion,” magazine editors also make use of verbal spells to transmit the particular virtues of an object (*elegant* pencil skirt, *sensual* perfume, *cool* sneakers, and *hot* corsets) to their readers. Such spells are a form of both sympathetic magic, in that they name qualities that the products then bring about, and contagious magic, in that, once named, such products maintain a lasting connection between maker and user (Frazer 1922).

Three main elements—magicians, rites, and spells or representations (Mauss 1972: 18)—operate simultaneously in this magical network. Fashion photographers work with fashion models in a controlled environment out of which, they hope, an unexpected “moment of magic” will appear. Fashion designers, in conjunction with their muses, look for equally unpredictable moments of “inspiration” to guide their work. Editors and art directors agonize over their choice of topics, images, and words in putting together every issue of their fashion magazine. *Everyone* is intent upon making a name, because names detach themselves from the physical world of people and things and, like fragrance, circulate magically in the air.

Because they are both cultural products and commodities (Beetham 1996: 1–5; Moeran 2015: 28–29), fashion magazines contribute effortlessly to the ways in which names, like magical modes of thought (superstition, sorcery, myth), form an implicitly coherent system of seemingly

magical connections between genres, styles, materials, texts, and culture, on the one hand, and advertising, brands, and the economy, on the other hand. These connections are capable of infinite extension, as they use basic elements in a variety of improvised combinations to generate new meanings. Thus, a pop singer will walk down a runway during fashion week; a model will appear in a music video; and a reality TV series star will release a number of eponymous fragrances. This is the concrete science of celebrity *bricolage* (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 16–22).

All forms of cultural production, and not just fashion, routinely create and make use of the reputations of individual people, organizations, and brands as part of their promotional activities. It is these reputations, rather than any common form of social organization, production methods, market structure, or value chain, that bind together the different industries of fashion, film, media, music, publishing, and so on under the single denomination of “creative industries” (Caves 2000)

The fact that it is reputations—and *only* reputations—that are common to all forms of cultural production *in equal measure* suggests that the worlds of fashion, film, music, art, and so on operate according to the requirements of an economy of fame. This economy is based on names: the names not just of *people* (celebrities, designers, photographers, editors, fashion stylists, models, bloggers, makeup artists, etc.) but also of *organizations* (mainly fashion houses, but also industry associations) and *brands* (supported image-wise by their logos). To ensure that a name performs well in economic terms by remaining foremost in the public eye, those concerned need to resort to illusion, magic, and, if necessary, sleights of hand. This is the primary role of fashion magazines in the fashion network.

Different forms of cultural production are organized in similar, though different, ways as they struggle with the vagaries of their respective “markets of singularities” (Karpik 2010), where every product differs from all others both now and from the past. But in all of them, what *matter* are the reputations of all concerned because they help define and sustain the different fields, together with the aesthetic evaluations that take place therein (as well as their ensuing valuations in terms of price). They contribute to

the kind of symbolic capital required in an “economy of prestige” (English 2005).

The fact that reputations enable and sustain an ongoing exchange between cultural, symbolic, and economic capital means that contemporary economies—especially those parts of them imbued with magical elements—function according to a *logic of names*. We wear Chanel No. 5 perfume, Doc Marten boots, or an Yves Saint Laurent gown. Sometimes we use a person’s name (a Cardigan), at other times a company’s (Burberry), as convenient shorthand to describe products. We also use abbreviations (LVMH, when referring to Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy), even metaphors (the Chanel logo’s “Double C”), and substitute a brand name for the thing itself (a Mackintosh).¹⁴ In the world of reputation, “the relation of worth is a relation of *identification*” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 181): consumers identify with what they choose to wear, with whom, and on what occasion. This is why fashion magazines (and advertisers) make use of names to give “personalities” to inanimate things—a form of “animism” that reinforces the magical aspects of cultural production (*Ungaro’s frivolous chiffon smock; slouchy Balenciaga dress; Helmut Lang’s delicate boa*).

Names take on particular importance in two ways in fashion and other fields of cultural production. First, they are actively used and disseminated as part of an industry’s promotional strategies (the primary aim of which is to enhance reputations rather than sell products) (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 156). In this respect, names perform “more as incantations than as objects with properties” (Mauss 1972: 77) (*Be bold in Chanel; Ralph Lauren’s sophisticated body suit*). To ensure that a name performs well in economic terms by remaining foremost in the public eye, those concerned need to resort to illusion, magic, and, if necessary, sleights of hand (hence, the enormous presence of PR in all its multiplicity of forms). Names are a crucial site for the functioning of the field as a whole, as each strives to “make its mark” in a struggle for power and so legitimate fashion’s “categories of perception and appreciation” (Bourdieu 1993: 106) (*Chloe’s twisted bikini is simple perfection; Prada’s cape is an ultra-chic alternative to the winter coat*).

Second, the main means of linking corporations to the products they sell is through celebrities of one sort or another. Celebrities constitute a “world of fame,” in which opinion—rather than any specific professional

quality—establishes equivalence. The worth of each depends on the opinion of others, so that corporations try to take advantage of the fact that “fame establishes worth” (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 171). This is in large part why designers and fashion houses spend a lot of time and money on preparing special clothes (which may not be worn) for actors and actresses attending the American film industry’s annual Academy Awards.

Names, then, satisfy an intellectual demand for order, involving a long-term accumulation of social and cultural capital that is then converted into economic capital and back again. They “transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry” (Latour 2005: 39, 59). Like animals and plants in a totemic system, names (of designers, fashion houses, celebrities, brands) are deemed to be useful or interesting because they are first of all known rather than known as a result of their usefulness (Lévi-Strauss 1966: 15). Initiating evaluations and valuation, and operating as cultural markers in a particular commercial field, names constitute a *name economy* (Skov 2000: 158).

By vesting individual designers, fashion houses, and their brands with particular powers by virtue of their names, fashion magazines themselves grasp power (think *Vogue*). Making use of the art of the magician, they suggest means (*Every fashionista needs a statement bag*), enlarge on the virtues of objects (*Dresses that are hand-crafted, hand-stitched and moulded to the body like a glove*), (Fig. 6.4) anticipate effects (*There is only one shoe to accompany the rebirth of elegance this season—the stiletto*), and “by these methods fully satisfying the desires and expectations which have been fostered by entire generations in common” (Mauss 1972: 141–142).

The name economy derives its existence from, and depends upon the struggle among, magical names—a struggle that maintains a structured difference, synchronically and diachronically, within and between the different creative industries and fields of cultural production in which they operate. For each of those participating, Shakespeare’s line still rings true: *’Tis but thy name that is my enemy*. To enemies and friends alike we may doff a cap, but (unlike Romeo) we cannot doff a name in the name economy.



Fig. 6.4 Dresses that are moulded to the body like a glove

Notes

1. The material in this chapter is based on 15 years of on-and-off fieldwork among magazine editors and publishers in Paris, New York, Tokyo, Hong Kong, and London, as well as on content analysis of more than

650 issues of 4 international fashion magazines: *Vogue*, *Elle*, *Marie Claire*, and *Harper's Bazaar*. For a more detailed analysis, see Moeran (2015).

2. The ways in which clothes and materials are described in fashion magazines (*sexy silk*, *frivolous chiffon*, *soft knits*, etc.) echo Evans-Pritchard's discussion of magic among the Azande, for whom "material substance... is the occult and essential element in a rite, for in the substance lies the mystical power which produces the desired end" (1937: 441). Fashion magazines, like Zande magicians, address their materials and then the object that they wish to influence (ibid. p. 450): *Gleaming gilded leather, sparkly sequins, and lashings of Lurex add film-star glamour to this summer's wardrobe.*
3. They also rely on trend forecasters, whose work focuses on future socio-cultural events, "ethnographic" observations of major urban environments, and a healthy dose of "performative utterances" intended to convince those in the industry. Their work is also in some sense magical, as they design, rather than predict, trends (Interview, Wessie Ling, fashion forecaster, Paris, February 11, 2003; see also Hoskins 2014: 45–49).
4. Weber (1978: 401) defines an "orgy" as a "primordial form of religious association."
5. As Tansy Hoskins (2014: 10) notes: "It is everything that *goes around* clothes that makes them fashion."
6. More recently, Delphine Dion and Eric Arnould (2011) have argued that luxury retail strategy in the fashion world relies on art and magic to create brand charisma. See their contribution to this book. Many of the words cited here, like *glamour*, owe their etymological origins to forms of magic. *Pretty*, for example, once meant "cunning, skilful, and artful," and is derived from *prettig* meaning trick or wile; *fascinate* meant to bewitch, or enchant (from Latin, *fascinum*, meaning spell or witchcraft); *allure* to attract, tempt, or captivate, primarily through "a gait, way of walking"; and *charm* referred to a magical incantation or spell (*Oxford Dictionary of English*).
7. Fashion magazines make use of both illocutionary (*a different kind of cool*) and perlocutionary (*grey suddenly looks newly fresh and chic*) acts. The former are designed to "secure uptake" on the part of their readers and the fashion world, thereby taking effect and inviting a response (Austin 1962: 117–118; *low-key cool*) which leads into the next fashion "season" with its collections (*a dark sense of cool*), and so on (*colour—strong colour—is now cool*) ad infinitum.

8. Fashion magazines publish fashion photographs in order to achieve through non-locutionary means the response (or sequel) invited by their perlocutionary acts (Austin 1962: 119).
9. See <http://www.bartleby.com/196/5.html>, <http://www.bartleby.com/196/6.html>, and <http://www.bartleby.com/196/7.html> for relevant discussion.
10. As with the *kula*, there is a hierarchy of fame at work here, from unknown designers whose dresses circulate in material form only, to those who can attach their individual names to material designs (*Organza dress, £4500, Christopher Kane*). Some names are indissolubly linked to the fashion houses for which they work (*Nicolas Ghesquière's debut collection for Louis Vuitton*); others are free-floating, because they have established their own fashion houses with their own names (*Joan in Tom Ford twisted wool coat and velvet dress*). Here material items circulate in generic verbal form (*Hilary Swank in Michael Kors*). A designer's ultimate aim, and accolade, is to make an item of clothing that is itself named (the *Berardi glass corset*, the *Monroe dress*, the *Birkin bag*, etc.) and talked about throughout the fashion and film worlds.
11. Clothing items are multifunctional when it comes to what they can do for different parts of a woman's body. *Marie Claire USA* (February 2001) advises its reader that a blouson jacket conceals a small bust; long jackets disguise a big butt; vertical lines flatter all silhouettes. With the latest lingerie, you can slenderize your body, firm up your thighs, downplay curves, flatten stomach bulges, create cleavage, and disguise your flaws. Trenchant advice for those in the trenches.
12. Angela McRobbie argues that fashion pages in fashion magazines do not have to sell the clothes depicted, even though they list stockists, talk about designers and retailers, and report on the new collections (1998: 163 [Kindle version]). Nevertheless, in the longer term such images are presumed to contribute, if but indirectly, to sales.
13. As Bourdieu (1993: 138) acidly points out: "if you're a fashion journalist, it is not advisable to have a sociological view of the world."
14. "To make oneself known, it is a good idea to have a *name*, or, for products, a *brand name*" (Boltanski and Thévenot 2006: 180).

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7

The Magic of Paradox: How Advertising Ideas Transform Art into Business and the Ordinary into the Extraordinary

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For consumers, advertising is said to act like magic, turning ordinary commodities into symbols of love, desire, power, or prestige (Malinowski 1965; McCreery 1995; Moeran 2014). Ads for perfume turn women into desired objects, male car drivers into masculine symbols, and energy drink users into vital tribal communities. Nevertheless, ads produced within advertising agencies offer a different view of magic. While advertisements are disseminated across consumer markets and succeed by transforming mundane products into elevated brands that promote inspirational ideals (Lukovitz 2012), they begin in ad agencies as small frail ideas. Advertised ideas come from the enigmatic world of advertising creatives. From such individuals, mere thoughts become “big” campaigns through dubious circumstances. Curiously, famed creative director David Ogilvy (1985: 16) claims “it takes a big idea to attract the attention of consumers.” Yet another business giant, John Elliott (1982: 7), states that “ideas are hard to recognize, so fragile, and easy to kill.” Indeed, this is the paradoxical nature of ideas in advertising: they start small but must grow

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big to influence many consumers; they come from elite individuals (advertising creatives) but must influence ordinary people to consume; they deal with often mundane products but sell larger ideals; and while great ideas help sell any product, they are also rare, hard to find, and so are sacred. Moreover, fetishized as ideals which other agencies might steal, advertising ideas must also be distributed among agency relations to develop and materialize marketing and promotional efforts. Hence, advertising internally requires a magical process to create and manage the paradox of power; that is, develop sacred ideas and guard them from others yet distribute them at the proper time and place to spur consumption, build relations, and make a name for an agency.

This chapter follows the generation of advertising ideas which begin as transient ephemera and through magical and paradoxical transformations *make durable* in Latour's sense the human relationships and material conditions in and out of ad agencies. I show that ideas are transformed through a network of relations, associations, contradictions, and rituals that assemble for ad creatives in encounters with various other elements in advertising. Magical paradoxes are thus built into the advertising network to transform one phenomenon into another since magic is about transformations that are "eminently effective," "creative," and "do things" (Mauss 1972: 23–24). Furthermore, other types of contradictions, such as magicians concealing magic tricks only to reveal them later under precise conditions (Taussig 2003), or tribal chiefs giving away some objects of value but keeping other sacred items (Weiner 1992), reveal paradoxical ways to hold power mysterious, ambiguous, and elusive and in the hands of elite few. Magic works, we learn, "not despite the trick but on account of its exposure," where ritual serves as its stage so that power flows not from hiding but from skillful revealing, "which masks more than masking" (Taussig 2003: 273). Likewise, contradictions exist in advertising creative idea development and are intertwined in magical modern practices, to conceal as much as to reveal "contesting claims for reality" (Jöhncke and Steffen 2015: 10). Manipulating reality is a key magical feature of power in advertising, both in and out of ad agencies.

As Foucault, Bourdieu, and Weiner affirm, symbolic power and authority are always surrounded by contradiction and ambiguity. Advertising through its symbolic power is especially subject to contradictory relations

since it produces no tangible goods in itself but rather converts commodity objects and services into symbolic images and narratives that are valued and adapted to localized tastes (Malefyt 2012: 219). Advertising begins with a paradoxical premise: it operates both as aesthetic art and business enterprise. Advertising ideas, like other works of art, are favorable to symbolic power (Bourdieu 1993: 33–34). But as a business, advertising ideas are a corporation's most profitable means by which ordinary products are transformed into brands with added value (Malefyt 2018). In this sense, advertising is an ideal modern trope that blurs contested distinctions between commercial reality and artistic ideals or, similar to what Latour notes, between fact and fetish (2010: 11).

The paradox of power, in fact, is particular to the fetishizing and distribution of idea creation within advertising agencies. The magic of idea creation within ad agencies is not an abstract force distributed universally but specific to persons and situations found in the creative director and copy writer on occasions for developing a new business pitch or brand campaign idea for a particular client. Creatives labor hard to develop clever ideas for a client's brand and for a new business pitch. The idea presented must resonate with client and agency, and spur consumption. *Big ideas* therefore are advertising's "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1993), a fetish that inspires the transformation of factual products into idealized branded messages.

Furthermore, the process of enchantment surrounding the network of advertising idea creation is located in Malinowski's (1922) and Mauss' (1972) observation of three necessary elements for magical transformation to occur—the magician, formula, and rite. All three elements form a network and must work together precisely or magic fails. Likewise, within ad agencies, many factors can derail fragile ideas from reaching fruition, so special circumstances (rites) surround idea development (the formula) in which creatives (the magicians) generate great advertising. Managing idea development requires the magician's process of careful concealing and revealing of tricks, defying as well as displaying them to exhibit a "supreme level of technique" that we might dignify creatively as magic (Taussig 2003: 306). As such, ideas, skills, and materiality flow in and out of one another, turning the ad creative's "art" paradoxically into

“business” for the client, while producing its inverse: turning fact-based commodities into fetishized brands for consumers.

The implementation of this magical tripartite network in advertising shows the highest form of paradox at work in processes which allow ideas to be kept separate and nurtured at times and distributed and shared on other occasions. Magic in advertising is thus carefully organized around elaborate practices that paradoxically assure the highest fetishization of artistic ideas, as they also assure their later distribution among agency functions and clients for purposes of reifying consumption. Facts and fetishes thus blend their properties (Latour 2010: 16), and by magical effect of artistic technique, the advertising creative manifests something unique, artistic and creative that, in advertising lingo, no one has ever fabricated before.

I draw from my 15 years of experience working in ad agencies to discuss the ways in which advertising ideas begin as simple artistic thoughts that eventually transform into full-blown materialized campaigns. I also show that an “idea trajectory” assumes paradoxical and magical transformations along the way, such that the symbolic capital of an artistic idea gains economic value, constituting not just the magical “art of change” (Mauss 1972: 76) but the necessary transformation of reality from art into commerce. As ideas develop, they change in magical potential from individual creative thoughts to highly effective commercial realities. Ideas further acquire artistic merit in creative award ceremonies, which later amplify the ad agency’s commercial value for new and existing clients. Ideas thus change in shape, form, and value across time and context of their social life in a “chain of transformations” (Latour 2010). While transforming ideas into art exemplifies what Susan Langer calls the “highest achievement in art” (in Weiner 1992: 103), advertising ideas must also serve agency propaganda, foster durable client relations, and build agency business. In the words of a senior account director, advertising represents that “lovely area where art and business rub up against each other” (in Hackley and Kover 2007: 67), which are also considered “mutually exclusive binary oppositions” of agency life (Hackley 2000: 248). Even as friction may generate instability, the resulting tension is mediated by rituals, which help transform ideas in value and casts an

enchantment over advertising that creates stable client relations within the agency and builds solid consumer relations with branded goods out in the marketplace.

Before discussing the ways in which the network of magicians, formulas, and rites in agencies transform artistic ideas into commercial campaigns, I lay out the organization of the ad agency itself and the specialized roles, practices, and responsibilities, which reveal the conditions under which paradoxical strategies thrive.

Managing Paradox in Advertising Agencies: Separating Sacred from Mundane

Managing paradox is a way of maintaining magical power in the hands of the elite few and is produced through deliberate systems of organization and social division. In the Polynesian culture that Annette Weiner (1992) studied, one set of social relations among Trobriand Islanders relied on the sacredness of magic while the other relied on rational practicality. The native use of magical *mana* not only reproduced magical power to legitimate chieftom authority at certain times but also its “magical properties play a fundamental role in how production, exchange and kinship are organized” (Weiner 1992: 4). Malinowski also discussed the organization of Trobriand Island gardening, which distinguished sacred magic from mundane work. Clear lines of division between work and ritual separated practical from magical activities in the social organization of gardening. Ordinary gardening practices operated under clear-cut conditions, while magical spells were cast for uncertain and adverse influences: “the two roles never overlap or interfere: they are always clear, and any native will inform you without hesitation whether the man acts as a magician or as leader in garden work” (Malinowski 1954: 29).

Inside advertising agencies, similar organization and divisions of social roles and responsibilities are established around creative idea generation. Raymond Williams first noted that advertising is a “highly organized, professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies” (1980:

193). Advertising agencies are organized into a number of divisions that function with particular roles and responsibilities that work independently as well as collaboratively. Specific departments such as the president, financial offices, media buying, account management, and creative services are assisted by various independent vendors that offer support services. From model agencies, film, photographic and recording studios, fashion and hair stylists to digital experts such as website developers and graphic artists are all enlisted for campaign development and execution. Idea generation is also speculated on the division and later unity between advertising-as-art and advertising-as-commerce. In the everyday life of advertising, the work of account management and creative services are distinct in function and task. Account management handles daily “business” chores of client responsibilities, such as brand management, conducting consumer research, setting strategic goals and other pragmatic or “factual” activities. Creative services are assigned to develop brand ideas, images, slogans, and artistic vision for the higher intangibles that fetishize the client’s brand. As Mauss affirms, “contrasts of categories are a distinct functioning idea of magic” (1972: 88). Division in activities assures that “The two roles never overlap or interfere: they are always clear. As far as a society is concerned, the magician is always set apart” (ibid.). Clear divisions are essential to magic’s operation, and likewise in advertising, help legitimate authority and power of the ad creative in idea formation.

To manage such organization and divisions, Mauss divides magic creation into a tripartite system of magicians, magical rites, and magical formulas, describing them as the coordination of “officers, actions and representations” (1972: 23). Malinowski similarly details magic development in terms of an integrated tripartite system:

Magic all the world over ... represents three essential aspects. In its performance, there enter always some words spoken or chanted, some actions carried out, and there are always the minister or ministers of the ceremony. In analyzing the concrete details of magical performances, therefore, we have to distinguish between the formula, the rite, and the condition of the performer. (Malinowski 1922: 403)

As this passage reveals, three elements are necessary to organize, develop, and circulate magic within a society. It requires the work of a specialized person to create something magical; it requires a process of creating the spell or formula to enchant; and it requires particular ritualistic situations in which magic is structured, shaped, and propagated. Brian Moeran first applied this integrated system to the organization of advertising magic:

In the advertising industry, magicians correspond to “Creative” personnel (in particular, Copywriters, Creative and Art Directors, but also photographers, makeup artists, hair stylists, and others called upon to produce advertisements); rites to competitive presentations and the production of advertising campaigns; and formulaic representations to individual advertisements. (Moeran 2014: 122)

I modify this arrangement to explore the magician as creative talent (specifically in copywriters and art directors), formulaic representation as the creative’s “big idea,” and rites to include the cult of creative awards ceremonies and rituals surrounding the production of advertising campaigns in pitches. All three elements of magic must be carefully considered for their relationship to producing ideas internally that are later transformed into ads for consumers. Moreover, I add the notion of a magical *network*, in place of system, because of its porousness and since it operates within paradoxical strategies where the organization and division of creative magicians, creative formulas, and agency rituals are arranged to hide or *keep* ideas sacred at times and reveal or *give* them out other times. Concealing and revealing, in other words, is a strategic variation of keeping-while-giving. Creatives conceal their ideation process to maintain mysteriousness but unmask or reveal their ideas at specific times and places, such as in ritualized agency pitches and ad award ceremonies, to enhance their prowess as one-of-a-kind artists. The following sections discuss the network of shifting relations among magicians, formulas, and rites employed as paradoxical magic strategies within the advertising world, which enables the agency to build fragile ideas into big unassailable campaigns.

The Quirky Nature of Advertising Magicians

Advertising creatives are a mainstream part of all agency life but stand apart as unique individuals within the agency. While account executives (the suits) run the day-to-day “business” side of client relations, creatives operate the artistic side. Since the “creative revolution” back in the 1960s, advertising creatives in US and European agencies have long been valorized for their odd social behavior, long hair, and other idiosyncratic actions (Moeran 2005). They are distinguished from other advertising employees, not only for their work function but also through their personalities, which are characterized as “quirky and insecure, brash and brilliant, and even mendacious” (Hackley and Kover 2007: 63). Their quirky demeanor is considered synonymous with novel thinking, since “artists” may take liberties to generate innovative ideas (Hallam and Ingold 2007) (Fig. 7.1).

Bourdieu notes the charismatic individual is known for discovering “brilliant” ideas that otherwise would remain anonymous (1993: 76). The creative artist is thus venerated above ordinary men for discovering



Fig. 7.1 AOL’s “Digital Creative Prophet” David Shing—Web Summit 2012, courtesy of William Murphy/Flickr, under CCBY license

insights in everyday life. In advertising, the ad creative is highly paid, most celebrated for talent, and on whom the fortunes of an agency depend. Ad agencies, therefore, encourage mystery, concealment, and difference to legitimate creative power, uplifting antisocial behavior and unorthodox practices, apart from others.

For Mauss, magicians are also recognized by certain physical or behavioral peculiarities, which identify a magician from a layperson. Magicians may exhibit “a cunning look, appearing odd, or untrustworthy, nervous and even jumpy behavior” (1972: 36), but while they may be feared and suspected, they are also admired. Set apart from others, magicians often possess political authority. They are highly influential and often important people. “One doesn’t elect to be a magician; one must be chosen into the profession” (p. 37). High social status preordains certain people with magical power, and “it is public opinion which makes the magician and creates the power he wields” (p. 50).

The magician also possesses special qualifications and powers that set him apart from others. Mauss ascribes entire professions with magic, such as doctors, barbers, blacksmiths, shepherds, actors, and gravediggers, because of the mysteriousness of their craft, their use of complex techniques not understood by others and because their work is shrouded in mystery: “It is their profession which sets them apart from the common run of mortals, and it is this separateness which endows them with magical power” (Mauss 1972: 29). Mauss further details mystery and secretiveness as empowering their profession. Whereas collective rites are performed openly in full public view, “magical rites are carried out in secret ... the magician is a being set apart ... so in this way he is reserving his powers ... Isolation and secrecy are two almost perfect signs of the intimate character of a magical rite. They are always features of a person or persons working in a private capacity; both the act and the actor are shrouded in mystery” (1972: 29).

Creatives in advertising, likewise, distance themselves from others both due to “professional insecurity” (Hackley and Kover 2007: 71), but also to preserve secrecy and power over their creative work. Account management and creative services work together, especially in the buildup to a pitch, but their relation may be characterized as based on secrecy and

mutual suspicion. As Hackley and Kover explain, the creatives' relation to others forms a contradiction of congeniality:

Creatives need approval, but they fear that some kinds of peer approval (such as that from clients or senior account directors) might be seen to threaten their professional integrity. Or, if a creative seems particularly close to non-creative workers, this might be interpreted negatively by other creatives. (2007: 71)

Creative teams form a sort of “marriage” relationship between art director and copywriter that is emotionally and functionally important. However, this intense relationship also keeps creatives apart from others in the ad agency, where the marriage offers a source of “comfort as well as insulation” (Ibid.: 72). Indeed, outside the agency, apart from work, creatives rarely socialize with “suits” (ibid.). By keeping close as a creative team but maintaining distance from others, creatives employ a concealing and revealing strategy, sharing ideas with some but not others, to further mystify the creative process. The creative artist thus skillfully blends fact into fetish as “sorcerer,” in what Latour describes as an “autonomous being” who “surpasses us” as a “divinity,” in works and representations (2010: 35).

Maintaining a mystique of power also translates into creatives distancing themselves from ordinary consumers. Advertising folklore locates top US ad agencies and leading creative artists in major metropolises like New York City and San Francisco, since “creative people are more slick, more in touch with the leading edge in fad and fashion” (Kover 1995: 596). Creatives identify themselves as “members of an elite,” whose role it is “to use their fine judgment ... as creative individuals to inspire consumers with visions of consumption” (Hackley and Kover 2007: 68). Still, their elitism brings certain “airs” to their demeanor in which they sometimes “find trouble communicating with more “traditional” consumers” (ibid.). Creative aversion to ordinary consumers is especially apparent during advertising campaign development.

During campaign copy testing, creatives are most averse to consumer feedback, since testing concepts among consumers in focus groups is deemed to “water down” ideas (Kocek 2013: 76). Arthur Kover interviewed copywriters and confirmed widespread antagonism toward consumer research. As one creative states, “It impedes; it does not understand

the depths of what I am trying to do” (Kover 1995: 604). In another instance of apparent disdain for consumers, David Lubars, chief creative officer at BBDO, encourages frequent repetition of advertising messages to consumers, since “Like roaches—you spray them and spray them (consumers) and they get immune after a while” (in Klein 2000: 9). Kover explains this apparent negative reaction to consumer research: “(Research) transforms emotion into numbers; it must, in copywriters’ eyes, distance the advertising both from the viewer and the writer,” and in “losing personal immediacy, the artistic idea is also lost” (Kover 1995: 604). This issue recurs so that copywriters distance themselves from “factual” accounts of their ideas, and deny the value of consumer research to their work. Another copywriter affirms: “You really don’t need research You can’t introduce some kind of scientific analytical method to improve [my] basic process” (in Kover 1995: 604). Instead, as another ad creative claims: “My idea, my dialogue, is not tempered by research” (ibid.). The role of consumer research and copy testing is therefore explicitly peripheral to creatives’ process of idea generation.

Instead of following formal guidelines for transforming consumer facts into insights, creatives stress their own implicit theories for idea generation. Creatives claim “big ideas” are sourced not from market research reports, copy testing, or from consumer descriptions in focus groups but rather from their own internal dialogues (Kover 1995). Copywriters claim they generate compelling ad copy through an imaginary internal conversation with consumers, where brand meaning and potential ad communication are worked out with an “internalized other” who represents both writer and audience. The imaginary conversation lasts only for as long as needed to complete the commercial message. As such, creatives conceal the process of idea making to amplify the ambiguity, power, and enigma of their profession, which adds to the mystery of their skilled practice.

The Formula: Turning Trivial into Exceptional

The celebrated power and paradox of advertising magic is recognized in a creative’s ability to turn ordinary commercial products into extraordinary campaigns. Sourcing inspirational ideas from the material life of consumers

is regarded as magical talent. The problem is big ideas usually must come from ordinary products and relate to consumers' mostly mundane lives. From toilet paper, laundry detergent, pharmaceutical drugs, toothpaste and soda to sanitary napkins, most creative work is rooted in the ordinary. Much of the labor and drama from which creatives develop "big ideas" is therefore quite trivial and uninspiring. In treating the everyday, advertising "attempts to make the insignificant seem significant" (Kottman 2010: 31). Furthermore, filling out client demands for campaigns means bending to restrictions in budgets, media outlets, and timeframes. Mandatory parameters leave little room for novelty and true experimentation. Perhaps ten percent of total output is actually creative and different (Mayle 1990: 58). Advertising creatives thus regularly deal with the trivial, but their work must elevate minor differences among "like" products to make them stand out as exceptional in the minds of consumers. It is here their tricks transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Because they *can and do* transform the trivial into the exceptional, the creative "formula" is a major source of speculation over their creative powers. A managerial approach to marketing might hold the creative formula as a mere *problem-solving* task and implicitly treat the creative function as a "technical input" (Hackley and Kover 2007: 65). But creatives' own approach to the notion of idea generation is purposefully mysterious. The concealed way to transform trick into technique is how knowledge is transformed into power (Taussig 2003). Creatives rarely source ideas from given research measures or managerial inputs and further resist bureaucratic routines and regimented material. Creatives feel their professional needs are not circumscribed by organizational bureaucracy but rather "transcend it" (Hackley and Kover 2007: 70). In interviews with multiple US-based creatives, Hackley and Kover heard the importance of "playing" with ideas and of "getting out of the agency" often. For many, "ideas come to (them) at home" (*ibid.*: 68). And while creatives may draw ideas from imaginary dialogues with fictive consumers, this often occurs outside conventional time and space, apart from the constraints of agency routine (Kover 1995: 602). As such, a query into *how* creative ideas are formulated is perhaps better rephrased as *where* ideas are generated, since creativity appears to occur most often in unstructured, away-from-agency "liminal space" (Malefyt and Morais 2012: 74–92).

The “sacredness of a hiddenness,” Taussig reminds us, is the essential theoretically that “mediates between the real and the really made up,” and which is carried off with no “less importance than that which mediates between trick and technique and therapeutic efficacy” (2003: 287). This guarded mystery is as crucial to the power of the established shaman as it is to the creative in advertising.

Creatives claim their best ideas arrive to them in everyday occasions outside normal agency activities. They say inspiration is triggered serendipitously, apart from regularized schedules in unspecific places and moments (Callahan and Stack 2007). Chief creative director of Ogilvy and Mather, David Ogilvy, recounts his most creative moments occurring away from work such as “when walking in the country, bird watching, listening to music, taking long hot baths or gardening” (Ogilvy 1965: 206–207). Phil Dusenberry, famed BBDO creative director, claims his “eureka moment” for the General Electric (GE) campaign arrived suddenly during a cab ride on the way to a meeting: “As we honked, bounced, and stalled our way through traffic, a beautiful thing happened. Maybe it was the last pothole, but the theme line, full-blown, popped into my head: ‘GE ... We bring good things to life’” (Dusenberry 2005: 4). When asked specifically where his creative insights come from, he comments:

Insights do not adhere to a strict metronomic beat that begins with research and ends with execution. Insights materialize at any point along the matrix. Sometimes they are the product of elegant research and analysis. But just as often they appear because of a casual remark by the client about what he or she really wants. Or in response to a clumsy execution of an ad that is so lacking in insight that it inspires you to fill in the blank. Or sometimes it’s little more than trusting your gut, relying on instinct, feeling moved by a notion and assuming that the rest of the world will be equally moved. (Dusenberry 2005: 19)

Dusenberry’s inscrutable answer here affirms what Taussig notes, that “magic begs for and at the same time resists explanations most when appearing to be explained” (2003: 295). Great creative ideas from masters like Dusenberry resist proper explanation since, like magic, such explanations “appear,” only to be made even more opaque.

Comparatively, the magician in Mauss' account is known to leave the clan to walk off in the forest alone, "taking advantage of the uncertainty" over explanation to their power, "encouraging it as another aspect of the mystery which surrounds their activities" (Mauss 1972: 42). For magicians and ad creatives alike, it appears the "domain of the unaccountable" is where magic proliferates (Malinowski 1954: 29), and also where technique and trickery further mystify the mode of enchantment.

What advertising creatives and magicians share in magical formulation in these off-spaces is the condition of liminality. Turner describes liminality as the subjunctive mode, a means of bending back and exposing the "what if" mode of life, where new possibilities and creative ideas thrive. Renato Rosaldo describes liminal space in terms of "zones of indeterminacy," in which unpredictability and variability mark a certain "open-endedness, which constitutes the social space in which creativity flourishes" (Rosaldo 1993: 256–257). This means situations apart from the ad agency that promise moments of serendipity, and where ad creatives experience ideas from a different perspective, are sources of inspiration and idea generation. Working away from structured routines and apart from established "facts" in ad agencies affords an alternative perspective on consumer life; so, while creatives may eschew direct contact with consumers in copy testing research and programed marketing measures, they do encounter the consumers' world in a reenchanting sense—through cab rides, along long walks, or while bird watching. This is the alternate reality of magic that appears as a form of reasoning itself, "as a strategy for managing uncertainty and gaining control over unknown risks" (Jenkins, Jessen and Steffen, quoted in Jöhncke and Steffen 2015: 18). This also affirms the way ideas, which no one else has ever fabricated before, are supposed to arrive, in what Latour calls, "some magical effect of reversal" (2010: 18). Consumer facts gathered "out there" by the magician are then brought back to the agency as idea fetishes, joining consumption facts with fetish properties in a complex configuration. The magician's irrational process of gathering insights then occurs *within*, as opposed to *against*, modern rationality and further shows how ideas are intertwined with movements that transform the ad creative's exploration and insight into knowledge and power.

Put another way, artistic inspiration at the beginning of the ideation process is formulated by tapping into an uncertain magical reality, which also drives uncertain economic business conditions in which the magical effects of ideas are consumed. Both artistic and economic uncertainty are therefore vital to the advertising process, as economic facts and fetishized ideas blend material and ephemeral properties into successful campaigns. Paradoxically, the business side of advertising attempts to mollify uncertainty by taking rationalizing approaches to commerce, such as regularly conducting market research, gathering consumer facts, investing in account management, and securing stable client relations; but the creative side of advertising celebrates indeterminacy and irrational measures as the means by which creatives develop “big ideas” to enchant clients and consumers. While the idea creation process is *kept* apart as mystical, artistic, and sacred, creatives also regularly *give* to business practices that distribute ideas in the form of rational branded campaigns for sustaining commercial realities. To mediate such keeping-while-giving oppositions, ad agencies turn to rituals in the numerous award ceremonies creatives attend, which paradoxically imbue creatives with more secretive power as artists, as they also help agencies at home expand commercial opportunities for new and existing clients. In rituals of award ceremonies and agency pitches, creative ideas are no longer concealed but strategically revealed in “rites of exposure” (Taussig 2003: 298), which *give* away tricks of idea formation, as they strengthen magic and *keep* the magician’s power intact.

Rites of Idea Consecration

Magic is central to actions of magicians, and rituals are the effective means by which paradox is mediated and magicians perform their tasks. Magic is realized in “rites of exposure” in which, magical rites are “eminently effective; they are creative, they *do* things” (Mauss 1972: 23–24). In advertising, rituals come into play at specific times, for specific purposes, and at regularized occasions such as to celebrate an ad creative in an award ceremony or when an agency competes in a pitch against rivals for a client’s brand. The former imbues the creative with more mystique

and artistic power, while the latter uses a creative's power in a pitch to transform ideas for a client's product into a brand. I first discuss the awards ceremony, which produces the cult of the artistic creative, and then turn to rituals surrounding ad agency competitive pitches.

The Awards Ceremony

In the world of advertising, creatives are esteemed for their role as idea generators. The advertising award system honors and elevates the creative's talent like no other event in the advertising industry (Malefyt 2013: 200). Specifically, the awards ceremony recognizes the "artist" in the creative, distinguishes creative talent among peers and imbues the agency at home with more commercial power. Paradoxically, the awards ceremony venerates creative ideas for their artistic value, apart from their economic capital.

Ad agencies relentlessly compete for clients in the consumer marketplace to gain economic advantage over rival agencies (Miller 1997; Moeran 1996; Schudson 1984). Fierce competition often leads to outright animosity such that agencies are "constantly looking for ways to poach clients from each other" (Miller 1997: 160). Yet apart from agency battles over commercial realities, creatives from rival agencies *collaborate* in the awards ceremonies to venerate each other's work artistically. They cooperate as judge and jury to award the "best" ideas among themselves in the industry. Affirming this distinction, Hackley and Kover note, "Consumers and clients respond to creativity while creative professionals and artists understand it" (2007: 71). Therefore, peer approval of the latter is perceived as far more important among creatives themselves. Creative awards not only elevate aesthetic accomplishments but also return to creatives their status as "artist" and imbue celebrity qualities to their names. As such, creatives develop a certain autonomy in formulating their own set of rules of form and style, in which they elevate their work as "art" (Bourdieu 1993: 112–115) (Fig. 7.2).

The 41 various award ceremonies, such as Cannes, Effies, Clios, Addys and so forth (see Sandiegox 2017), are ritualized in that they occur as regularized annual activities, in designated places, for a discrete period of



Fig. 7.2 The advertising awards ceremony at Cannes, France, courtesy of bayerberg/Flickr, under CCBY license

time, with certain objectives and evaluations carried out. They offer a frame of analysis for understanding specific roles, relations, and divisions in the agency world (Goffman 1979; Malefyt and Morais 2012; Moeran 2005: 43–57). Likewise, rituals in magic require exact strictures and boundaries to work. Malinowski explains: “First of all, magic is surrounded by strict conditions: exact remembrances of a spell, impeccable performance of the rite, unswerving adhesion to the taboos and observances which shackle the magician. If any one of these is neglected, the failure of magic follows” (1954: 85). This ritual framework is essential for magic and for enhancing the aura of an artist. For this, creatives regularly attend award ceremonies to magically imbue their names with power.

What’s in a Creative’s Name?

According to Malinowski, surrounding any big magician, “there arises a halo made up of stories about his wonderful cures or kills, his catches, his

victories, his conquests in love. In every savage society such stories form the backbone of belief in magic.” In other words, magicians strive to build names for themselves, since “Every eminent practitioner ... makes his personal warrant of wonder-working” (1954: 83). In the advertising industry, likewise, magical ideas depend on the “wonder-working” of a big-name creative.

The awards ceremony potentially magnifies a creative’s name wherein every creative practitioner generates a legendary “halo” to his name. In the awards ceremony, the creative artist is venerated in terms such as “initiator” or “catalyst,” and as one who creates “big ideas” out of the ordinary (Malefyt 2013). Perpetuating a “myth” around a magician’s power creates a “living force” (Malinowski 1954), which produces new beliefs and inspires legendary prowess around a creative’s name. Bourdieu elaborates on the “charismatic ideology” as the ultimate basis of belief in the value of a work of art (1993: 76). Such ideology creates *an original* that carries a unique inalienable aura, which cannot be copied, but through distance of time and space gains authentic value (Benjamin 1969). Creatives in advertising are similarly venerated as “originals” by their charisma and distance from other agency people, which adds a unique identity and aura to their name.

Paradoxically, creative names are celebrated singularly even as the agency collectivity participates in campaign and pitch development. The artistic vision of an ad creative is rewarded for his “novelty of exceptional acts,” which is expected of charismatic individuals who achieve something unique and extraordinary against a world of mass conformity and standardization (Hallam and Ingold 2007: 5–7). Put differently, the act of creation in advertising, like elsewhere, is celebrated for its “singularity, separateness and disjuncture” (ibid.: 5). Even as other agency members collaborate in a campaign, the creative individual wholly receives singular credit for an idea. For example, in a publically contested spat, BBDO’s chief creative officer, David Lubars, was awarded the highest honor Gold Medal at Cannes for his work on HBO’s 2007 *Voyeur campaign*, even though a digital media company that collaborated with BBDO challenged singular ownership to the campaign idea (see Malefyt 2013 for full story). The aura of the creative reflects the “mythology” of the lone

genius artist and is venerated as a solo act in the creative industry as it is among the work of magicians.

In another sense, a “name economy” (Moeran 2003) operates in advertising, which also represents a potent symbolic means by which the artistic capital of an ad creative is enhanced. Celebrities such as sports figures, movie stars, and fashion models regularly use their names for corporate sponsorship and product endorsements. Creatives in advertising also use their names for their celebrity power to attract clients and enchant brands with charisma and status. Beyond their “well-known” factor, celebrity names carry a unique ability to transfer their celebrity associations *across* distinct cultural, economic, and symbolic categories of society. Names “magically” join other fields of cultural production that are normally distinct (fashion, sports, film) through advertised endorsements with other brands (Moeran 2003: 300). For example, Sean Connery’s rugged yet refined film character allows the luxury brand Louis Vuitton travel gear to advertise its product with his image, joining ruggedness and virility with high status and social class, in ways that could not be achieved without his name endorsement. Celebrity names act as “cultural mediators” (Moeran 2003: 308) that stand out as unique and “magically” connect symbolic and cultural capital across various fields of production.

We see the “name economy” at work in advertising, where the basis for elevating a creative’s name to celebrity status artistically plays into the paradoxical magic of an agency commercially. As the creative award ceremony confers celebrity status to an artist’s name, it also confers economic status to an agency as a commercial enterprise. The creative’s name stature more easily attracts lofty clients, promising the client greater strategic resources from the agency to link a brand *across* a range of media and audiences for commercial purposes. More successful agencies use the creative’s name and agency stature to leverage buying power with media to link a client’s brand across mediums of print, broadcast, out-of-home, direct mail, and digital/interactive channels in one effort. The creative name, then, keeps-while-it-gives, both retaining unique celebrity status for the artist, while disseminating prestige to an ad agency and client for economic purposes, and broader reach across markets and media. The paradoxical feature of keeping-while-giving shows a creative’s artistic ability to

elevate a brand by enhancing its symbolic value, while demonstrating its commercial value to disseminate messages across consumer landscapes.

Rituals of Pitches

Creative services and account management operate in distinct worlds, but join forces in the buildup to a pitch when artistic vision joins business management in an agency-wide roll-out. Rituals function to unite various teams and practices that normally are distinct to create magical results for the client's brand, since it is "magic which unites the various classificatory terms" (Mauss 1972: 102). Rituals are not only useful for understanding agency creative life but also for interpreting and understanding various sets of relationships, both in and out of the agency (Moeran 2005: 63–79). More importantly, pitches are where the creative artist skillfully blends fact into fetish by *revealing* previously concealed ideas that will transform commodity products into idealized brands.

In agency-wide pitches, multiple departments collaborate. Copywriters, art directors, account planners, account managers, and others contribute to the process. Account managers deliver strategic direction for the assignment to agency creative teams, and are concerned with keeping the brand in line with client expectations (Malefyt and Morais 2012: 35–46). Creatives, on the other hand, take pride in their craft and passion for their ideas. Creatives often resist account managers because they feel the purity of their idea will be defiled and their imaginative efforts compromised (cf. Douglas 1966). Given the interaction of these two sides—the account side wanting client stability, and the creative side desiring to distinguish itself with iconoclastic artistic work—the ritual process perfectly mediates the tensions to bring the work to completion (see Malefyt and Morais 2010).

Rituals are needed to mediate paradoxical tensions and join venerated ideas with practical promotions. Like ancient systems of sacred amulets and totemic clan symbols as understood by Durkheim, magic relies on both division and unity of the symbolic and the material, joining sacred and profane, whose properties are authenticated and legitimized in cosmologies of the clan. Performing together in ritual, an agency not only

joins separate departments but collective actions help foster group consensus as a united front. Appadurai affirms that ritual offers a “flexible formula of performances through which social effects are produced and new states of feeling and connection are created” (Appadurai 2004: 79). In the unity of a competitive pitch, ritual underlies the emotional conviction of a worthy “big idea” and gives the agency team a sense of faith in themselves as a clan. As Geertz posits, “In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world, producing thus that idiosyncratic transformation in one’s sense of reality” (Geertz 1973: 112).

Nevertheless, it is Turner’s concept of social drama in ritual that reveals a culturally sanctioned *organizing principle* by which social divisions that otherwise create schisms may foster reconciliation (Turner 1987: 37). Turner posits that rituals importantly possess both tangible and intangible properties. He refers to the phenomena articulated in ritual as a polarization of meaning, allowing symbolic values to take material form. He writes, “At the sensory pole are concentrated those *significata* that may be expected to arouse desires and feelings; at the ideological pole one finds an arrangement of norms and values that guide and control persons as members of social groups and categories” (Turner 1967: 28). By combining affect and cognition in ritual action, *symbols gain their significance* in the context of performance. Ritual is performative action that supplies the conditions for the materialization of ideals (Stewart and Strathern 2014; Bell 2009; Handelman and Lindquist 2005). As Stewart and Strathern (2014: 5) posit, “The embodied participation of persons in rituals not only influences them in bodily ways but becomes *the actual vehicle* by which metaphorical meanings are created and credited with efficacy.”

Moreover, the creative’s “big idea” is not only revealed to the client and agency in the pitch but often the creative discusses *how* he came up with an idea. The unmasking, in Taussig’s words, “adds to, rather than eliminates the *mysterium tremenduom* of magic’s magic” (2003: 300). It turns on, in the meeting, “not a question of seeing more or seeing less behind the skin of appearance. Instead it turns on seeing *how* one is seeing” (ibid., my emphasis). Involving this turn of events within the “known unknown,” then “turns on” a whole new attitude. Notably, creative ideas

performed in a pitch assume material form in the subsequent presentation of the roll-out of marketing plans. In other words, not only are ideas revealed at this point, but when creative ideas are set forth in a pitch, they *materialize* in metaphor as well as in artifacts of designed promotional displays, signage, packaging, loyalty programs, and other branded material propaganda that are developed and presented by a united agency team to win a client's brand.

In a corresponding way, creative ideas performed in a pitch not only materialize promotional material for a campaign, but also in Latour's sense, *make durable* the human relationships between the agency and client. "Winning ideas" from a competitive pitch are the symbolic *and* durable foundation to the start of a new relationship with a client. For example, after several ad agencies competed in a pitch for a client, the CEO of a losing agency rebuked the ethics of the winning agency when ideas from his agency were "taken" by the latter and used for the new client-agency relationship. This "idea borrowing" was later discovered when new ideas that were "not their own" appeared in the marketplace for the client's brand. The CEO of the losing agency admonished, "Not much good can come from a relationship where the client thinks that the ideas from two different agencies are interchangeable" (Johnson 2012). In other words, creative ideas are not only sacrosanct of an ad creative's individual talent but are *themselves* the seeds of durable client relations. Ideas performed by an agency are the essence of that agency's self-definition and social body. Ideas therefore *belong* to an agency and cannot "mix and match" with other agency material, since ideas, as the losing CEO affirmed, "relentlessly express [the agency's] vision through all of the touch points that a company has with the public" (Johnson 2012). Latour and Woolgar (1986) remind us that just as social features of "hard" science *assemble* into objective "facts," ideas crafted by agencies and performed in pitches also assume material form when they *assemble* a network of human relations. Only when "actors and points of view are aligned," do we enter a "stable" and "durable definition of society" (Latour 1991: 129). For ad agencies, ideas materialized by human actors in pitches importantly form the foundation of durable partnerships with corporate clients, providing additional proof "that ritual—as an element of magic—is predetermined by collective forces" (Mauss 1972: 73).

Conclusion

This essay reveals the ways in which paradoxes and tensions in advertising, such as keeping-while-giving, concealing and revealing, exceptional versus ordinary, and individual versus collective enchant ideas for change. Organized as a dialectic of agency life, and through a network of magicians, formulas, and rites, advertising ideas entangle the embodied insides—the exclusive thoughts of creative individuals—with social outsides in agency roles and work-related functions, to remake mundane products into branded ideals for consumers. As such, the irrational impulses of an artistic creative are made durable as the substance and form of agency relations and sustained client relations, which then market those branded ideals to consumers.

In another sense, this chapter explores the ways in which advertising agencies circulate magic through a “chain of transformations” (Latour 2010) in which idea ephemera alternate symbolic and material forms. In extended transformations, the symbolic capital of an artistic idea is nurtured into a campaign idea, which enchants the cultural capital of material goods and is circulated in society as a brand to uplift a corporation’s economic value and profit. Concomitantly, ideas return to an agency in the form of revenue, repeat business, and client relations to further enhance the symbolic capital of a creative’s name, and through contagion, reenchant the power and authority of the advertising agency. Two realms—the ephemeral mystical realm of creative ideation and the factual realm of business relations and stable client relations—are thus intertwined as art into business and blend as transformations of each other in a construction *and* version of reality, each a “synonym” for the other (Latour 2010: 24).

Ideas in advertising thus represent essential social, symbolic and durable transformations. Ideas spread ideological value of possible lifestyles and consumption narratives to audiences, while bolstering economic systems of capital for branded corporations that help maintain the life of an agency back home. Transformative ideas are held as agency assets and celebrated of a creative’s name in elite award ceremonies but also disseminated as essential tools for building long-lasting partnerships with clients

and aspirational ideals for consumers. As such, the advertising of ideas presents a paradoxical system of exchange which overlays political strategies of power, knowledge, and authority (Weiner 1992). Advertisers are both producers and consumers of ideas that transform culture—such that ideas are inalienable possessions as well as alienable commodities. Ideas rely on indeterminacy to sustain practices of hierarchy, status, and power inside agencies, as they also play a major role in reproducing culture outside of agencies. The paradox of advertising is that it helps shape culture while it also draws from culture, in and out of ad agencies, through the magical circulation of ideas.

Malinowski's observation of the purpose of magic in society applies here to advertising: "The function of magic is to ritualize man's optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear. Magic expresses the greater value for man of confidence over doubt, of steadfastness over vacillation, of optimism over pessimism" (Malinowski 1954: 90). Accordingly, the magical purpose of advertising today is not only to become a determiner of our collective self-image but also to optimize and enchant our greatest hopes and wishes in consumption through the circulation of ideals.

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8

The Business of Inspiration: A Magical Technology of Prefiguration

Kasper Tang Vangkilde

Dominant modern imaginaries of the future portray “that which lies ahead” as an inherently open and indeterminate horizon (Anderson 2010; Nowotny 2016). On the one hand, this openness and indeterminacy go together with a profound sense of *uncertainty*, as the future is perceived to disrupt and exceed the present. Thus, nobody can know the future since it will determine its own genealogy (Strathern 1992: 172). On the other hand, the openness and indeterminacy serve precisely as a potent impetus to pursue a certain understanding of the future, in that all meaningful action relies on a vision of plot and future developments (Hastrup 2007; Wallman 1992). In this sense, anticipation is essentially *potentiation*, meaning that once we have a view of the future, we are able to act (Strathern 1992: 178).

These implied effects of an open and indeterminate future are distinctly pronounced in modern capitalism. For quite some time, the future has figured as deadly serious in the world of business, being potentially valuable, highly contested and, as such, by no means to be disregarded.

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In their bestselling book *Competing for the Future* (1996), for instance, Gary Hamel and C. K. Prahalad contend that “[i]n business, as in art, what distinguishes leaders from laggards, and greatness from mediocrity, is the ability to uniquely imagine what could be” (1996: 27). Accordingly, what I shall here term “technologies of prefiguration”—that is, more or less systematic practices of knowing and prefiguring the future—prevail today in corporate organizations in the form of scenarios (e.g. Chermack 2011), trendspotting (e.g. Laermer 2002), big data analytics (e.g. Ohlhorst 2013) and so on. Although Helga Nowotny may certainly have a point in arguing that “[t]he future is the ultimate inexhaustible reservoir of uncertainty for the inhabitants of this planet” (2016: vi), such technologies seek precisely to cope with or overcome uncertainty by prefiguring the future in distinct ways. In this sense, they are indicative of a more general human “craving for certainty” (ibid. 1).

This craving is a central driving force behind not merely scientific reason and rational order but also magical practices. As is often noted, Bronislaw Malinowski famously argued that magic is found “wherever the elements of chance and accident, and the emotional play between hope and fear have a wide and extensive range” (1948: 116); or, in other words, in activities characterized by unpredictable and uncertain forces. Magical practices, then, share with processes of science and rationality the endeavor to acquire a degree of control and certainty over what otherwise appears uncontrollable and uncertain. While anthropological discussions have often conceived of these endeavors in terms of a modernist distinction between rationality and irrationality—typically with science associated with the former and magic with the latter—Steffen Jöhncke and Vibeke Steffen have recently suggested that we need to move beyond this dichotomy and find a more neutral vocabulary when discussing different forms of reasoning. Their solution is the concept of arationality (2015: 32–35):

The ability to act in culturally appropriate or practically sensible ways, without necessarily being in need of explicit, rational legitimacy—nor being able to produce it, should it be demanded—may be referred to as *arationality*. In many cases it is impossible to say whether a given form of acting or reasoning is rational or not—but moreover, this question is beside the point. (ibid. 34)

In addition to the fact that this approach avoids the value-laden connotations of rationality and irrationality (ibid. 33), and instead focuses on humbly understanding how people try to make sense of their world in various ways (ibid. 34), it also underscores that different forms of reasoning may coexist and be entangled in practice (ibid. 10–11). Indeed, the title of this book, *Magical Capitalism*, captures precisely this point: the coexistence and entanglement of economic logics, magical practices, organizational order, technologies of enchantment and so on.

In this chapter, I set out to explore processes of inspiration, so often emphasized as imperative in various forms of cultural production. My argument is that these processes of inspiration constitute a distinctive technology of prefiguration by which creative agents deal with the inherent uncertainty of the future. Or, in other words, the common endeavor to become inspired is a particular way of overcoming the challenge of an unknown future in modern capitalism by prefiguring it and, thus, making it actionable. As I shall demonstrate by drawing on my previous research among fashion designers (Vangkilde 2015, 2017), the practice of inspiration cannot be accounted for in rationalist terms. Rather, it constitutes an *arational* form of reasoning which, as magic, works toward desirable ends in ways that go beyond and challenge dominant rationalist conceptions. More specifically, I contend that processes of inspiration among fashion designers are essentially anchored in an animistic ontology—that is, a world in which not merely humans but also nonhumans are perceived as being alive—which forms the basis for a shamanic practice by which fashion designers become possessed—or *in-spired*—by what they refer to as the *zeitgeist* or “spirit of the time.” Crucially, this entails that they acquire a distinctive sense of the time, which turns them into prophetic agents able to prefigure and act on the future. Magical capitalism, indeed.

A Purposeful Naïveté: Taking Inspiration Seriously

Whenever a novel remarkable cultural product—be it a film, a book, a piece of music or a fashion collection—is created and acclaimed for its distinctive vision and originality, it is by no means uncommon that the

media will probe into the underlying sources of inspiration. Thus, we know that practically anything can be inspiring: places, people, music, books, art, dreams, emotions and so on. “The list is endless,” as one book puts it (Vrontikis 2002: 7). In fashion, for instance, Giorgio Armani was once inspired by the mountains of Mongolia and China (Davis 1992: 128), John Galliano by images from the time of Napoleon (Mete 2006: 284) and Alexander McQueen by an orchid photograph (Armstrong 2007). This fascination with inspiration is perhaps not all that surprising. After all, would it not be more surprising if laypersons and scholars were *not* intrigued by such mysteries as to how a Chinese mountain or an orchid photograph could be transformed into a dress or blouse, and why the sources of inspiration were precisely those objects and not, say, a beautiful lake, a peculiar bike, a Claude Monet painting, or something else? Apparently, the famous British fashion designer, Alexander McQueen, stumbled upon the orchids in a coffee-table book. Or, perhaps more accurately, the orchids stumbled upon McQueen. Because, as he explained, “[t]hese were so striking and strange that they *leaped out* at me” (in Armstrong 2007: 361, emphasis added).

Indeed, there is something magical about inspiration. The term itself derives, like the term spirit, from the Latin *spirare*, which means “to blow” or “to breathe.” More specifically, in-spiration thus means the blowing of spirit into a subject or the possession of a subject by a superior power. In this sense, the term has clear religious connotations, being closely associated with aspects such as divination, prophecies, possession, mystical experiences and so on (Moffitt 2005: 3). While it is common to link inspiration to a romantic myth of artistic and poetic creativity, the *locus classicus* of this conception is an intriguing dialogue in Plato’s *Ion*, in which Socrates questions Ion, a prize-winning rhapsode, that is, a professional performer of poetry, about his practice and skills. During their dialogue, Socrates develops the argument that Ion’s impressive recitation of the poetry of Homer cannot be based on knowledge or mastery but is rather attributable to a divine inspiration. As Socrates puts it: “You see it’s not because you’re a master of knowledge about Homer that you can say what you say, but because of a divine gift, because you are possessed” (*Ion* 536c in Cooper 1997: 943).

Historically, inspiration has thus been broadly understood to denote the possession of an individual agent by some transcendent power (Clark 1997: 2). Not least in the field of art and poetry—or cultural production more generally—the ability to become inspired has commonly been perceived as a unique and privileged gift that is only granted to a few and, importantly, is simply essential in order to attain creative excellence (Moffitt 2005: 14–15). During the period of the Romantics, for instance, acts of creation by artists or poets were largely seen to be a kind of message from God or some other spiritual being, with the artist or poet serving as an emissary of the divine (Negus and Pickering 2004: 2–3). As a medium, in other words, a creative person was primarily defined by the capacity to let some divine authority speak through oneself. Such ideas have not been left unchallenged, however. In 1846, Edgar Allen Poe argued strongly against the idea of intuitive creativity, emphasizing that poets prefer to give the impression that their creations are the results of “an ecstatic intuition,” while they “would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought ... at the cautious selections and rejections—at the painful erasures and interpolations ... which, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrion*” (quoted in Clark 1997: 1).

Despite such harsh critique, inspiration continues to figure as a critical component in accounts of creativity in cultural production. This may be closely linked to a modern quest for self-expression and entrepreneurship, along with endless celebrations of originality and novelty in contemporary capitalism. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to explore the intricate links between modernity and inspiration (see Moffitt 2005: 11–32), it is evident that tips and tricks to gain inspiration remain widely shared and discussed as a distinct way of working (see e.g. Swanson 2006; Vrontikis 2002). If one listens to fashion professionals and several fashion scholars, for instance, sources of inspiration are considered essential for nurturing creativity and originality, for which reason managers are occasionally urged to be more proactive in encouraging a focus on inspiration (Eckert and Stacey 1998; Mete 2006). Accounts of the significant role of inspiration in the creation of new cultural products are thus pervasive. John Lennon, for instance, also once stressed that “real

music ... the music of the spheres, the music that surpasses understanding ... I'm just a channel ... I transcribe it like a medium" (quoted in Negus and Pickering 2004: 3).

A key question is, of course, how we are to approach such descriptions. In *The Theory of Inspiration* (1997), a detailed study of the relation between inspiration and composition in Western Romantic and post-Romantic poetics, Timothy Clark emphasizes that writers may very well be notorious for drawing on romantic myths of creativity, but their explanations nonetheless "demand better consideration than the forms of dismissal or evasion they have hitherto received" (ibid. 9). He goes on to suggest that the most novel, but clearly also most risky, approach "is, with qualification, to take writers' claims to inspiration seriously" (ibid.). This resonates with certain trends in anthropology, closely associated with the ontological turn, which have gained currency by urging anthropologists to take things and phenomena encountered in the field seriously instead of substituting them with recourse to more well-known conceptions, thus explaining them away. In one version of this approach, laid out in *Thinking Through Things* (Henare et al. 2007), the key to taking things seriously is to adopt a strategy of "purposeful naïveté," which seeks not to limit in advance the anthropologist's conceptions and vocabulary (ibid. 2; see also Latour 2005: 47–49). If, as Eduardo Viveiros de Castro puts it, "[a]nthropology is that Western intellectual endeavor dedicated to taking seriously what Western intellectuals cannot ... take seriously" (2011: 133), it is essential that we, as anthropologists, seek to *pass* and *think through* what we study in order to approach an understanding of it. In other words, creative agents' descriptions and experiences of being inspired, of being somehow in a state of possession, may perhaps appear somewhat odd or nonsensical to us, but if this is so, then that problem is ours, not theirs (Henare et al. 2007: 6); that is, we may simply not know what they are talking about (ibid. 12).

On this basis, my intention in the rest of this chapter is to delve into how inspiration unfolds in practice in the business of fashion and design. While it would clearly be possible to analyze and, in a sense, deconstruct the descriptions and experiences of being inspired as mere expressions of a romantic myth of creativity, this analysis would fail to take seriously what the designers themselves take seriously, relegating their perceptions and experiences to pure romanticism. Instead, I seek to adopt the strategy

of purposeful naïveté by seizing on any astonishment as an analytical opportunity to challenge and open up common ideas of what modern capitalist practices comprise. Building on Brian Moeran's recent argument that fashion is "underpinned by all kinds of magical practices" (2015: 26), I shall argue that processes of inspiration are grounded in an animistic ontology that underlies three essential components of inspiration: a condition of being, a mode of engagement and an experience of possession. I expand on each of these in the next three sections in order to advance the argument that inspiration constitutes a magical technology of prefiguration.¹

A Condition of Being: Staying Open to the World

During my eight months of ethnographic fieldwork among fashion designers and product developers in a leading international fashion company, I joined a small group of designers on a number of their so-called inspiration trips. On one occasion, the designers had just received the disappointing message from the Creative Director that their work in no way progressed as expected. It was, therefore, decided that they needed to get away from the office in order to seek new inspiration. On a Wednesday morning, we thus headed toward Milan with the plan of visiting a range of museums, bookstores, furniture shops, fashion stores, restaurants and bars. In what follows, I present a brief snapshot from our day in the north Italian city.²

Having visited the first museum, we discover a bookstore, as well as a store offering clothing, arts and crafts, right next to the museum. When we enter the stores, the designers walk around more or less separately, looking carefully at all the different things. Not all of these are, of course, equally exciting, as some of them are almost ignored while others are perceived as much more fascinating. Among the latter are not merely shoes, bags, clothes and other fashion accessories but, just as often, or perhaps even more so, things of a quite different nature. Katja, for instance, is very interested in a book which she finds extremely cool. She shows me a few pages of it, in which pictures of CD covers from hard rock and heavy metal bands are surrounded by pictures of entirely different things, such

as a flower, a teddy bear, a puppet or the like. She explains that she really likes this odd and surprising combination, and Louise adds that it is always so exciting when you see something that you have not seen or thought of before.

After some time, we continue on to another museum, which is hosting an exhibition entitled “The New Italian Design.” This exhibition presents a number of designers in such areas as product design, food design, graphics and much more, and, again, the designers are highly enthusiastic. As in the stores, it is not only things like handbags, jewelry and other accessories that attract the designers’ attention. Rather, it is often other kinds of design that they find really fascinating. One creation, in particular, called *Un Seconda Vita*—A Second Life—inspires Rebecca. At first glance, the creation shows a broken bowl but broken in a particular way so that each of the broken pieces becomes a small plate. Rebecca explores the creation carefully, and she emphasizes how she finds it truly fascinating that something gets a second life. Might this, she ponders, be applied to fashion as well? In much the same way, the other designers are also highly attentive to whatever we pass through, activating all their senses in the process. Things are touched, materials smelled, people observed and so on.

After a few hours, we decide to turn our attention to Milan’s famous shopping areas. Since our plan is flexible, we spend the next hours going from shop to shop, looking at all sorts of things, including furniture, antiques, interior design, books, art, expensive designer clothes and mainstream fashion. We visit all those stores which, for one reason or another, attract our attention; for instance because of a great amount of weird stuff in the window, an unusual interior design or something else. In these stores, the designers eagerly explore and discuss a large number of things, both the minor details and the overall construction of what they examine. In this respect, looking and touching are not always enough, as certain items of clothing must even be put on in order to see how they really look and feel.

Let this brief description suffice to emphasize that the designers demonstrate a quite extraordinary attention and responsiveness to everything and everyone around them; not only people and things but also buildings, sounds, atmospheres and so on. Creations in museums, clothing in fashion stores, people in the streets and so on are sensuously explored in every

possible way, almost as if nothing like it has ever previously existed. Whereas I was surely inclined to see *entities*—fixed and complete, however odd or remarkable they appeared—the designers always saw *potentials*, constantly exploring what things might become rather than what they were. Catherine explained this to me surprisingly clearly:

I think that it is very important to always look at things in a new way and never take things as they are. You have to be really open-minded, and I think that you always have to, you know, look at everything that is happening around you, take everything inside in a way.

In an interview, Lisa, another fashion designer, joins in: “You have to have a certain feeling about trends. You have to have a sensibility to see which things exist right now, so that you can say that ‘now, it is enough about those things; now, we need to have something new.’ Yeah, a special sense maybe.”

Importantly, these statements should not just be seen as a matter of being “attuned to an impressive degree to modern developments,” as Herbert Blumer once put it (1969: 279) but of relating to the world in a very particular way. On their inspiration trips, the designers appeared much like a kind of “urban hunter,” tirelessly in pursuit of things, people, pictures, atmospheres and other constituents that could provide food for thought. As Tim Ingold stresses, people who hunt for subsistence generally have a very intimate knowledge of the landscape and its plant and animal inhabitants (2000: 111). But even more than this, they are also often associated with animism (e.g. Ingold 2000: 111–131; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Willerslev 2007), one of the earliest concepts in anthropology, which is traditionally known to designate the human tendency to endow nonhuman entities with human characteristics (Descola 1996: 87; Willerslev 2007: 2). Ingold convincingly emphasizes, however, that the distinctive feature of an animist ontology is not so much the point that life is *in* things but rather that things are *in* life, caught up in a continual process of coming into being (2007: 31). Animism as a condition of being, Ingold elaborates, “could be described as a condition of being alive to the world, characterized by a heightened sensitivity and responsiveness, in perception and action, to an environment that is always in flux, never the same from one moment to the next” (2006: 10). In other words, in this

condition of being, the world is a nascent world, continuously about to disclose itself for what it is.

It is hard to conceive, I believe, of a more accurate way of describing the heightened sensitivity and responsiveness of the designers in Milan. Like numerous other hunters, the designers are present at the continuous birth of the world (ibid. 12)—that is, at the fact that things are *in* life—for which reason they are not turned in upon themselves but *open* to the world around them (cf. Ingold 2007: 31–32). A designer, it was both stressed and enacted, has to be open-minded, never taking things as they are, always approaching life as a process of on-going generation. Faced with the uncertainty of designing, here and now, what is yet to come, it was not merely critical that the designers left their daily surroundings in order to immerse themselves in a setting marked off from the ordinary. What is more, they related to this setting in a particular way, almost as though they, at each moment, opened their eyes to the world for the first time (cf. Ingold 2006: 12). One significant aspect of the processes of inspiration thus entailed a distinct condition of being alive and open to the world (Fig. 8.1).



Fig. 8.1 With heightened sensitivity and attentiveness to everything and everyone around them, a group of fashion designers are on a so-called inspiration trip to Milan

A Mode of Engagement: “Talking with” Things

In Milan, it was clear that not everything was considered fascinating and inspiring. Certain things were more attractive than others, almost irresistibly drawing the designers’ attention to them. As art historian James Elkins notes, it is sometimes as if some things possess such an irresistible effect that they tie us to them by little wires (1996: 19). He puts forward the rather provoking idea that, instead of saying that humans are doing the looking, we might argue that objects are trying to catch our eyes, their gleams and glints being a sort of hook that snares us. In this sense, to go on an inspiration trip is to be “like fish who like to swim in waters full of hooks” (ibid. 20). Of course, the designers are the ones in pursuit of things but, to turn our customary assumption upside down, suggesting that things catch our eyes rather than, or just as much as, our eyes capturing things is, I believe, a thought-provoking yet apt invitation in the light of the above animistic condition of being.

In the ethnographic studies, some of the most intriguing instances of animate things concern stones. Nurit Bird-David describes, for instance, how a man from the Nayaka, a hunter-gatherer community of South India, relates that his sister-in-law was one day sitting under a tree when a stone jumped into her lap (1999: 74). We also know that stones among the Ojibwa have been experienced to follow a human around a tent, as well as to respond to a question (Ingold 2000: 97). Certainly, to a Western ear, such an experience may sound strange, but perhaps it is more common than we tend to think. Is it merely a coincidence, for instance, that the designers often explained that they were *attracted by* a particular thing, thus ascribing the force of the attraction more to the thing than to themselves? Similarly, the things perceived to be inspiring were always described as wild, crazy, attracting, eye-catching and so forth, always causing a stir and thus *capturing* the designers’ attention. At one point, the Creative Director even put it in this way: “I really go through the things. I let these things jump on me. I am absolutely open-minded. Whatever is coming, is coming.” The distinctive feature of an animistic condition of being—that is, the perception of things as being *in* life—thus entailed a particular mode of engagement, which amounted not to a one-way but to a two-way relatedness, meaning that the designers were

highly attentive to the ways in which the things responded as they explored them (cf. Bird-David 1999). In the same way, we recall how Alexander McQueen described that the orchids *leaped out* at him.

In an interview, Catherine elaborated on this engagement. She suddenly looked at a lamp in the corner of the room and emphasized that she could easily take this lamp as her source of inspiration. “You can get something out of it,” she said. “You can do a collection with this lamp as an inspiration ... I could see, for example, big white tops, and then really thin trousers ... And then this round shape of it, you could try to have this as a topic going through as well.” Like the engagement with things on inspiration trips, Catherine explores the lamp carefully—its color, its materials, its construction and so on—and, in this process, the lamp stares (Elkins 1996) or speaks (Holbraad 2011) back, as it were, making a difference to how Catherine envisages a fashion collection. In a paper intriguingly entitled “Can the Thing Speak?,” Martin Holbraad argues that things may be said to have their own language, which consists of their material characteristics. These, he contends, “can dictate particular forms for their conceptualization” (2011: 18), meaning that things may be able to yield their own concepts and speak for themselves, if you will (ibid. 17–19). As Catherine explores the lamp, it speaks back in this sense, thus providing a distinctive perspective on how a fashion collection may be envisaged. As a kind of effect of the lamp, Catherine sees big white tops, thin trousers and something with a round shape.

In this way, the designers are evidently not approaching things as passive objects for their explorative gaze. Quite the reverse, things are actively responding, for which reason the engagement constitutes a mutually responsive relatedness characteristic of an animistic condition of being. As Bird-David describes what she calls an “animistic epistemology” that is epitomized in the phrase that the Nayaka are “talking with” things:

‘Talking with’ stands for attentiveness to variances and invariances in behavior and response of things in states of relatedness and for getting to know such things as they change through the vicissitudes over time of the engagement with them. To ‘talk with a tree’—rather than ‘cut it down’ [the modernist epistemology]—is to perceive what *it* does as one acts towards it, being aware concurrently of changes in oneself and the tree. (1999: 77)

This kind of “animistic epistemology” characterizes also the designers. Their close practical engagement with a number of things is likewise one of “talking,” in that the designers are highly attentive to the ways in which the things respond as they come closer to them, look carefully at them, touch them, smell them and so on. The lamp, *Un Seconda Vita* and other things are thus being both “looked at” and “looked from” in the same process (Elkins 1996), in the sense that the designers explore the things, the things respond to their exploration, and the designers come to see a fashion collection in a particular way. The key point is, in other words, that the things afford (Gibson 1979) certain possibilities in the engagement with them; that is, they form part of a “circuit of affordances,” as Moeran has aptly phrased it, which both inhibits and enables the creative processes (2014).

Much of this analysis clearly challenges basic modernist conceptions and certainties, not least the distinction between subjects and objects, humans and nonhumans (see Latour 1993). Indeed, it may appear counterintuitive to assert that things are alive, responding and jumping. As Ingold explains, it is customary for people in the West to conceive of life as a qualifying attribute which only some entities and not others are seen to possess (2000: 96). Insofar as the properly modern way of dealing with things is to perceive them as belonging to the category of “lifeless” objects detached from “lively” subjects, it follows that much of the above does not really make sense. In an animistic condition of being, however, the key point is that life is not conceived as a property that entities may or may not possess a priori to their engagement in specific fields of relations. Rather, it is the other way around: things are perceived to be alive (some of them even to be persons) *as* and *when* and *because* people engage in and maintain relationships with them (Bird-David 1999: 73; see also Ingold 2000; Willerslev 2007). The quality of life is revealed after the fact, so to speak (Ingold 2000: 97), that is, things are alive *not* as outward expressions of life as an innate property, but as the effects of being bound up together with the designers in contexts of practical engagement. In this mode of “talking with” things, certain things and not others are then perceived to be inspiring, being wild, crazy or extraordinary, because they respond in such stimulating and powerful ways that they enable the designers to envisage a fashion collection from a new and unprecedented perspective (Fig. 8.2).



Fig. 8.2 Certain things may be so inspiring that they “speak” to you. “Talking with” a lamp, for instance, may enable a fashion designer to envisage a fashion collection from a new perspective

A State of Possession: Becoming *In-Spired*

An important question is still hanging in the air: how do the designers determine, as Patrik Aspers asks, “among the things that they are inspired by, what actually to do” (2006: 749)? Faced with this question, it is typical to hear designers object that “this is so difficult to talk about” (see also *ibid.* 750). Moreover, they often refer to a certain bodily feeling, which may be described as a kind of “gut feeling” or “fingerspitzengefühl” (cf. Aspers 2006: 756; Entwistle 2009: 131). “You have to have a certain feeling about trends,” as Lisa said earlier. This may immediately call to mind Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of a practical sense or “feel for the game,” which denotes the “capacity for practical anticipation of the ‘upcoming’ future contained in the present” (1990: 66). This capacity is produced by

experiences of the game (ibid.), and one could clearly argue that good designers acquire such a capacity by being so engaged in the field of fashion that an anticipation of the future becomes possible.

In the present context, however, I think that there is more to it than that. Rebecca, for instance, argued that “you have to know the time spirit. You have to have a feeling for the time, or era in which we’re living.” Almost as an echo, Catherine also emphasized how a designer always has to “be in the *zeitgeist*.” As she continues, it becomes crystal clear why this is of such importance:

So, you have to have this feeling for this time spirit in a way, because then you know basically what people are going to like in maybe one year ... If you know a lot about what is happening in the world, you can already imagine how things might be in one or two years’ time. There are a lot of trend reports and things like this, but it’s not only this. You have to kind of feel it or take it in.

Now, does this amount to what Bourdieu calls “a feel for the game?” Or to what sociologist Joanne Entwistle in a study of fashion buyers terms “tacit aesthetic knowledge” (2009: 139)? Although such concepts might prove illuminating in certain ways, the resulting analysis would suffer from a crucial flaw: namely, that of substituting an unfamiliar expression—for instance, the *zeitgeist*—for a familiar one—for instance, a feel for the game. But if we instead seek to take seriously what the designers themselves take seriously—that is, that you always have to be in or know the *zeitgeist*—then it ought to be clear that there is more to it than a feel for the fashion game. As the Creative Director elaborated:

In a way, it’s just to follow the wave, because, from my point of view, a designer is a kind of shaman. It is a person who has a possibility of catching something which is not really visible; something which is in the air, which everybody can breathe, but which only some people have the possibility, or the faculty, of translating into reality, into real and concrete things ...

It’s not mathematics or physics. I strongly believe that there are energies in nature which are moving things, which are not visible, and which

few people have the chance to catch. That is the reason why I make the comparison between the designer and the shaman, because the shaman is also a person who moves from the regular level to another level in order to catch what is there and bring it back.

As untouchable and invisible yet in the air as something which everybody can breathe, but which only few people are able to capture and translate into tangible things, the *zeitgeist* is an omnipresent *medium* in which we are all essentially immersed as we continuously breathe it, not unlike the air, wind and weather which we likewise cannot touch but only touch *in*, as Ingold describes it (2007: 29). As a distinct type of spirit, we simply *are* in the *zeitgeist*. But if this is so, what is it then that makes certain people like the designers able to connect with it, and others not?

The Creative Director gives us a clue. While shamanism has been widely discussed, it is generally known to denote a spirit-medium, with the ability to serve as a bridge between the spirit world and the human world (Morris 2006: 17–18). As described by Ioan Lewis, a shaman thus constitutes “an inspired prophet or leader, a charismatic religious figure with the power to control the spirits, usually by incarnating them” (quoted in *ibid.* 18). As spirits speak through the shaman, spirit possession is an intrinsic part of the shaman’s capacity to master the spirits (*ibid.* 24). Importantly, Viveiros de Castro argues that this capacity rests on a particular mode of knowing: animism (2004: 468–469). It is by perceiving an animate world and exploring it through a relational stance—that is, by entering into a reciprocal engagement in order “to take on the point of view of that which must be known” (*ibid.* 468)—that shamans come to be possessed by the spirits and, thus, to know and control them by adopting their perspectives. Shamanism presupposes, in other words, an animistic mode of knowing which essentially grows from the knower’s reciprocal relatedness with the known (Bird-David 1999: 78).³

The designers’ acute attentiveness to, and two-way engagement with, everything and everyone around them constitutes such an animistic mode of knowing. Since the *zeitgeist* is an omnipresent medium flowing

through us all, humans as well as nonhumans, it follows that it can be known and mastered only by attending to and exploring everything carefully. In fact, Catherine emphasized that connecting with the *zeitgeist* comes about by being highly attentive to the present, just like the Creative Director one day stressed that he is “always looking left and right.” Connecting with the *zeitgeist* thus hinges on the designers’ animistic condition of being according to which things are not merely alive and active but explored and known in a mutually responsive engagement with them. The *zeitgeist*, I argue, appears precisely in and through this two-way relatedness by which the designers “open” themselves to the forces and perspectives of the world around them. Thus, their animistic inclinations underlie a shamanic practice which entails an experience of a certain state of possession: of being essentially *in*-spired.

To go on an inspiration trip is, in this sense, to embark upon a certain spiritual travel, to paraphrase Moeran (2015: 132). Importantly, the key point of this is not merely that the designers gain a fine-tuned sense of what *is* happening but of what is *going to* happen. “If you know a lot about what is happening in the world,” Catherine explained above, “you can also already imagine how things might be in one or two years’ time.” In this way, the future is not detached from the present but closely linked to it. Or, as Kirsten Hastrup describes the prophetic condition: “While situated in the ‘old’ world, prophets give voice to a ‘new’ one” (1989: 224). This position betwixt and between the present and the future is pivotal. As often emphasized by the designers, they must be ahead of the market but not too much ahead, because this will lead to fashion collections which consumers are not ready for. As such, they should not be *one* pace ahead but only *half* a pace, as the advertising professionals in Moeran’s ethnography put it (1996: 138). Becoming *in*-spired by the *zeitgeist* is thus firmly anchored in a particular condition of being and mode of engagement in the present, but, crucially, it entails that the designers come to see, or see from, a future point in time. This means that they can determine what to do (or not to do) and, as a distinct yet not detached temporal moment, the future informs decisions and actions here and now (Fig. 8.3).



Fig. 8.3 At some point, the processes of becoming *in-spired*—that is, possessed by the *zeitgeist*—need to be materialized in a concrete prototype, for instance, an “open-lapel jacket”

A Magical Technology of Prefiguration: Foretelling the Future

In her recent book, *The Cunning of Uncertainty* (2016), Nowotny emphasizes how uncertainty is inextricably enmeshed with human existence, even to such a degree that a given certainty always remains provisional. While this is a general point, it has been suggested that creative industries, in particular, are characterized by a “nobody knows property,” which denotes that demand is highly uncertain and success unpredictable (Caves 2000: 2–3; Moeran 2005: 172–173). Knowing and acting on the future is thus both an imperative and complicated affair, as “knowledge of potential outcomes of future-creating actions is inescapably uncertain and hence ‘a contradiction in terms’” (Nowotny 2016: 7). By seeking to take

fashion designers' accounts and experiences of inspiration seriously, I have argued that this not only prompts us to see a world of business populated by entities and processes not commonly associated with modern capitalism: animistic tendencies, responding things, spiritual beings, shamanic practices, prophetic agents. What is more, the processes of inspiration essentially amount to a distinctive technology of prefiguration, in that the designers come to obtain a distinct sense and vision of the future that makes them able to act under inherent uncertainty.

The concept of prefiguration is most commonly related to the more specific notion of prefigurative politics, mainly connected with various social movements. In this respect, it refers to a political practice where the temporal distinction between a future goal and the present means to reach that goal is dissolved or conflated (Maeckelbergh 2011: 4); that is, the political ends are expressed or acted out through their means (Yates 2015: 1). As Luke Yates explains: "to prefigure is to anticipate or enact some feature of an 'alternative world' in the present, as though it has already been achieved" (ibid.: 4). While this is not entirely the case with processes of inspiration, the notion of prefiguration serves to emphasize that the future is not detached from the present, but, precisely, prefigured in it. In his discussion of "the voice of prophecy," Edwin Ardener likewise argues that prophecies are not really about *predicting* the future but about *foretelling* it: that is, a prophet not only discovers a new reality but conceptualizes and defines it (1989). It is in this sense that the processes of inspiration constitute a distinctive technology by which the designers explore and prefigure the future, thus rendering it present in the present, as it were.

As should be evident, this technology of prefiguration can by no means be accounted for in purely rational terms. Rather, it represent an *arational* form of reasoning and practice that is aimed at obtaining a degree of knowledge and certainty over an otherwise unknown and uncertain future through particular magical processes. As Moeran shows in much detail in *The Magic of Fashion* (2015), the fashion business is replete with magical agents, spells and rituals. Processes of inspiration form part of these, serving as a kind of passage (cf. Hastrup 2004: 111) between separate worlds and viewpoints, between the well-known and the new, between the present and the future. In brief: a magical practice through which to overcome the challenge of the future in modern capitalism.

Notes

1. Although it has been shortened and slightly rewritten, the main part of the presentation and argument in the following three sections has previously been published in the *Journal of Business Anthropology* (Vangkilde 2015).
2. The fieldwork took place over eight months in 2007 in a European fashion company in the high-end fashion market, primarily in a subsidiary in Switzerland.
3. While the conception of the designer as shaman may perhaps appear surprising, it has also been taken up by Moeran, who presents a detailed discussion of various connections between a designer and a shaman (see Moeran 2015).

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9

The Magic Trick of Creative Capital: Competition, Confidence, and Collective Enchantment Among “Starchitects”

Aina Landsverk Hagen

As “master builders,”¹ *doing architecture* is about enchanting audiences, be it juries, clients, the media, or the public—through words, miniature models, and sketched lines—into believing that the impossible is possible. With the buildings and landscapes they make, the changing aesthetics they promote and the materiality they invoke, architects can be seen as powerful shamans of our public spheres. In the documentary film, *Snøhetta on Ground Zero* (2012), several employees of the Norwegian-based architecture company Snøhetta take us through the lengthy process of designing the National September 11 Memorial Museum Pavilion in New York. Interviews with the two directors of the New York and the Oslo branch are combined with scenes from workshops with clients and contractors. At one point, the camera zooms in on a young, male architect in the New York open office landscape. Surrounded by miniature models made out of museum board and wood, he exclaims with enthusiasm: “We sketch with knives, not pens. Isn’t gravity wonderful? That’s the magic trick in a way.”

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Close to a century earlier, Malinowski (1935) outlined the function of the Trobriand carver magician. The carver magician carves patterns in the canoes used in the Kula trade to make them whirl through rough seas, as effortlessly as in the Trobriand myth of the flying canoe (Malinowski 1932 [1922]: 311). Rites and spells are accompanied by magical crafting techniques to ensure a safe journey—in the myth, by enabling the canoe to fly in the air rather than navigate the treacherous ocean. The communion made between the magician and the objects addressed in such rites is a form of dialogue, Malinowski argues—“the magician speaks and the object responds” (1935: 241)—the result being a collective confidence in the task at hand. His functionalistic interpretation of the Trobriand notion of magic resonates with the later theoretical arguments of Alfred Gell (1992) in his work on the enchantment of technology. Gell’s theory outlines how the artist, much like a shaman, enchants the audience through his “magical” skills, viewing the art object as an agent, a collaborator of the enchantment. When the director of the New York office later comments on the requirements of the client on the Ground Zero project, “they wanted us to make an invisible building”, the architects know that there is no such thing. Still, they work hard to make it *seem invisible*, with all the tools and materials they have at hand. In order to overcome this contradiction and to deliver a desired outcome to the clients, they are invested in a monetary system, as Comaroff and Comaroff argue, “that depends for its existence on ‘confidence’, a chimera knowable, tautologically, only by its effects” (2001: 20).

The main office of Snøhetta is situated in the harbour area of Oslo, Norway. The US satellite office—set up as a consequence of the Ground Zero win in 2004—is located in lower Manhattan, New York. The company was established in 1989 after a small group of young, newly educated architects unexpectedly won the global competition for designing the prestigious new library in Alexandria, Bibliotheca Alexandrina (completed 2001). They have since designed buildings that have become iconic, such as the Oslo Opera House (completed 2008) and The Memorial Museum’s Pavilion on Ground Zero (completed 2014). During my period in the field (2008-2011), they won competitions for designing the extension to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (completed 2016) and the reconstruction of Times Square in New York

(completed 2017). Producing architecture at this level is all about selling lines, stories and sensations, seducing the world, juries, and each other into believing anything is possible. The staff call themselves “Snøhetter” (the Snøhettas) in Norwegian—to signal their communal identity, as the company is named after the legendary Norwegian mountain Snøhetta, in contrast to most architect offices that are named after the partner(s).²

Doing architecture is also about juggling the conflicting interests of clients, commissioners, contractors, and collaborative domains like engineering and construction work, while enchanting a diverse audience. Snøhetta’s philosophy and work ethics is built upon the notion of collaborative creativity and the sharing of ideas, and their business model is one where they are, in their own words, “selling the process, not the product”, implying that the creativity inherent in their collaborative efforts is something special and worth paying (extra) for (see also Sawyer 2003, 2015; Moeran 2014). At the same time, they are fierce in arguing that they are not “drawing for money”, like so many others in the architecture and engineering business—who are deemed to design regular office buildings and convention centres.

Snøhetta’s first competition win allowed them to step into the sphere of the global architect elite, where professional confidence is a creative capital. The magic trick of gravity is thus not only aimed at enchanting the “others”. Doing architecture, or “sketching with knives”, is also about enchanting your colleagues and yourself into believing in the ideas put forth. Magical words and practical activities are complementary (Kaplan 2003: 197), and when investigated these “magical efficacies” have real effects, in making shared professional imaginaries and in some cases architectural or institutional history—when an in-house team wins the competition—and actual physical structures that leave a spatial and aesthetic legacy in the world. The concept of magic is more to the Snøhetta architects than just an emic term used in casual conversation or professional communication, when the camera is rolling. A number of “magical practices” are inherent in a modern organization like Snøhetta, to set things or people in motion, to make them produce, create or become. They operate within a capitalistic economy, while all the same working hard to distance themselves from the very same system, much like how Caves (2000) argues that *art for art’s sake* is a property of all creative industries.

This chapter will examine the magic tricks of this particular group of starchitects, following Bloch's argument that in magical rituals there "is no *hidden* code to crack, only the examination of the given code in which communication takes place" (1989/2004: 42). Another saying in this particular company is that "our most important project is Snøhetta itself", referring to the ongoing maintenance and sustenance of the organization. This formula or "feature of articulation" (Bloch 1989/2004: 20) is chanted repeatedly in conversations both within the organizations and in communication with outsiders. The magical formulas and rituals are revealed to more than the privileged few, as the Snøhetta architects believe in the sharing of ideas. Yet as we will see below there is a certain group of employees that are in the mastery of such magical means.

The Snøhettas and Their Origin Myth

Snøhetta originated as a Norwegian-based firm comprising young architects and landscape architects, and to this day they uphold the original egalitarian ideology of collaborative creativity and a compulsory sharing of ideas. To ensure success, these architects make use of a range of magical practices in their everyday work. The magic is inherent in their origin myths, the technologies they explore, the collaborative efforts they sustain, and the sensory atmosphere that they co-create with their material surroundings (see Hagen 2014). The magic of their origin myth is something they work hard to be able to experience over and over again, and it is their most valuable commodity. They are selling their own ability to do the "impossible", their own magical skill and competence in making "invisible" buildings like the Ground Zero memorial. These buildings promise to equate the elite with the "everyday-man", like the Oslo opera house with its signature roof—"the fifth façade" where people are invited to walk and congregate.

Modern identities "conceal the vulnerability and violence of modern forms of power", according to Pels (2003: 38). In order to uncover the discursive tricks and practical techniques of these architects, "a critical interrogation of the magicality of such forms of power" becomes urgent (Pels 2003: 38). Architects' status as "creative professionals" is more or

less unquestioned by the public (or even critics). Magic is a “means of domination, of possession, and sometimes also of struggle for autonomy” (Kaplan 2003: 186). It can be used to construct more than famous libraries, opera houses, and national museums, as it also builds organizations, institutions, personal careers, and companionship.

To complicate the matter further it is worth noting that rituals or magical practices may “uphold authority or overturn it” (Tambiah 1985 in Kaplan 2003: 198). As every architect knows, a building or a landscape may seem like but never is *one object* or *one surface*. Layers of functions and structures comprise what appears to be a unity. The same goes for organizations. The human beings, the vocal subjects of this chapter, are involved in a multiplicity of material actors and phenomena. The power and agency of the “sketching” knives, the brick of wood, the drawing paper and pen or the screen and mouse are intertwined in messy ways with the enchantment of professional power and charisma. Who (or what) is in power when magic is present(ed), is by its very own nature difficult to entangle, as we find that, according to Taussig, the “real skill of the practitioner lies not in skilled concealment but in the skilled revelation of skilled concealment” (2003: 273).

Since the Snøhetta architects portray that every in-house creative process is different—this is their sales pitch—the result must by necessity be different every time. As such they are not selling an expected design, where the (male) mastermind just repeats a once successful formula, and his assistants carry it through to completion, but a place at the table for everyone (also the client) to join in and be equal collaborators. The seduction inherent in this commodity of serendipity—the process—is effective on both clients and the employees themselves, as every new design concept that is “invented” promises fame and feeling good throughout the hardship of completing the structures, on average an eight-year process. The number of employees fluctuates according to competition wins and losses, project revenues, and external factors such as the global financial crisis in 2008. During my fieldwork period, the Oslo office reduced its staff of 140 by about half, while the New York office almost doubled from about 17 to 30 employees. At the moment, the offices consist of a total of more than 180 employees from about 30 countries, and Snøhetta recently established offices in San Francisco (2013), Innsbruck, Stockholm, and

Adelaide. Albeit they have never made any substantial profit over the years, and at one point been on the brink of bankruptcy and extinction (Hagen 2015), they always seem to manage and earn money enough to sustain themselves as a company—and continue to win prestigious competitions all over the world.

Nevertheless, every creative process in Snøhetta can be seen as a repetition of the origin myth of serendipitous mastery, where they are designing and winning against all odds. When operating within the “starchitects” economy of fame, where winning competitions seldom brings in substantial revenues, this (re)production of magical skill is highly valuable, as it strengthens their position within elite magicians of public space, and simultaneously reinvigorates the organization itself. It is exactly the ongoing production and reproduction of the community and the process as a collaboration of equals that make the impossible act of living with the art/commercial contradiction possible.

Carver Magicians and Creativity as Commodity

The financial state of the Snøhettas depends first and foremost on signing contracts after winning competitions, contracts that seldom reflect the actual amount of work they will put into the design process. Since in the US, competitions are won after firms are short-listed and not based on conceptual design alone, the private or public sector clients are a very strong factor when overseeing the drawing and building process. In Europe, competitions are traditionally open (or include both invited and randomly selected firms), and juries decide on anonymous entries of more or less finished concept models.

After winning a competition, the next step is approval of the cost estimates that often exceed the original project plan by a multiple factor. Getting the client or contractor to sign the agreement is therefore of crucial value to a company’s finances and, thus, has direct consequences for the employees’ future in the organization. To get the contract to cover most of the actual costs is thus an issue of critical concern, as entering competitions involves a substantial expense for the architectural firms involved. Even if they are invited and receive a fee, it is never enough to

cover the hours invested in such a process. “We like to speak and be Snøhetta, but there is no one to bill that work. We need to learn how to bill more,” one senior architect argued in an all-hands meeting during one of the downsizing processes in 2010.

When discussing other creative industries, like the movie or music business, Bilton argues that “the myth of individual talent provides a glimmer of hope for the vast army of underpaid and exploited hopefuls who feed the industry machine” (2007: 16). Gell also comments on this precarious situation, “If artists are paid at all (...) it is a tribute to their moral ascendancy over the lay public” (1992: 59), arguing that magical production is the reverse of productive technology. When divine inspiration and ancestral spirits fill the artist, she is not working “for us”, and the trivial world of contract formulations and cost assessment seems to be disenchanting. This might be a key to understanding the contradictory notions of “selling the process” without “drawing for money”, as the Snøhetta’s claim. In simultaneously winning prestigious competitions, while not earning “too much” and seemingly never compromising their philosophy, they appear to be overcoming the contradictions of art and commercialism, turning it into a magical capitalism.

So how do new or inexperienced employees believe they can create enchanting structures, on an equal footing with their organizational “ancestors”? I have previously looked at magical practices and creativity during processes of downsizing (Hagen 2015), operating with different *modes of magic*: vocal magic, crafting magic, and sensory magic. A dozen of the Snøhetta senior employees pose, inspired by Malinowski’s terminology, as *garden magicians*: “the person magically responsible” for collective work. They encourage the younger or less experienced employees through their speech acts, their ritual formulas. In Snøhetta, these ritual experts are predominantly female, while the two male directors pose as lead *architectural shamans*, guiding the spiritual direction of the company while demonstrating an “outsider” position in the larger society, as exotic Scandinavian champions of the increase of public spaces designed to be available for everyone—including the commoner or “unwanted” (see also Vangkilde 2012; Moeran 2015: 131–136 on fashion designers as shamans). They are usually too busy to be part of every design process but are present at decisive moments. Their vocal magic is critical in

order to be able to sell the process to the potential clients, as their portrayal of the design process always hinges on the philosophical and metaphysical elements of collaborative creativity. Equally responsible for the company's success, although usually junior in experience and age, would be the role of the *carver magician*, quoting Gell “whose artistic prowess is also the result of his access to superior carving magic” (1992: 46). Some of these, but not all, are well versed in new 3D technologies and tools.

The Spell of Materialization

What I call *crafting magic*, then, concerns the ritualistic practices of securing the dialogue between materiality and the virtual or imaginary, the ideas set forth in communion (see also Evans-Pritchard 1976 [1937]: 441). To see how the ‘sketching with knives’, the production of creativity that is central to their collective work processes and successful sales pitches, plays out among the architects, let us visit the enclosed space of their model shop in Oslo, where a team is working on the competition design for a national library. The 3D-skilled architects Luke³ and Ayden are at the stage of interpreting the collective ideas of the larger group into an architectural model made out of museum board and Plexiglas—with the help of software, glue and a laser cutter. The garden magician and senior project manager, Bente, is working hard as a ritual expert to give the library competition team extended knowledge of the mechanisms of a collaborative, creative process, through repeated informal and spontaneous “lectures” on the topic in group meetings. She is thus instrumental in preparing “the garden,” making it “look good,” before she will let the carver magicians loose. Drawing the first line is decisive for the unfolding of the creative process, the architects argue (Hagen and Rudningen 2012). This is a position of power, and therefore the Snøhettas are used to delaying this moment by discussing the ideas for weeks before putting them into physical shape. One particular incident is worth recapturing in its full extent, as it shows the simultaneously skilled revelation of skilled concealment that Taussig (2003) argues is defining for magical practices.

31 October 2008, Oslo Office

The team is seated in one of the meeting rooms on the mezzanine, gathering around a red table with black steel legs, the table cluttered by a site model, coffee cups, tracing paper, printouts of reference pictures, and an early, conceptual 3D model in coloured Plexiglas. Bente is standing, holding blue, sliced foam pieces in her hands. The sleeves of her sweater are pulled up and she starts laying out the pile on the table while explaining the creative process.⁴

If we do what we have done so far, to spread all our possibilities, because we have so many possibilities, reference projects, organizational diagrams, possibilities, possible programmes [she arranges and rearranges the pieces of blue foam while she talks], possibilities, everything is possible and we spread it out and look at everything [she is gesturing, a pause, an inclusion of all the elements]. Then you start putting something aside [throws a piece behind her, before laying out a new piece], and that is on the table, that is presented and that one we put aside for the moment and that one will maybe be brought out and we'll cultivate that one [she grabs a piece far in front of her], so we've got to fetch that from another place and start building.

I don't get this from the old [pointing to the pile behind her], I fetch something new [she looks at the others and smiles, they laugh] and then we start to cultivate, narrowing [she pats the pieces, shuffles them together], throwing away and eliminating silly things—or no, not silly things, but things we are not going to use. That is very important, that we do not continue adding new things. We also have to do that, but this time in a more rectilinear process [she gestures a line moving forward, wiggles her hand a little], so that we'll reach the goal.

As Taussig argues, there is a “need for rites of exposure built into rites of magic in order to strengthen magic itself” (2003: 298). According to the Snøhettas, the high expectations ensures that you don't have to constantly prove your brilliance; or as Bente frames it, you dare to make mistakes, because it does not devalue your abilities. This frees up a lot of resources that would normally, in a more competitive environment, go into defending your territory, proving or boasting about skills, or plotting

how to *appear* to be the most creative in the office (see also Moeran 2014). Through being employed as a Snøhette, the derivative series of mythological magic is bestowed upon you, as you rest on the creative shoulders of seniors responsible for the firm's past 20 something years of achievements. For the Snøhettas to succeed, their level of confidence needs to be perfected—enough to make them believe they can actually perform when it matters but not so much as to cripple the collaborative spirit that defines the company ideology.

Malinowski outlines three elements of magical performances: the rite, the formula, and the condition of the performer (Tambiah 1990). Bente is here assuming the guru role of the performer described by Barth (1990), explaining the process to the team novices. Such instructional speeches or formulas happened regularly and were usually accompanied by excessive gesturing and example materials like the cubes of blue foam. The magic formula or spell is the core of the magic procedure, often accompanied by “rites, ritual gestures or use of a further object operating as a medium” (Nadel 2002 [1935]: 197). The aim of the “spell-making” session described above was to visualize the importance of materialization throughout a creative process, Bente later explained.

The “rhetorical art” of magic described by Malinowski (1935) thus serves as an accurate description of the practices of ritual experts like Bente. Here the regular way of using speech to “induce action in people became the magical use of addressed language to *induce motion in things*” (Tambiah 1990: 82; emphasis added). She attempts to induce motion in the potential sketches and models of the group, to set them “to become produced.” In this manner, she instils in the group (through the material at hand) the professional confidence they need when competing for a prestigious commission. Taussig discusses how ritual serves as “a stage for so many unmaskings. Hence power flows not from masking but from unmasking, which masks more than masking” (2003: 273). In later instances, Bente responded to the team's actions of making conceptual 3D models, by making a magical counter spell. This happened several times during the team's process and seemed to coincide with her disagreement over the direction the team was taking at the time.

The dialogue between the magician and the objects forms a communion. The resistance arising from the material, when sketching with

knives instead of pens, gestures, or the click of a mouse, *is* what Malinowski describes as the dialogue where “the magician speaks and the object responds” (1935: 241). “In this sense, magic is a floating signifier, never fully absorbed by but rather haunting the discourse seeking to assign it a place, and proliferating and articulating itself in places where it is not supposed to be,” according to Meyer (2003: 203). Gravity is not normally viewed by architects as something wonderful, rather it is seen as a painful obstacle keeping them from fulfilling their ideas. A building that can be made without columns, to float in the air, is a recurrent dream, like the Trobriand myth of the flying canoe. Although magic is constructed through discourse, it “refuses to be fully captured” (Meyer 2003: 203). This floating signifier is transformed into an object of power and conflict in the instances where there is more than one performer in the room.

In the Model Shop

26 January 2009, Oslo Office

The architects all seem to be caged in a silent movie, these numerous employees moving about in the open office landscape. The Plexiglas wall enclosing the model shop where I sit on a bar stool muffles all familiar sounds. My gaze spans the busy activity going on around the desks, pierces the transparent barrier of the model shop and slowly takes in rows of plastic boxes filled with small-scale trees, the laser cutter next to a computer in the corner, shelves with white museum boards, acrylic sheets and cubes of blue foam, before zooming in on the miniature model in front of me.

Ayden’s body is hunched over the massive workbench that fills most of the small model shop. He is gluing an androgynous-looking plastic figurine to the smooth surface of this library-to-be. The model will be presented to the team later on this freezing January day. Like Gulliver in Lilliput, Ayden inspects the citizens in their 1:500-scale habitat. The team is to deliver a physical model as part of the competition entry in a month’s time. I am curious about the level of precision he is aiming for, so I ask him how detailed an architectural model should be at this stage.

Ayden holds his gaze on the model while answering: “Oh, it’s a personal choice.” Then he lifts his head, directing his physical being towards my question. “But it’s crucial that everyone *agrees* that we want to see it as a fairly precise model.”

With a nod towards the meeting room on the mezzanine above us, he explains how the project team discusses and reaches agreement on some key ideas, withdraws to sketch on their computers—in 2D or 3D, according to their individual skills—resumes in small groups to discuss the work and then withdraws and sketches some more. When the team as a whole is satisfied, they export the 3D model drawings to the laser cutter that “prints” by directing a laser beam to burn or melt whatever flat-sheet physical material is put in the machine, leaving the pieces with razor-sharp edges. Each component of a building—roof, walls, facades, outdoor landscape, and so on—is cut out, and it only takes a few minutes. All the pieces are then assembled and glued together by hand, slowly becoming a miniature model like the one in front of us.

“The model is, in effect, based on decisions reached in common,” Ayden says with confidence, “even though it is true that Luke and I choose the technique—which can be decisive for the aesthetic expression.” I have already learnt through individual interviews how collective creation and consensus is valued in this company. Some employees have also revealed how they would be sanctioned by the in-house ritual experts for claiming something as “my idea.” In Snøhetta, all ideas are to be expressed as “our ideas,” they say.

Ayden’s colleague Luke turns from the laser cutter he has been busy operating and points his finger at the physical model in front of us. “It will stimulate ideas. A model is good when it’s convincing.”

He explains how they want to move on, to help the group overcome certain challenges. He pauses before concluding: “It’s a tool of clarity.” “And you can touch it, feel it,” Ayden adds.

I ask: “Does it ever happen that new ideas emerge while you are working on the model?”

Up until now I haven’t paid much attention to the other two guys working quietly on their own miniature model in the adjacent part of the room. I don’t know them that well, as they are not on the library

competition team. But they have obviously been listening in on our conversation, as they both turn around, as if on cue, and blurt out: “Yes!”

Ayden picks up on their sudden exclamation and continues energetically: “We implement and improvise. It’s actually fun when that happens—and the best thing is to explain it to the team later.” He smiles before adding with a tone of voice that calls for an audience, “a little change, minor adjustments.”

* * *

If we listen to Ayden and his colleagues’ arguments, what one would think is reduced to a mere afterthought of designing, is in fact a creative process of ideas evolving. In order to uncover the mechanisms of material objects of creativity, it is necessary to ask what a miniature model *is*—this object that Ayden and Luke are working on so meticulously in the model shop. To me, it looks like a miniature building populated with imaginary visitors. What is it to the architects? A functional tool of work or an object of art, made solely for jury presentation? A senior architect in the New York office argues for both, when I ask her: “So models are not just [depicting] buildings?”

“No,” she replies, “They’re ideas, they’re ideas. It’s really not until really deep into the design that a model becomes a representation of a building. It might represent an attitude of a building or just a specific part of the building or a type of form.”

According to Ayden, ideas evolve as they build a physical model, even when it may seem to be just about gluing flat parts of wood together. He explains it as a process leaving room for improvisation. Seducing the team-as-audience is a specific magical performance where the carving magicians need to convince their colleagues that this physical model is the perfect synthesis of the collective’s ideas. This act of seduction is leaving the model as the agent of enchantment (Gell 1992), or in Luke’s words, “a model is good when it is convincing.”

* * *

Back in the meeting room on the mezzanine, Bente asks, “is it possible to see the model?” One of the architects heads down to check if the whole group can have a look. She returns with Luke, who exclaims “the model is ‘visible enough’, ready for a viewing!” He makes a gesture towards me, indicating “the time has come, hope they are convinced.” Everyone moves excitedly, yet slowly, down to the model shop, where Bente immediately starts to comment on details she thinks they should alter in order to make the concept clearer. The atmosphere in the room begins to heat up. Ayden points at the corner of the model, by the imagined river, and states enthusiastically “This area is fantastic!”

Bente quickly replies, “I have some trouble reading it as a smooth curve.” She argues for another solution. Ayden explains the thoughts they had while building the model and underlines that what they all see now is just a quick printout of the 3D drawing. It gets even more tense when Luke start to defend Ayden’s position. Ayden follows up, “At this moment it is a raw ...” He is interrupted as they continue to argue. At one point, the interior architect, Taran, intervenes.

“We’ll give you a little peace and quiet until you are done with the model.”

Diplomacy. Highly skilled. Everyone in the room laughs, relieved of the tension through this interjection. But Bente doesn’t want to give in. She continues to comment on sections she disapproves of, suggesting other solutions. After a while, the discussion trickles out, and people start leaving the room. One of the landscape architects winks in my direction: “Tomorrow will be the battle of titans.”

He smiles. We all leave.

Back in the model shop, a little while later, Ayden continues to work on the miniature structure.

Me: “It seemed like they were discussing the model as if it was finished?”

Ayden: “You noticed that? Yeah, that is a problem.”

* * *

These kinds of discussions happened at regular intervals in many of the design processes I followed in Snøhetta, as it seemed that much confusion

and delaying of decisions was generated when the teams attempted to get a collective grip on what the model *is* at any moment in the process. The tension between Bente, Ayden, and Luke was not resolved during their collaboration, even though both parties throughout the process excelled in explaining their view of the effect of materialization to the others. What causes these clashes of mis/understanding?

Building on the empirical findings of Malinowski (1935), Gell (1992, 1998) argues how the art object is given the power of agency through the enchantment of the audience, who is unable to grasp the technology enabling the materialization of the object. Objects, thus, have an indirect agent role by acting on humans or other things and are part of a technical system with social consequences that may lead to further actions. The magic is not inherent to the object itself, since the magical powers are bestowed upon it through production. As we are listening to the Snøhetta employees, the ideal collaborative process in the company is more of a trick to be performed than a distortion of reality. In this way, their creative processes resemble the magical practices described in Evans-Pritchard's (1976 [1937]) work on the Azande priests, where the British anthropologist goes to great lengths to reveal the native shamans' forgery and fake practices of healing (Taussig 2003).

It seems that the model is at any point in the process being conceived as process by its makers, and as results by its audience—regardless of the intentions of creative collaboration and sharing of ideas. When Mol (2002) argues that different versions of the same object (e.g. multiple sclerosis) coexist through relations of practices (Bille and Sørensen 2012), calling this phenomenon *multiplicity*, she activates ideas that may help to unleash the black box of creativity and magic in the organization of Snøhetta: The object *is* simultaneously multiple, fluid, and fractal, Mol argues (2002), and above all one should never take it for granted analytically (Law and Singleton 2005). Asdal et al. (2007) argue in the same vein that categories like subjects, objects, and agents must be understood as *results*, and that it is not until relations manifest in materiality that one can distinguish the real value of an object. Another factor to complicate the matter is that the model is made out of 3D drawings and printers, making it *seem* magical and with the intention of enchanting its

audience—at a moment in the process where the garden magician Bente believe the garden is not ready to be cultivated.

Taussig proposes that the “recruits,” here in the form of the young digital experts, are required as “exposer vehicles for confession for the next revelation of the secret contained in the trick that is both art and technique and thus real and really made up” (2003: 288). In this sense, Bente is using her senior professional identity as leverage to influence the communal idea generation, in order to prevent the “interruption” on the egalitarian ethos that the digital experts and their 3D software drawings represent. Without a counter spell, the capitalist project and the commercial product (the egalitarian, collaborative work process that enables the impossible possible) would be at danger. Still, employees’ confidence must never be allowed to decrease. How are the Snøhetta garden magicians balancing this act?

3D Enchantment and the Confidence Theory of Magic

To disentangle this conundrum, we need to return to Gell. With his untimely death in 1997, the progressive thoughts pervading his works never reached their revolutionary potential. The reification of the term society and social relations may be what kept him clinging to the agent’s inferred intentionality (Miller 2005), laying the base for a hierarchy of humans and nonhumans, “looking through objects to the embedded human agency we infer that they contain” (Miller 2005: 13). This normative view of the human reign over the material world fails to fully explain the daily conflicts of the architects in dealing with materials, machines, physical and digital objects, software and (for landscape architects) organisms.

Architectural design in a competition phase is about convincing others and oneself that a certain concept is brilliant, and worth spending years of your professional life struggling to design. After the New York branch of Snøhetta won the competition for designing the extension to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, one of the young architects, in his

early 30s, shared how he felt awed by the fact that he was now designing a building in an imaginary “collaboration” with its original designer, the iconic architect Mario Botta. If he stopped for a moment to think about this, fears of failing struck him with force, he confided. In Firth’s discussion on magic’s role in the Polynesian economy, he explains how magic “enters where human knowledge is least and the liability to failure is greatest” (1972 [1939]: 169). He is inspired by Malinowski’s confidence theory of magic, which denotes the rituals surrounding everyday work practices as endowing man with “the conviction that he can master the obstacles which nature presents to him, and therefore is equipped to undertake tasks from which he would otherwise *shrink*” (Malinowski 1935: 184). The risks and liability to failure can be overwhelming for the individual, and magical practices and rituals are ways of remedying the situation.

With the introduction of 3D software and machines like the laser cutter, the ready hand sketch paper usually overflowing every meeting table in the architect studio, are replaced by a personal computer mouse as the tool of enchantment and as a potent agent in the creative process. Actor-network theory carries the questions of agency further into unknown territory, where objects possess inherent properties of their own (Lien et al. 2012). The interest of a piece of wood could be to keep its structural solidity, while cardboard will strive to be anything but transparent, and a line will struggle to remain straight (Hagen and Rudningen 2012). This agency of materials and tools makes objects powerful in shaping idea processes and in causing younger architects to take refuge in 3D landscapes, arguing that the software give less resistance and more aesthetic design, and hence power over the result. Even though actor-network theorists have often been accused of being apolitical in their demands for a perfect analytical symmetry, power as micro-physics, “the tools so to speak, of social control” are a central element in their analysis, as Law notes (Asdal et al. 2007: 25). The *power to* act or not to let oneself “enrol” (as the scallops refused to do in spite of the fishermen’s and researchers’ attempts to cultivate them in new territory, in Callon 1986) becomes more important than the power that a human exerts *over* another human being.

Following this argument, we see how software is made “invisible” in modern organizational life (Thrift 2005) and hence is often ignored both by practitioners and observers. The practices of the competition teams I followed in Snøhetta clearly show that both traditional sketching and advances in hardware and software technology not only influence the way architects design but also the process of choosing ideas for the continuation of the creative process. Most of the younger architects today neither sketch with knives nor pens but with the click of a mouse, using 3D software like Grasshopper or Rhino. Some even claim they cannot draw a line by hand, a skill that once defined the architectural profession. But this doesn’t seem to inhibit confidence. When Ayden talks about the influence that he and Luke have as the ones who are choosing “the technique,” he is referring to the skill set they have and the relation between the digital drawing of models in 3D software and the various ways of shaping the physical models in different materials. The digital experts have access to knowledge that the others don’t have, and this seems to skew the traditional power balance in a company that champions a “flat structure.”

The magical rite of becoming a Snøhette is to voice your ideas verbally or through material expression, regardless of your experience, age, gender, or professional status. After they handed in their entry in February 2009, the library competition team gathered to reflect on the process and their own work practices. A discussion of what was so special about working in Snøhetta soon arose. “It is expected of you that you contribute and that you are at the forefront, and it is expected of you that you come up with amazing ideas. There is actually quite a lot that is expected,” senior project leader Bente argued. The high standard of creative practice is a consequence of Snøhetta’s amazing achievements, she explained, contributing to expectations of excellence from the public, clients, and contractors and from the employees themselves. The Snøhettas expect that their design solutions will be somewhat different from and better than others—and that they will win prestigious competitions. When they lose, which they report they do in about nine out of ten competitions they partake in, they usually blame it on external factors like the jury—and they move on without evaluation, believing that too strong a focus on failure will cripple creativity.

The Magic Trick

Instilling confidence in workers, regardless of the circumstances, is a crucial part of magical capitalism. According to Mauss, “the key to the social authority of magic lay in ‘the moment of the conjuring trick’” (Mauss 1902/1972: 123 in Pels 2003: 11). For Latour, Law, Callon, and Mol operating within science and technology studies, and phenomenologists like Ingold (2011), the traditional disconnection between object and subject becomes a cultural construct obscuring our understanding of the world (Bille and Sørensen 2012)—in much the same way that the concept of mystical mentality (Lévy-Bruhl 1928) connects human and material reality in a reciprocal relation of continuity. Rather than operating analytically within a dualistic or dialectic framework, the “actants” (Law 2004), cyborgs (Haraway 1988), and magical experiences (Lévy-Bruhl 1928) of scientists over a century of Western philosophical thinking form a world where separation doesn’t exist in the way we are accustomed to thinking. It is not the essence of things, technologies, or humans that decides their visibility and social relevance but the level of attention at any time in the analysis (Bille and Sørensen 2012).

The architects often become so enchanted by the 3D software that they forget to see it for what it is: the result of a multitude of relations formed as much by materiality as by the imaginary and by normative structures. Bente’s “speech” on the materialization of ideas can, according to theories on magic, also be seen as a ritualization of optimism (Malinowski 1992 [1948]) and a way of inducing motion in the potential model itself, making it fluid through the use of spells. She is, like the young architect quoted at the beginning of this article, “sketching” with imaginary knives, gestures, and words, seducing through the promising of lines convincing juries and enchanting the general public as audience. Still, there are repeated glitches in the enchantment, where the collaborative process seems to suffer from unresolved power dynamics and differences, both between human and material actors.

In the end, the team of Bente, Ayden, and Luke lost the competition. Their reasoning in hindsight was that the jury lacked the confidence to go with the Snøhetta’s non-traditional, creative solution. The capital assets of the creative economy “depend primarily upon a valuation of intangible

assets and future profits” (Bilton 2007: xix). The spiritual manifest of the Snøhetta in-house motto: “we are selling the process, not the product,” that is repeated internally and to competition juries, contractors, researchers and the media signals a semi-detachment from the prevailing capitalist ideology and reveals the oppositional force that the organization’s genesis is built on. This is simultaneously a formula that drives acceptance of the relatively high cost of commissioning Snøhetta architects. In that way they are true capitalists, selling creativity (as an unpredictable work process) to the highest bidder in the global economy of fame. Both employees and employers state that making money (for something other than survival) is not really the point, by disclaiming those who “draw for money.” Yet, they are entangled in an economy of assets, expenses, and revenues, like any other company in a capitalist system.

The stakes are high, as the partners risk losing the brand name if the company collapses financially and the employees risk losing their community and their jobs. With too many competition losses, they all risk losing the *idea of the company* as a collective endeavour, the origin myth itself. To ensure this will not happen, the Snøhettas seem to accept continuous up and downsizing, while simultaneously putting faith in the practices of crafting magic, executed in communion by the garden magicians—the ritual experts—and the carving magicians—the digital experts, with the help of the architectural shamans and their vocal magic.

The constant tension, caused by status differences and professional hierarchies within the organization, is amplified by the resistance of materials, soft(ware) as much as hard(ware). Magical rites and formulas becomes the equalizer effect in a professional world filled with inequality, risk, and exploitation. The myth of the creative genius (Bilton 2007) is surpassed by the repeated chanting of the collective creativity performed in this particular architecture company. Whose ideas are really chosen we will never know, as the utopian notion of ‘our ideas’ is the significant magic trick within Snøhetta, where the concealment of individual ownership to the architectural product increases the creative capital of the company itself. The secret of their success is as such “a public secret, being that which is generally known but cannot generally be articulated” (Taussig 2003: 302). Creativity and professional confidence is thus linked

to magic through the rituals and spells performed in the architects' everyday lives. These practices are present to ensure confidence of safe journeys through the treacherous waters of a magical capitalism.

Acknowledgements I thank the employees and partners of Snøhetta for being generous both in their acceptance of having an anthropologist around and for inspiring me to pursue further knowledge of processes of creativity and collaboration. I also would like to thank my colleague Ingrid M. Tolstad for a very thorough and insightful reading of an earlier version of this text.

Notes

1. Etymologically, *architect* derives from the Greek *arkhitekton*: *arkhi-*, chief + *tekon-*, builder (Source: Online Etymology Dictionary, www.etymonline.com).
2. For example, BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group), Zaha Hadid Architects, or Gehry Partners. More on the importance of the company name Snøhetta as origin myth and brand in Hagen (2014).
3. All personal names in this chapter are pseudonyms.
4. This moment is recorded on video and transcribed in its totality.

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10

Anthropology as Science Fiction, or How Print Capitalism Enchanted Victorian Science

Peter Pels

In a political and commercial environment, where people make political reputations by fake news and by questioning the authority of scientific claims to fact, it may be a good idea to turn to history to try and understand the cultural roots of the attitudes that foster such structures of feeling. One of the most striking and earliest events of producing fake news in modern history is Orson Welles' "Halloween special" broadcast on 30 October 1938, in which he made a fake documentary out of H.G. Wells' pioneer science-fiction novel, *The War of the Worlds* (Wells 1997 [1912]). Welles relocated Wells' story about an attack on Earth by Martian war machines—thwarted by the extraterrestrial colonizers succumbing to an earthly virus—from England to contemporary New Jersey. The mockumentary's realism—neither the first nor the last in its genre—created a widespread panic among American radio listeners and made Welles famous overnight. The event shows that science fiction could puncture the sociocultural membrane between commercial fiction and political or economic fact—even at a time when people's faith

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in modernity's commitment to scientific factuality was at a peak, as demonstrated by the displays of next year's New York World's Fair. Can we, perhaps, understand current doubts about science and factuality, and the making of fake news, from thinking about the ways in which science fiction enchanted modern people with the magic of science? This chapter aims to contribute to such an effort by a reflection on the cultural constitution of science through fiction by going back to some of the roots of science fiction. The genre emerged in a period when the modernist technological optimism of its twentieth-century futuristic fantasies (such as those that drew Isaac Asimov to science fiction and the New York World's Fair: Asimov 1979) had yet to materialize. Victorian science fiction had a decidedly self-questioning and even paranoid side to it, and may therefore shed light on the similarly pessimistic and paranoid, but far more nostalgic sentiments that seem to characterize some of the right-wing and socialist fantasies that inform present-day politics. It can certainly tell us something about the ways in which capitalism and science—often regarded by economists and politicians as twin sources of enlightenment—can combine to generate magic instead.

If one takes an etymological approach to science fiction—as a practice based on the fictionalization of science—it quickly becomes clear that James Frazer's original intuition of a special affinity between science and magic vis-à-vis religion is both an accurate description and a symptom of the place of magic in nineteenth-century capitalism. This has little to do with Frazer's own theoretical inclinations: his rationalist and evolutionist views were often a distorted reflection of what was going on in Victorian culture in his own time. Retrospectively, social evolutionism can be classified, at least since Herbert Spencer and Lewis Henry Morgan tried to define it by human moral progress, as one of the more outstanding forms of colonialist fiction in Victorian science.¹ It was, however, not the kind of science fiction that sold well in cosmopolitan markets, the magic of which became a driving force behind the new bestselling industry of the mystery novel. Capitalism was better served by another, more popular, anthropology, an anthropology that the disciplinary history of ideas, learned societies, museums, and academic institutions tends to either overlook or banish to the margins. This subaltern but culturally vital magical current militated against

central hierarchies of Victorian values; it almost invites the label “post-modern” in the ways it mixed high and low culture, and it can be seen to eat at the heart of high modern science and its social ideals. This commercialized version of anthropological and ethnographic mystery, put on the market by authors like Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Henry Rider Haggard, and Arthur Conan Doyle, was highly ambivalent about civilization and often staged atavistic powers of other “races” in a way that threatened scientific and moral progress.² It anticipates the pessimism about humanity’s position at the apex of civilization that was also exemplified by Wells’ novella and Welles’ “fake news” in 1912 and 1938, respectively.

In order to understand this relatively understudied phenomenon, one needs to rethink the cultural and social location of science fiction and its history and the place of magic in modernity—a place that, I would argue, raises magic to an eccentric but nevertheless decisive category of modern capitalist self-understanding (largely because the category was reinvented by Protestantism and nineteenth-century secular anthropology). It is only after a detour through the anthropology of science fiction and modern magic, therefore, that I can address the question of how and why science was fictionalized for the first time in a way that makes it recognizably modern (starting with the publication of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in 1818) and can explore why that shift only gathered momentum when fictionalization of the sciences of geography and anthropology began in the early 1870s (at the same time that anthropology was professionalized as a science). Science fiction has until recently been stereotypically portrayed as a celebration (or depreciation) of futuristic technology, not least by some of its major practitioners. This obscures the fact that it was always intensely preoccupied with the largely non-technological “anthropology” of psychic powers and altered states of mind (Pels 2013). Finding such magic—which I regard as quintessentially modern—at the heart of scientific fantasies will help us better understand why, especially after science fiction and fantasy conquered mainstream Western culture cinematically in the late 1970s and early 1980s (by *Carrie*, *Star Wars*, *Alien*, *Stalker*, and *Blade Runner*, among other films), spectacular capitalism provides such a comfortable home for the enchanted reason of both magic and science fiction.

Why Do an Anthropology of Science Fiction?

Sociocultural anthropologists rarely studied science fiction, although a minority treated it as a privileged window on the future and “cultures beyond earth”.³ This is to be regretted: science fiction is probably one of the better ways to study the cultural patterns of modernity and its imaginative forms, precisely because of sci-fi’s location in capitalist commerce—initially in literary form, but always supported by commercial spectacle, and more recently overshadowed by cinema and digital gaming. Only recently have anthropologists discovered this resource for the study of the modern imagination, partly inspired by cultural studies (see Battaglia 2005; Rosenberg and Harding 2005). They are discovering new questions on the way: apparently, secular conceptions of space can once more be sacralized by science fiction’s explorations of the infinite (Pels 2013), and such fictions, in the form of Ufology, for example, can turn into new social movements (Roth 2005)—and even literally become a question of life and death, as in the multiple suicides of the Heaven’s Gate sect (Harding 2005). Because of this “real-time” connection to the cultural construction of worlds that modern people live in, anthropologists raise different questions about science fiction. Cultural or literary studies have tended to focus on the utopian or dystopian novelties of science fiction, to some extent stimulated by the fact that cultural studies and cyberpunk science fiction seemed to reinforce each other’s status as critical harbingers of a new age (see, for a representative example, Ross 1991). In contrast, anthropological perspectives should be wary of the risk that announcing such temporal breaks may also reify them (or sometimes call them into being). While not denying that things change, anthropologists first tend to contextualize futuristic discourse in a cultural *longue durée*, since such discourses tend to replicate a form of epochal thinking of which technophiles are particularly fond, and that may obscure, rather than clarify, the sociocultural transitions they try to describe (Tsing 2000: 332–323; Pels 2015). An anthropology of science fiction should acknowledge that 1980s cyberpunk changed the style of science fiction by bringing technology close, even into the body, and by divorcing itself from the techno-sublime fantasies of progress of the “Golden Age” of science

fiction, and even the pessimism of the “New Wave” of the 1960s: cyberpunk emphasized digital and nanotechnology as invading minds and bodies at a micro-scale, in stark contrast to the large-scale “Hoover Dam” technology of the Space and Atomic Age—as cyberpunk writers themselves argued (see Sterling 1986). But just as the techno-sublime Space Opera continued to appear next to cyberpunk “post-humanism”, similarly the “Golden Age” of sci-fi was only supposedly dominated by the technological sublime: it was as obsessed with “post-human” bodily mutation and the magic of psychic powers as cyberpunk novelists have been since the 1980s (Pels 2013). The process by which science fiction divorced itself from the techno-scientific fantasies of the culture of modernization that dominated the immediate post-1945 period is therefore often misrepresented by indigenous histories. Some Golden Age science-fiction writers identified themselves as one of the last public bastions of critique and free speech (Theodore Sturgeon, cited approvingly by Isaac Asimov [1979: 650])—a fantasy that was, like Jürgen Habermas (1989), critical of, yet derived from, modernization theory’s conceit of a political development toward transparency. The fantasy is echoed by a “party of utopia” of literary critics who celebrate sci-fi’s potential for imagining the new (Jameson 2005: v; Suvin 1979). Anthropologists are, like good historians, at least equally interested in the extent to which sci-fi can exploit the xenophobic underbelly, the ethnocentric superhero fantasies, or the attractions of apocalypse and disaster, not least because they can be cultivated by commerce for a profit. Indeed, anthropologists may be less comfortable with defining science fiction in terms of the scientific “novum” it experiments with (as Darko Suvin did [1979]) than with Kingsley Amis’ definition of science fiction in terms of “new maps of hell” (Amis 1960). Pessimism and optimism can be equally commodified; there is no utopian critique inherent to the sale of either romance or catastrophe.

One defect of the ways in which anthropologists have paid attention to science fiction so far should be mentioned, however: the fact that they have neglected cultural diversity to the extent that they have not yet sufficiently interrogated science fiction beyond its hegemonic cultural setting in the Anglophone North Atlantic. Anthropologists tend to not only bypass some of the more salient differences between writers or movie-makers within the Anglophone world but also pay less attention to some

of the more important developments of science fiction on the European continent (especially those emerging from Soviet times), Japan, and more recently, Southeast Asia, China, and Africa (in the form of Afro-futurism). This is not simply a call for cultural relativism: it is, more importantly, a plea for a comparative effort, by which the exploration of such cultural differences may also answer questions such as why has the Anglophone North Atlantic been such a dominant breeding ground of this genre, or why, quite remarkably, two island societies, Britain and Japan, have both produced outstanding science-fiction narratives that define a fatal threat to civilization to come from the sea (compare, for example, Komatsu 1995 to Wyndham 1951 or 1955). Such cultural comparisons may also help to explain why my chapter privileges British perspectives on science fiction that are less optimistic—such as those that are voiced by Kingsley Amis and Brian Aldiss and epitomized by H.G. Wells’ alien war machines and mad scientists—than the faith in science fiction’s voice for progress that North Americans seem to have inherited from Jules Verne.

Against such a background, what anthropologists want from a definition of science fiction is that it makes social and cultural sense without having to fall back on modernist techno-optimism. Whereas the definition of science fiction, by practitioners as well as scholars, is notoriously elusive, the observation that science fiction is whatever we say it is (by, among others, science fiction writers like Damon Knight and Norman Spinrad) loses much of its apparent triviality once we start by acknowledging that science fiction “certainly [is] a publishing category” (Stableford et al. 1993: 314). Regardless of its content, writers and publishers have practical use for the label in the social world of print capitalism (Anderson 1983: 47–48). The question how, when, why, and for whom science is fictionalized then mutates into the question how, when, why, and for whom science becomes culturalized as a commodified spectacle—as a packaged imaginary and narrative that sells wonder, excitement, awe, horror, or a temporary escape (and this applies to sales of sci-fi in other media too). The only “hard” condition for such fictionalizations of science is that they make a profit, but that condition only posits an “empty future”, in the sense that the quantity of profit does not determine the quality or content of the commodity or spectacle by which it is earned (Pels 2015: 785).⁴ In a cultural analysis, this allows us to distinguish science fiction

from other forms of the future that determine modern lives: unlike all forms of modern policy that aim to “develop” something, it does not require maintaining a “future positive” that makes the present imperfect (Mosse 2004: 640); unlike macroeconomics, it does not render the present abstract by invoking the mathematical fantasy of a future market equilibrium (Maurer 2002; Mitchell 2014); unlike the legal contract, it does not need the magical conceit that we actually control the exchange that we agreed upon (Westbrook 2016). Interestingly, science fiction may, at least in our current paranoid times, resemble the Christian fundamentalist’s apocalypse, for even its secular fantasies can be used to reject the neighbors as unbelievers (Stewart and Harding 1999; Crapanzano 2007).

Science Fiction as Modern Magic

If, even after the caveats listed above, one still wants to define science fiction by the content of its future expectations, one may be more successful by turning to the “not quite real” realm of magic and witchcraft—where “magic” points to the miraculous satisfaction of desire, and “witchcraft” to the paranoia that comes with anticipating misfortune. This, however, implies that we recognize that these terms should not be reified (they cover a huge and contradictory terrain including occultism, spirit possession, enchantment, fetishism, shamanism, and other terms used to write such phenomena off as non-modern: see Pels 2003). More importantly, we should move away from the classical anthropological understanding of magic and witchcraft as timeless “beliefs”, since they situate them historically as “other” ways of thinking, incomprehensible from and incommensurable with modern points of view. Instead, Evans-Pritchard’s snippet of insight into a young Zande boy’s mind, when the latter said that stubbing his toe while running home was “witchcraft” because it runs counter to a future the boy had routinely come to expect (1976 [1935]: 20), reminds us of the fact that we, too, can make “occult” or paranoid versions of anything that frustrates our common expectations—that much, at least, is not culturally peculiar. Moreover, sci-fi teems with instances of a “substance X” that is at least as weird as the witchcraft

substance that Evans-Pritchard identified among Azande (see, for an early science-fictional “substance X”, Smith 1958 [1928]: 5).

Situating magic in the context of modernity, however, requires more explanation, since modern rationalism and secularism denies it has a place in it. Elsewhere I argued that the concept of magic should be primarily understood as modernity’s antithesis, as a way of telling ourselves that this is *not* who we are. Many modern people like to think they do not believe in or practice magic or can be bewitched, if that is understood as expecting or experiencing efficacious action at a distance by mimesis, psychic powers, or the animation of dead matter. However, this raises a paradox: modern people also often deplore the extent to which their own society produces precisely such expectations, so that modernity can be seen to produce its own magic, in diverse forms of paranoia, fetishism, charisma, or the mimetic *mana* of “representation” (see Pels 2003: 17–29). The paradox is perfectly conveyed by James Frazer’s work: Frazer not only portrayed magic as modernity’s antithesis in terms of the twin (and, according to him, fallacious) ideas of magic working through homeopathic and contagious connections, his work also inspired some of the more influential reinventions of magic in modernity (such as the Order of the Golden Dawn; or Gerald Gardner’s Wicca: Pels 2003: 308n8). Frazer both took up and disseminated a newly psychologized sense of magic (even using metaphors, such as “ether” that were cultivated by the rising tide of theosophy, occultism, and psychic research), but whereas he regarded it as essentially a malfunctioning subjectivity, the cultural movements that his modern magic inspired—among occultists as well as artists—rather saw it as a kind of super-functional subjectivity (Pels 2003: 31; Wilson 2013).

As a result of insisting on magic as the workings of the psyche, the occultists from whom Frazer got some of his ideas (such as Bulwer Lytton and his admirer, Madame Blavatsky), Frazer himself, and the occultists whom he stimulated with his examples, have emphasized the evolution of the mind, and caused anthropology to neglect the *material* practices of modern magic (but see Pels 2010; Jones 2011; Lears 1994: 40–74). The cover photograph of *Magic and Modernity* (Meyer and Pels 2003) (Fig. 10.1) shows that this attention to the material mediation

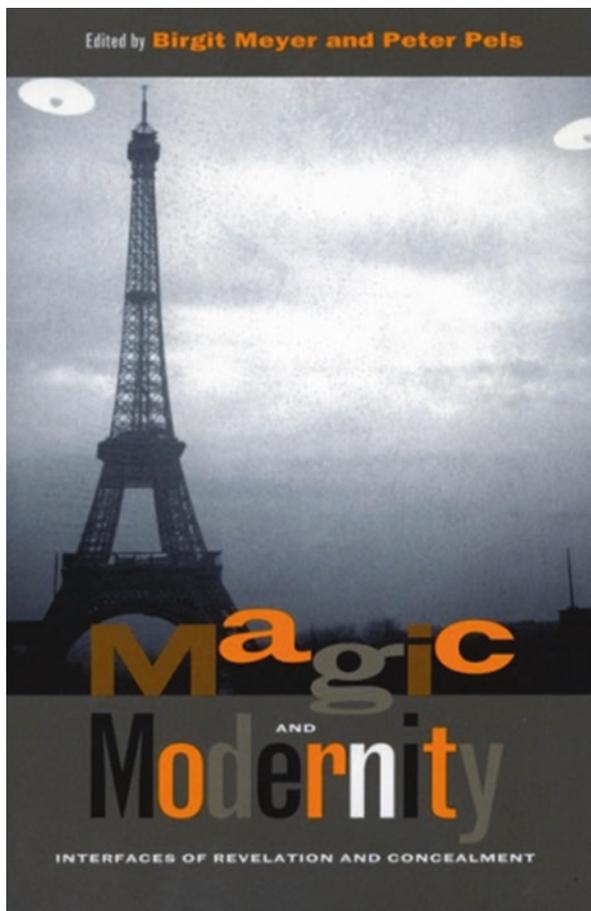


Fig. 10.1 UFOs passing the Eiffel Tower (cover image of Meyer and Pels [2003])

of modern magic may connect it to science fiction: the photograph of UFOs passing the Eiffel Tower perfectly conveys the modern conundrum of making cultural sense of technology in a modern world—an activity that inevitably calls up magical action. This remains true even when we acknowledge the possibility of a trick—that is, of a photograph of two “floating” *plafonnières* taken through a reflecting window—because it portrays magical action as involving fraud and *légerdemain*, in a trope typical of modern discourse on magic. In any

case, the Eiffel Tower itself remains as a reminder of the ritual magic Europeans wanted to generate by the technological sublime (as usually expressed in World's Fairs).

Vivian Sobchak, in her influential analysis of science-fiction cinema, makes the point that science fiction, if it had to be defined, should be classified as a hybrid genre consisting of slippages from magic to science to religion (1987: 63). Indeed, a focus on the material practice of film brings out that it has been interpreted as enchanting modern life from the very invention of cinema onwards (Moore 2004).⁵ Although the topic deserves a much longer analysis, this culturalization of the materials of science and technology is maybe best represented by the vignette I used in an earlier publication: the scene in Alfred Bester's brilliant *The Stars My Destination* (1996 [1956]) in which the main protagonist Gully Foyle, after psychically teleporting himself through space for the first time, ends up in the hands of "the Scientific People", an isolated group in a remote backwater of the galaxy. Foyle's potential as a "naturally selected" mate to one of the group's women gives rise to a ritual, in which his face is tattooed as a sign of membership, while the group recites the exact measures of several ingredients in a chemical formula, ending with triumphant shouts of "Quant Suff! Quant Suff!" ("quantity sufficient"; Bester 1996 [1956]: 28–29; see Pels 2013 and Fig. 10.2).

The culturalization of both biology and chemistry into ritual—a feature of everyday life that we all have encountered at one time or other, if only in the form of placebos—is conjoined in *The Stars My Destination* with teleportation in a perfect example of how science fiction constructs the magic of modernity.

Fictionalizing Romantic Science

These reflections on the definition of science fiction and the modernity of magic lead (with the help of Brian Aldiss) to an anthropological perspective on science fiction and its cultural origins. Rather than looking—as many histories of science fiction do—for remote and respectable intellectual ancestors in Plato's *Republic* or *Gulliver's Travels*, or reaffirming the techno-scientific focus that is often associated with Hugo Gernsback's invention of the earlier term "scientifiction" in 1926, the anthropological

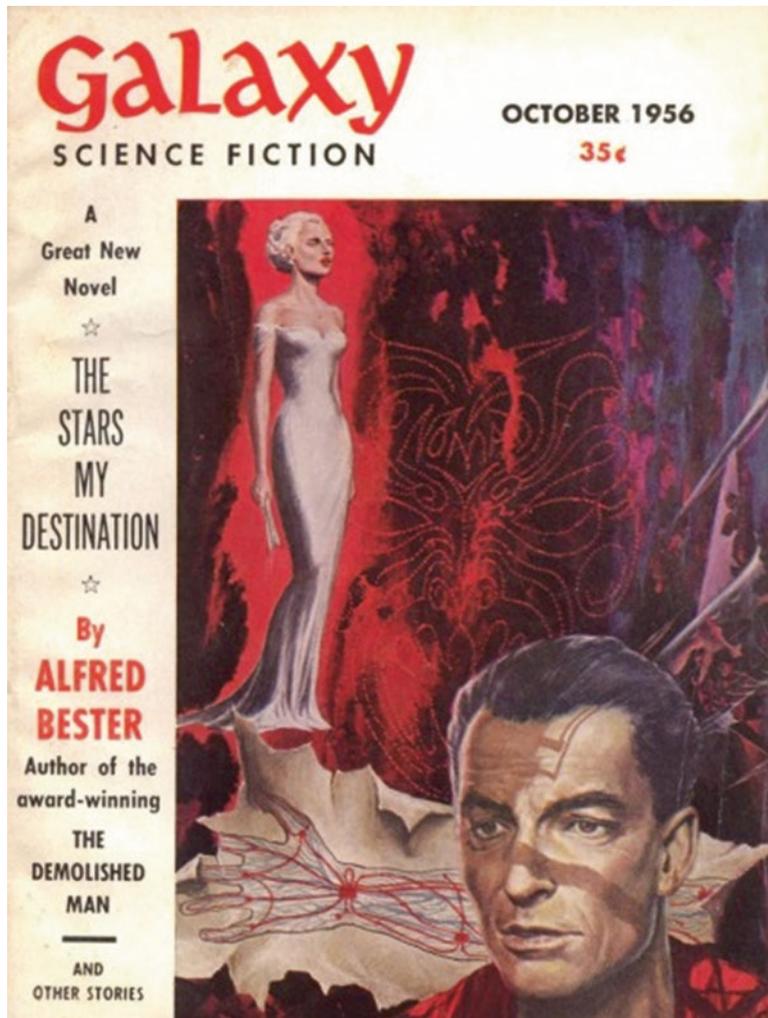


Fig. 10.2 The 1956 cover of *Galaxy Science Fiction*, containing the original version of Alfred Bester's *The Stars My Destination*

focus on cultural transformation should lead us to ask when and how, and, not least, *which* science was fictionalized (cf. Stableford et al. 1993). If, indeed, science fiction sacralizes the objects of secular scientific attention (Pels 2013), it cannot emerge unless science and the secular have

become culturally salient; and it can only unfold in full when their disenchantment with humanity, nature, and history is translated into commercial fiction (for this tripartite conception of the secular, see Asad 2003: 192). This does not happen until, in the words of Brian Aldiss, people start searching “for a definition of man and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state of knowledge (science)”, when it is romantically “cast in the Gothic or post-Gothic mould” (1973: 8). Aldiss’ insight is profound, because he defines “science” as a search—as a *desire* for certainty amidst cultural confusion about humanity’s place in nature, a confusion that historically appears only after the Christian God absconds from the everyday control of nature and humanity faces the question of how it can manage in His stead in the future. (One cannot, therefore, understand science fiction without taking religion into account.)

This particular *cultural* pattern was first connected to the circuits of print capitalism by Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus* was written and published in the same years that her atheist husband Percy Bryce Shelley wrote *Prometheus Unbound*, which sets its human protagonist free after the supreme deity, Jupiter, is dethroned. Frankenstein is a new Faust, a true contemporary of the fictional character continually recreated by Goethe between the 1770s and 1830s. Unlike the seventeenth-century magus Dr. Faustus, who dealt with the devil, or Goethe’s Faust, who faced the social destruction that his designs to improve humanity brought with them (Berman 1983: 37ff.), Frankenstein wrestled with the doubt whether his intervention in nature—this is the height of the industrial revolution!—is evil (Aldiss 1973: 26). Significantly, Aldiss identifies the science being fictionalized by both Shelleys as inspired by the work of Erasmus Darwin, the true inventor of evolutionary thought. Grandfather of the man who was eventually credited with this innovation, Darwin took part in a much larger secularizing movement of scientists and capitalists, best represented by the Lunar Society of Birmingham. It included inventors like James Watt and philosophers like Joseph Priestley, some of Darwin’s greatest friends being the pioneer entrepreneurs Matthew Boulton and Josiah Wedgwood, and its members waxed lyrical about the discovery of infinite space (and the resulting confusion about extraterrestrial life) by their contemporary William Herschel’s telescopes, and of the discovery of the

possibility of infinite time (and the resulting doubts about Biblical authority) called up by John Whitehurst's geological fieldwork in the nearby Peak District (Uglow 2002). There was a science whose secularism disrupted Christian time and space to such an extent that it called for ways to come to terms with the doubts it generated—although this coming to terms mostly had to take place in private, given the public dominance of a religiously inclined aristocracy and clergy. The fictionalization of such perspectives started before the cultural routines of capitalist commerce kicked in—in fact, the likes of Boulton and Wedgwood were in the business of experimenting with capitalist routines in such a way as to bring them into being. Erasmus Darwin's biological poetry led the way for this generation of romantics who, inspired by Rousseau's humanism, Edmund Burke's sublime nature, and Goethe's approach to nature, did not yet divorce art from science. They found “wonder” (a kind of preternatural miracle, already secularized since Francis Bacon) in the proto-anthropology of Joseph Banks, the extraterrestrial life of father and son Herschel, the secularized alchemy of Humphrey Davy, and the orientalism of William Jones (Holmes 2008).

Romanticism may have given science fiction a Gothic aura, but in Shelley's version, *confusion about science* overwhelms its mystery and turns it into horror. Shelley portrays Frankenstein's creature as a kind of noble savage or *tabula rasa*—clear echoes of Rousseau here, but also of Banks and his ethnography of innocent Tahitians—who, in a secular version of the Fall, becomes a monster because the morbid and immoral desires of his human creator have put (in the earlier words of Erasmus Darwin) “writhing Mania [...] on Reason's throne” (quoted by Aldiss 1973: 30). In the frontispiece to the original 1818 edition, we see the “monster”—a handsome creature quite unlike the cinematic horror popularized in 1931 by actor Boris Karloff—come awake in surprise, and Frankenstein fleeing from his inability to guide what his science has just brought into being (see Fig. 10.3): the practice of secular scientific creation running up against its moral limitations.

Aldiss calls this “the first great myth of the industrial age” (1973: 23). It was not immediately popular at the time of its publication in 1818 but gained in public estimation in the next decades, not least through its theatrical versions. The moment of its first publication, however, marks

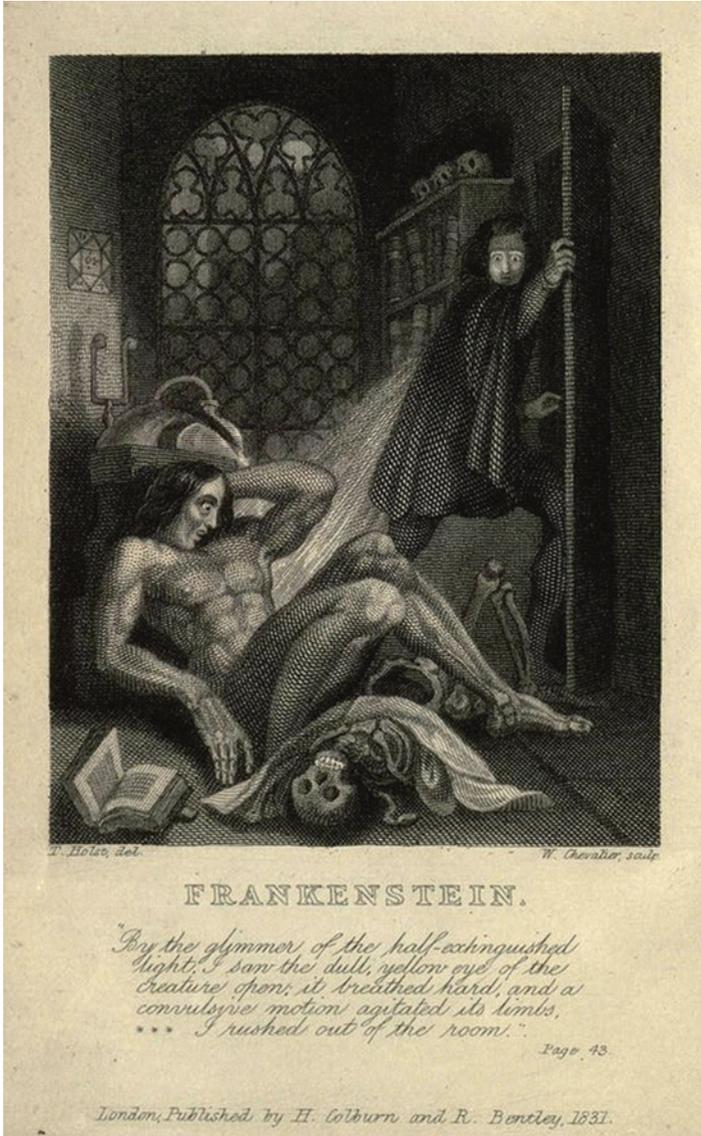


Fig. 10.3 Frontispiece of the original 1818 edition of *Frankenstein*, showing the confusion and innocence of the "monster" before it turns evil, and Frankenstein's horror at his own creation

the point where the definition of science fiction's *social* nature (as a publishing genre—the Gothic novel—within the landscape of print capitalism) and the definition of its *cultural* nature (as a sacralization of secular science—even if it mutated into horror) come recognizably together. This is why I think an anthropology of science fiction should follow Brian Aldiss' lead and start here.

Anthropology Fictionalized

The conjuncture of confusion about the human place in nature and its commercialization by print capitalism did not become a profitable concern until the second half of the nineteenth century. Compared to present-day classifications, the genres that were included in the Gothic novel and that evolved into the “mystery” novels of the second half of the nineteenth century were themselves confused—or, at least, not well distinguished from each other, as, for example, Edgar Allan Poe's mix of horror, ghost, science fiction, and detective stories testifies. In both Britain and the United States, these genres developed against the background of imperial expansion, frontiers of the so-called discovery, and the need to get acquainted with and rule over people markedly different from the standards of North Atlantic societies. It does not come as a surprise, then, that anthropology became one of the more important sciences fictionalized at the time. As demonstrated by the expedition ethnographies of Joseph Banks and Mungo Park (see Holmes 2008: 1–59, 211–234), the budding science of human difference provoked the question whether “other” people could offer anything that might upset the hierarchy of values that the people of the North Atlantic thought they shared. Anthropology must, in the context of the period, be defined in broad terms, as including philology, archeology, ethnology and folklore, and, not least, scientific racism. Equally important, anthropology at the time should be seen as moving under the canopy of the queen of Victorian sciences: geography.

Three examples may show how anthropology, archeology, and geography were fictionalized in ways that interlocked and overlapped: Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* (1871), Henry Rider Haggard's *She*

(1996 [1887]), and Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* (1960 [1912]). All three forged bonds between the high culture of elite scientists, the subterranean doubts they cherished, and the subaltern fantasies such doubts generated—not surprisingly, fantasies about intercourse with other races and genders in, to Victorians, largely tabooed ways. On this basis, they also forged bonds between science and magic on the basis of print capitalism. All three examples demonstrate geographical science fiction, in particular the “lost world” genre, that imagined the unknown in parts of the world that geographic exploration and colonial conquest had nearly, but not quite, managed to abolish: the Himalayas, the interior of Africa, or the inside of the earth. This focus on geographical science (rather than technology) is still clearly present when the momentum of science fiction starts to shift to the United States, since the protagonists of Edgar Rice Burroughs' first two fantasies of 1912 traveled to Africa in an everyday manner (*Tarzan of the Apes* [1959]) or were miraculously transported onto a planet in outer space, respectively (*A Princess of Mars* [1972]).

This geographical imagination was exemplified (at least in the first two examples) by the location of the most powerful magic: while Lytton's *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834) still centered around an Egyptian sorcerer, his *The Coming Race* (1871) had shifted to an occult Hinduism, especially by borrowing the notion of *vril* (a superior psychic power) from the anthropologist Friedrich Max Müller, the foremost authority on the Vedas in Britain. Lytton was rumored to be a Rosicrucian sorcerer himself and may have been Madame Blavatsky's model for the occult masters who inspired her Theosophical Society in 1875 (Liljegren 1957). Blavatsky copied this geographical move, since she first located Theosophy's magical epicenter in Egyptian magic (as exemplified by the title of her first book, *Isis Unveiled* [1877]), but subsequently preferred the occult whisperings of “Mahatmas”, dwelling in the remoter parts of the South Asian subcontinent and the Himalayas in particular (Washington 1993). Finally, Rider Haggard made a similar move much later, when he resituated Ayesha—the Egyptian sorceress found at a remote spot in Southern Africa in *She* (1887)—to the Himalayas in a later novel (*Ayesha*, published 1924 [1978]). All three copied a shift from Egyptian magic to an orientalism farther East that also characterized the visual popular culture of British shows (see Altick 1978).

All three novels draw directly on anthropology for their fictional credibility. Lytton's book is not only dedicated to Friedrich Max Müller and adopts the notion of occult power or *vril* that Müller lifted from his study of the Vedas, it also reproduces the nineteenth-century anthropological focus on race hierarchies, if in a curiously inverted and paranoid way. Its publication date coincides with the subordination of the polygenist notion of race hierarchies to the doctrine of the "psychic unity of mankind" cultivated by leaders of the Anthropological Institute such as Edward Tylor and Thomas Huxley (Stocking 1987: 269–273). Indeed, it is possible to interpret both *The Coming Race* and Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* as means to recompose race hierarchies in the margins of Victorian culture after the newly triumphant professionals among anthropological authorities had ruled it out of bounds (for such an interpretation of Blavatsky and Müller, see Pels 2000). The Vril-ya, the "coming race" from Lytton's title, are clearly superior, especially the magnificent Zee, who falls in love with the book's male and very ordinary human protagonist after he falls down into the hollow earth and discovers their abode. They can fly and possess telepathic and telekinetic powers (*vril*) that put the story's narrator in such awe that he is afraid they will conquer humanity should they ever rise up and reach the earth's surface (see Fig. 10.4).

A similar mental or psychic hierarchy of races forms the core of Blavatsky's Theosophy (and of much twentieth-century UFOlogy inspired by her: Roth 2005) and predicts, indeed, that a superior race of psychic masters will succeed humanity in its mental evolution. Blavatsky's Theosophy was one of the ways in which the polygenist hierarchy of races retreated from public anthropology into an "occult" circuit (Pels 2000). However, the fact that Lytton put forward Zee as a powerful woman who almost awes her male counterpart into impotence suggests that these scientific fantasies put not only race hierarchies under negotiation but gender hierarchies as well, and at the same time. Decades before the official emergence of the suffragette movement, it was only in spiritual movements with a homegrown anthropology like Spiritualism and Theosophy that women could grasp opportunities under Victorian rule to speak out in public and lead an organization (Braude 1989). Existing doubts about race and gender hierarchies—hierarchies that ethnographies about noble savages had questioned in Joseph Bank's time, and anthropological speculations about



Fig. 10.4 A version of John Martin, *Pandemonium* (ca. 1825), originally meant to illustrate a scene in which devils build Hell in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. This painter's architecture is compared to that of the Vrilya in Lytton's *The Coming Race*, and this version of the painting adorns the cover of a late twentieth-century edition of the book

kinship and matriarchy around the 1850s—could thereby become the raw material from which a novel like *The Coming Race* could be composed.

Likewise, Henry Rider Haggard's first bestseller, *King Solomon's Mines* (1885), was not only based on his own ethnographic experiences in South Africa, but must also be one of the first books in Victorian times which features a cross-racial romance (between Captain Good and Foulata). Centered (among other things) on the witch-hunt of the hag Gagool, it also brings Haggard's experiences with South African healing into European fantasy. But it was Haggard's second bestseller, *She* (1887)—the book breaking all the sales records in print capitalism that *King Solomon's Mines* had established two years earlier—that provided even our age with an archetypal image of a powerful woman. "She-who-must-be-obeyed" is Ayesha, an Egyptian sorceress who rejuvenated herself over

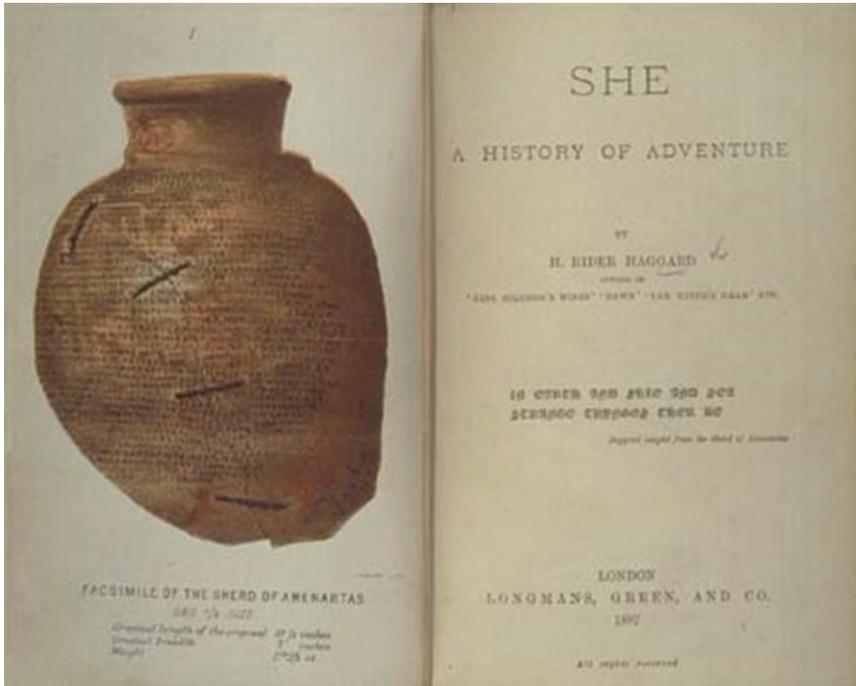


Fig. 10.5 Frontispiece and title page of the first edition of *She*. They show the sherd of Amenartas and its inscription that lead scholar Horace Holly and his ward Leo Vincey to their voyage of discovery in Africa

two millennia by means of a magical fire located in a remote mountain area of Southern Africa. She is found by the archeologist Horace Holly and his ward Leo Vincey, when the former feels obliged to accompany the latter on a voyage of discovery after Vincey comes to him with a potsherd that was excavated by Vincey's deceased father. The archeological science fiction of this book is rendered particularly realistic by a minute description of the potsherd's measurements (Haggard 1982 [1887]: xxx-xi; see Fig. 10.5)

Again, the connections to anthropology are multiple: not just the archeology of the potsherd and its inscription but also Haggard's own ethnographic experiences as the personal assistant of Theophile Shepstone, the Native Commissioner of Natal (see Pels 1998: 196), now symbolized by

the “Amahagger”—the name a peculiar combination of a Zulu prefix and Haggard’s surname—the people ruled by the imperial imagination of a gorgeously rejuvenated Isis in remote Africa, that she now promises to mobilize for her new love, Leo Vincey, to conquer Britain. Note that in both cases (*The Coming Race* as well as *She*) the threat to overturn civilization by a different race upsets Victorian gender hierarchies as well. Maybe this expresses the common finding in Africa—or perhaps worldwide—that magic seems the more powerful the more remote its (social) provenance.

The Lost World, Arthur Conan Doyle’s adventure story starring the unforgettable Professor Challenger, is less preoccupied with gender hierarchies than the previous two science-fiction novels, but it, too, was directly inspired by a colonial anthropologist-cum-explorer: Everard Im Thurn, whose expedition to the remote Roirama Plateau raised extraordinary expectations among the British public. Im Thurn organized the expedition to the mountain plateau on the border with Venezuela after he had been appointed director of the museum in Georgetown, British Guiana, by Joseph Hooker, the influential director of Kew Gardens, and earned recognition among anthropologists by the publication of *Among the Indians of Guiana* in 1883. He would build his reputation as an anthropologist further while governing Ceylon and Fiji and he became President of the Anthropological Section of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in 1914 and of the Royal Anthropological Institute in 1919. Well before Steven Spielberg turned similar fantasies into the visual magic of Jurassic Park’s post-modern genetics, the expedition to Roirama, on the border of Guyana and Venezuela, raised expectations of the discovery of missing racial connections by “primitive life forms”—both zoological and in terms of the (humanoid) “missing link”—in the British press, and Im Thurn shrewdly cultivated the expectation that such evolutionary survivals would be found since it helped to raise funds for the expedition (Dalziell 2007: 99). The “missing link” was an especially powerful image because finding a race between ape and human promised to hammer a last nail in the coffin of a creationist view of the origin of species. Conan Doyle did little more than fictionalize and sensationalize Im Thurn’s findings upon hearing him lecture after the expedition’s return, although Doyle’s addition of a full-blown war between primitive humans and evolved apes and, most importantly, living dinosaurs to the mix of survivals Professor



Fig. 10.6 Advertising poster for the first (1925) film version of Conan Doyle's *The Lost World* by Harry Hoyt. Early film was overwhelmingly devoted to magic and science fiction, as the predominance of film versions of *She* and *King Solomon's Mines* shows (Leibfried 2000)

Challenger encountered was surely one reason why *The Lost World* (published in 1912) was turned into blockbuster cinema already in 1925 (Fig. 10.6). It has continued to do so in Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* in the 1990s, although the anchoring in anthropology was lost in the process of turning from evolutionary racism to a more subtle racial metaphor in genetic technology.

Conclusion

The Lost World illustrates the cultural secret behind the magic of print capitalism in the way Doyle materialized, in a commercial circuit, the desires for science cherished by a British public at the time. Anthropology, when fictionalized, could fulfill those needs, maybe just because those

desires by no means implied merely positive satisfactions. Aldiss' brilliant idea that, in a cultural sense, science is more about *confusion* than anything else—should I, as a mere human being want this power for creation and development? If I satisfy my desires, will they not turn into evil?—is perfectly illustrated by Lytton and Haggard's suggestion of a racial and gender superiority that male Protestantism can only barely keep at bay. The fascination is magical, with perhaps the only difference between this commercial magic and the "skilled revelation" and "skilled concealment" of a shaman being that there is often no real risk or a patient's health at stake (Taussig 2003). This kind of magical spectacle—you pay for it, but it does not threaten you with pain or physical transformation—was generalized by the experience of cinema, as contemporary theoreticians of film repeatedly argued (Moore 2004).

However, the preceding examples show, just as Orson Welles' mockumentary in 1938 and the Heaven's Gate sect multiple suicide in March 1997, that no medium—regardless of whether it delivers the message by print, radio, cinema, or the digital—can guarantee that the membrane between fiction and fact remains impermeable. I propose that this cannot happen because science cannot muster that kind of reliability, at least not in the publicity generated by a capitalist society. Even when the secularized remnants of masculine Protestant Dissent had established themselves as the new authorities of science (at least in Britain; Pels 2008), the more plebeian (and magically inclined) currents they pushed aside continued to exist, if in the margins (Pels 2000). They helped to cultivate a gnostic attitude toward publicly authorized knowledge by affirming that reason and science, or faith and religion, were both too narrow to attain truth (Aupers et al. 2008: 688–692). The fluctuations of this subaltern cultural current depended—like science fiction—on mood swings in the North Atlantic between the modernist celebration or romantic mistrust of science (and religion)—just like the one that helped to create the Faustian moment in the early nineteenth century that produced *Frankenstein*. If World War One destroyed Europe's optimism about science and technology but boosted the faith in its own technical prowess of the rising hegemon, the United States, it is tempting to juxtapose the European fantasy worlds of E.R. Eddison and Lord Dunsany or the dystopian vistas of Olaf



Fig. 10.7 A performance of Karl Capek's *RUR* in 1921. Capek's play introduced the term "robot" in describing how they revolt against humanity

Stapledon's "last men" or Karl Capek's "robots" (Fig. 10.7) to the "science-fiction" of Hugo Gernsback's *Amazing Stories* (Fig. 10.8) or E.E. "Doc" Smith's *The Skylark of Space* (1958 [1928]).

However, that would not only marginalize American fantasy (by, for example, James Banch Cabel) or European utopia (by, for example, Aleksander Bogdanov), but also ignore that, when American faith in techno-scientific modernization was at its apex immediately after World War Two, the subaltern currents of commercial science fiction and Blavatsky-style gnosis would merge in another crossover of fiction into fact (or vice versa). As the then editor of *Amazing Stories*, Ray Palmer, merged Madame Blavatsky with a peculiarly racialized Ufology between 1945 and 1947 (Roth 2005: 48–50), and the celebrated editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, John Campbell, pledged his allegiance to the gnostic religion of L. Ron Hubbard in 1950 (Hubbard later founded the Church of Scientology; see Asimov 1979: 586), doubts about science and desires for a post-human evolution once more combined to turn a debate in fiction into a factual movement creating its own fake news.⁶

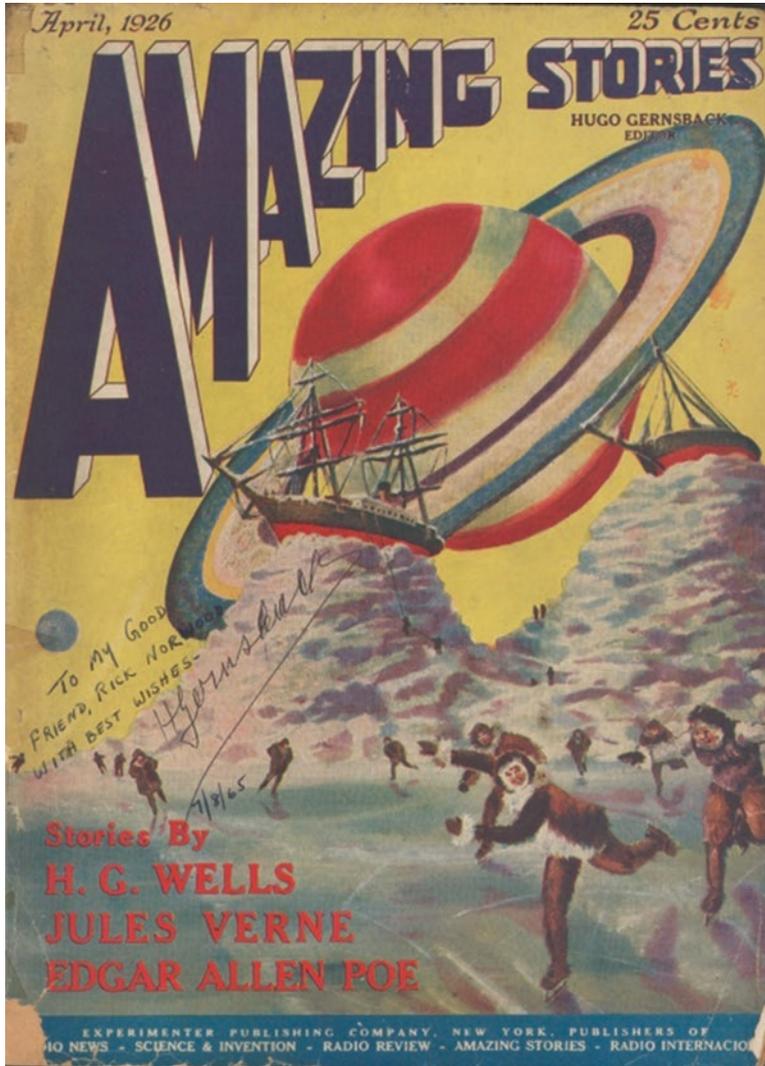


Fig. 10.8 The first cover of *Amazing Stories*, edited by Hugo Gernsback, of April 1926

Our current world is not radically different. In their brilliant overview of “American Apocalypse”, Kathleen Stewart and Susan Harding suggest that—since the Moral Majority broke up the secular public sphere in the United States of America in the 1980s—the gnostic mood has even

become more prominent and that both Christian fundamentalists and Ufologists might agree on this mantra of conspiracy theory, first coined by the TV series *The X-Files*: “Trust No One—The Truth Is Out There” (Stewart and Harding 1999: 294; see also Harding 2000: 79). The gnostic suspicion of the surface appearance of the world, and the certainty that a divine spark of insight will lead an individual to the truth, was staple food to the conspiracy theorist and the Theosophist, and continues to inform those viewing *The X-Files* on television, or *The Matrix* in the movie theater. If anything, gnostic suspicion has become more mainstream, to further undermine trust in science—or in other statements of public authority. Even more, the “Alt-Right” movement uses the simile saying that its members have been “redpilled” so that they can unmask the left-wing public conspiracy of science and welfare—copied from the scene in *The Matrix* when Morpheus offers Neo a red pill to take the shells of his eyes and see the real world behind the cyber-illusion that dupes everyone else.⁷ The trust in evolution displayed by Blavatsky’s fantasy-Mahatmas, or the fear of a post-human evolution voiced by Lytton and Haggard, is echoed by such imagery, even if current science fiction has replaced evolution by the digital revolution. It suggests that the magic of capitalism still lies in the fact that (contrary to most liberal expectations) it works neither through the attractions of fact (or skepticism) nor those of fiction (or faith), but by the uncertainty of their juxtaposition.

Notes

1. On the ideological (and initially non-Darwinian) influences on social evolutionism, see Peel (1971) and Trautman (1987).
2. In contrast, Frazer was not ambivalent about these hierarchies of value, although he did fear that the forces of barbarism could break through the thin crust of Victorian civilization from below (Frazer 1911: 236).
3. A field pioneered by Magoroh Maruyama and Arthur Harkins (1975, 1978).
4. Therefore, neither the fact nor the quantity of profit says anything about the literary quality of the texts or the visual quality of the performances.

5. Indeed, this material focus (see Pels 2010) explains why I illustrate my argument by some of the most visible material manifestations of science-fictional magic in print capitalism: the images on and in books.
6. And vice versa: Ufology's brainchild, the "saucerite movement", would be once more turned into sci-fi by Fritz Leiber's wonderful and hilarious *The Wanderer* (1983 [1964]). My own attitude toward the possibility of extra-terrestrial visits put forward by Ufologists is comparable to Thomas Henry Huxley's comment on the possibility of communicating with the dead in Spiritual seances: Huxley could not muster much interest if the deceased would not start to communicate more intelligently than they had done so far (Huxley 1900: 420).
7. Clones of "Alt-Right" argue this on both sides of the Atlantic: see Kouwenhoven and Adriaanse (2017: 10).

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11

The Magic of Mass Publicity: Reading Ioan Couliano

William Mazzarella

Advertising and the other arts of mass publicity are often compared to magic. The comparison is generally offered as an ironic simile. But what if one were to propose, in all seriousness, that mass publicity is not *like* magic but rather that it *is* magic? This is the gist of some hints left us by Ioan Couliano, in his *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, where he reads the arts of magic through magus-philosophers like Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) and Giordano Bruno (1548–1600). Couliano offers a handful of speculative assertions that, taken together, amount to a provocative opening to further investigation. Or should I say “activation”? Perhaps it would be altogether in the spirit of Couliano’s enterprise to treat the suggestive remarks he made on magic and mass publicity as keys to doors that have yet to be installed, let alone opened.

Couliano writes: “we would tend to say that [...] the actual magician and the prophet have now vanished. More probably, however, they have simply been camouflaged in sober and legal guises. [...] Nowadays, the

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magician busies himself with public relations, propaganda, market research, sociological surveys, publicity, information, counterinformation and misinformation, censorship, espionage, and even cryptography—a science which in the sixteenth century was a branch of magic” (Couliano 1987 [1984]: 104). And further: “magic is a means of control over the individual and the masses based on deep knowledge of personal and collective erotic impulses. Insofar as science and the manipulation of phantasms are concerned, magic is primarily directed at the human imagination, in which it attempts to create lasting impressions. The magician of the Renaissance is both psychoanalyst and prophet as well as the precursor of modern professions such as director of public relations, propagandist, spy, politician, censor, director of mass communications media, and publicity agent” (xviii). Several terms in these passages deserve closer scrutiny: the relation between *individual* and *mass* magic, what Couliano might mean by *phantasms* and the question of why they can become media of *manipulation*, and perhaps also the suggestion that this magical manipulation comprises aspects of *therapy* as well as of *prophecy*.

But first, let me acknowledge that Couliano was not the first to notice a connection between magic and mass publicity. In *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, the pioneering ethnographer Bronislaw Malinowski calls advertising “the richest field of modern verbal magic” and remarks that “The advertisements of modern beauty specialists, especially of the magnitude of my countrywoman Helena Rubinstein, or of her rival, Elizabeth Arden, would make interesting reading if collated with the formulae of Trobriand beauty magic” (Malinowski 1935: 237).¹ Notably, the comparison is not intended to flatter anyone; Malinowski imagines the comparative research project that someone might undertake on these matters as an inquiry into “parallels between modern and primitive savagery.”² His distaste for what he implicitly renders as atavistic survivals in modern mass publicity is entirely conventional, albeit also understandable, given the European political climate at the time. He renders the magical dimensions of mass communication as tools of mass hypnosis energized by mob frenzy and, as such, as inherently inimical to the flourishing of liberal democracy:

[M]odern political oratory would probably yield a rich harvest of purely magical elements. Some of the least desirable of modern pseudo-statesmen

or gigantic politicianti have earned the titles of wizards or spell-binders. The great leaders such as Hitler or Mussolini have achieved their influence primarily by the power of speech, coupled with the power of action which is always given to those who know how to raise the prejudices and the passions of the mob. Moreover, the modern socialistic state, whether it be painted red, black or brown, has developed the powers of advertisement to an extraordinary extent. Political propaganda, as it is called, has become a gigantic advertising agency, in which merely verbal statements are destined to hypnotize foreigner and citizen alike into the belief that something really great has been achieved. (238)

Malinowski zeroes in on a kind of language use which he calls “mystical” or “magical” and which might today be called performative: bringing about a state of affairs by invoking it in speech. For Malinowski, the use of such magical techniques in modern mass publicity is regressive because it re-confuses the “magical” and “pragmatic” functions of language that the long march from savagery to civilization was supposed to have separated.³ This is, of course, a normative discourse that is still widespread today: the assumption that the affective and mimetic dimensions of mass communication are, if not actually savage, then certainly incompatible with mature and responsible citizenship.

In this regard, Couliano’s stance is quite different: far from pathologizing magic, he portrays it as the original—and even today, the most sophisticated—art/science of intersubjectivity. But Couliano also shares with Malinowski a resistance to reducing the magic/mass publicity relation to a metaphor or a simile. Couliano suggests that both magic and mass publicity are *arts of eros*—or to put it a bit differently, they are sciences of susceptibility, arts of addressability. A magician, like a publicist, always asks: what makes one thing or person *resonate* with another? What can such resonances bring into the world? What can they keep out of the world? How can these resonances be manipulated or harnessed so as to *control* the things and the people that are resonating? At stake, here are what Couliano calls “erotic impulses”—that is to say, our individual and collective addressability, our availability to resonant activation. Because it is of course our addressability that makes us believe that, miraculously, we encounter the right things and the right people at exactly the right time.

So what makes us addressable? It's one thing to talk about magicians casting spells or publicists broadcasting propaganda. But what in us resonates or doesn't resonate with those messages? As the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk puts it: "How can it be that for billions of messages, I am the rock on which their waves break without resonance, while certain voices and instructions unlock me and make me tremble as if I were the chosen instrument to render them audible, a medium and mouthpiece simply for their urge to sound? Is there not still a mystery of access to consider here? Does my accessibility to certain unrefusable messages not have its dark 'reason' in an ability to reverberate that has not yet been adequately discussed?" (Sloterdijk 2011 [1998]: 479).⁴

Ancient psychology, Couliano notes, suggests that every human being comprises a certain mixture of humours that makes him or her particularly susceptible to particular things, situations, images, or people. Many traditions, Western and otherwise, involve some notion of a prenatal configuration of the individual's soul or personality—whether we are conditioned by the astrological conjunctures of our birth or by some other influential imprint. The idea here, as Couliano develops it via Ficino and Bruno, is that each of us carries a unique matrix of addressability, and that a magician is able to awaken that addressability (bring it into resonance) by choosing exactly the right phantasm for the job. "Phantasm" here means the image, the gesture, the person, or the situation in which the dormant potentials of my particular addressability come alive on the stage of my imagination.

This is how Couliano describes the relation between individual addressability and phantasm in Ficino: "Ficino emphatically states that this unconscious impression stamped on the soul is not [itself] a phantasm. On the contrary it is a matrix conditioning the phantasmic process to the extent it imperiously commands the phantasms received to conform to a prenatal prototype. This theory of the *facies* or preexistential image of the individual stems from a stratum of very archaic beliefs also found among so-called 'primitive' peoples. The later Neoplatonists gave it a philosophical foundation. Later, the cabalistic *Zohar*, by Moses of León, again took up the idea of an eternal impression stamped on the soul. [...] Through Neoplatonist doctrine, Ficino means to provide a transcendental basis for the empirical psychology of Eros. This field is bounded by the completely

unconscious choice made by the soul from among the phantasms capable of becoming the object of love” (Couliano *op cit.*: 45). When a phantasm becomes the object of my love—when it awakens an erotic resonance—I don’t experience myself as consciously choosing. Rather, I experience myself as being overcome by an ecstatic sense of encountering the very thing that I always wanted—except I didn’t know I wanted it until that very moment.

All this might make a certain kind of familiar sense at the level of the individual. It’s not too hard, after all, to translate this kind of language into, say, modern psychoanalysis such that we can provide explanations of why certain individuals are unconsciously drawn to certain sites and situations. But how might this work at a collective level, at a social level? If each individual carries a kind of *punctum* that can be activated by the right phantasm, then might it make sense to speak of a *public punctum*?⁵ Are there similar unconscious matrices for families, for societies, for cities, for countries—for the universe? The great thing about occult thought, of course—and in this sense it’s curiously reminiscent of anthropology—is that for the esoteric imagination everything is connected to everything else. Again, Couliano voices Ficino: “Eros, presiding over all spiritual activities, is what ensures the collaboration of the sectors of the universe, from the stars to the humblest blade of grass. Love is the name given to the power that ensures the continuity of the uninterrupted chain of beings; pneuma is the name given to the common and unique substance that places these beings in mutual relationship” (87).

Compared to such a universal network of resonant relations, the psychographic and socio-economic categories of modern marketing seem crude indeed. But of course here, too, we have new technologies of emergent correspondence: the algorithms that wade through millions of correlations for Netflix, Amazon, and the rest in order to make recommendations for us every time we log on are, in a sense, experiments in divination that seek, like the magician’s art, to know us better than we know ourselves (Seaver 2012). That the work—if not the design—of this new digital divination is now being done by machines is, perhaps, also significant in ways to which I return in a moment. But we don’t have to get too techy to see the point: from Walter Benjamin’s famously enigmatic theory of non-sensuous similarities through Charles Baudelaire’s

correspondences and Marcel Proust's flashes of involuntary memory, from various theories of the collective unconscious on to every modern method of propaganda, we have, as it were, plenty of models for thinking about how to activate the esoteric potentials of exoteric life.

Couliano argues that it's in the transition from Ficino in the fifteenth century to Bruno in the sixteenth that the magician's work takes on an explicitly *public* dimension. Bruno theorizes the art of eros not only as an intimate relation between individuals and things but also, and by the same token, as a technique for regulating mass opinion. It is Bruno that, in his treatise *De Vinculis in Genere* ("Of Bonds in General"), develops a theory of magic as a kind of *binding* that is at once intimate and public—and here it's worth keeping in mind the etymological origin of the word "religion" in the Latin *religare*, "to bind." The point, of course, is that to be bound by magic is to be constrained and manipulated but—at the same time, and this is crucial—it is also to experience that manipulation as the deep fulfilment of one's most intimate desire. This is why the magician's esoteric knowledge is so important. Couliano writes: "Bruno's manipulation demands perfect knowledge of the subject and his wishes, without which there can be no 'bond,' no *vinculum*" (Couliano, *op cit*: 90).

The magic that in Ficino applies to a dyadic couple becomes in Bruno, Couliano argues, a "*general psychosociology*" (108, original emphasis). Likewise, Couliano suggests, intersubjective magic aimed at a sick individual is called medicine, but when its target is a collective subject, it becomes religion (110). Or perhaps we could equally well say "ideology"? For Couliano, the modern magician—the magician described by Bruno—is an "integral magician" (105). Which is to say, a magician in the service of the state: "What could be hoped for through knowledge of intersubjective relationships? A homogenous society, ideologically healthy and governable" (105). Couliano notes that Bruno appears, here, to anticipate Marx and Engels' argument about religion as the opium of the people. "But, while Marx and Engels have humanitarian and utopian ideals, Bruno shows little concern for safeguarding human dignity; the only right he envisages belongs neither to God nor to man but to the *manipulator* himself" (89, original emphasis).

Nevertheless, although the magician may in a certain sense be an entirely pragmatic actor, his or her work depends on identifying and deploying the phantasms that will bring alive, *for a certain purpose*, latent correspondences that are immanent to a world. The parallel with the arts of rhetoric, advertising, and marketing could hardly be clearer. The term “aspiration,” long a theological concept, has taken on a banal meaning in marketing, indicating a conscious longing and striving for a better life through consumption. But the annals of magic, Couliano shows, have long been animated by a notion of magical activation as aspiration: an aspiration latent in worldly circumstances to actualize their transcendent truth. Such a notion, for example, is implicit, Couliano suggests, in the classical concept of eros: “Love [eros] is the name of that desire with many manifestations which, even in its most decadent form, admixing sexual attraction, still retains its quality of unconscious aspiration to the transcendental Beauty” (3). In ancient Greek thought, eros is the activating, resonant link between things as they exist and their essence. It links the material world of the body to the eternal realm of the soul. Pneuma is the subtle substance and medium that translates between corporeal and ethereal domains. In this sense, pneuma is aspirational, not only literally as breath but also as “horizon of hope” (6). Whether pneuma is imagined as a thin casing around the soul (as for Aristotle) or as the soul itself (as for the later physicians and the Stoics), Couliano’s point is that magic, through the mobilizations of phantasms, brings alive resonances between otherwise conflictual or discontinuous dimensions of existence: body and soul, individual and collective. Refunctioning the early anthropological language bequeathed to us by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, we might say that magical phantasms are the *representations* that activate *participation*.

Couliano reads Bruno, then, not only as a theorist of magic but also as an early analyst of the magical dimension of politics. In that regard, some of the most eccentric, speculative passages in *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* are also those most obviously marked by Couliano’s own origins in Cold War Rumania. If at one level his book is an attempt to articulate a general theory of magic as a mode in which immanent potentials find their transcendent articulation—eros as “unconscious aspiration to the transcendental Beauty”—then at another level the text expresses the slow but insistent trauma of a divided world.

The political division reappears as a potentially fatal split between the fertility of political magic and the rigidity of the ideological commitments that it might serve. On the one side, Couliano characterizes the capitalist polity as the “magician state,” bursting with subtle and flexible energies, with a veritable excess of transformative energies, but for that very reason always teetering on the brink of degenerating into the “sorcerer state,” unable to harness the “dark and uncontrollable forces” (106) that it has set into motion. On the other side, there is the “police state” of the communist world, rigidly committed to outmoded slogans and exhausted values, dismally tending towards the “jailer state.” A split dialectic, then: on the one side, all life and precious little form; on the other side, all form and no life. At one point, Couliano, writing, let us recall, during the early 1980s, at a time when the Cold War order still looked like it might well go on forever—even speculates that the reason that the Western magician states have not been better at bringing down the police states of the Eastern bloc is that they are so preoccupied with the volatile energies of their own internal lives that they have precious little attention left over to mobilize much in the way of effective external magic. Crudely general and overdrawn, Couliano’s diagnosis is clearly of less interest as comparative politics than as a reflection on the possible impasses of mass publicity in *any* society, torn as it will necessarily be between the vital proliferation of resonant potentials and the pragmatic need to stay “on brand.”

We seem to be in the neighbourhood of some very familiar debates about advertising as false consciousness when Couliano insists that the idea that a magician speaks to our most intimately specific desires—the idea that a magician binds me through the phantasm that addresses *only me*—is a “total illusion” (90). But here, I think, we need to be very precise, because it would be too easy simply to equate “illusion” with “manipulation” and, from there, to fall back on all the commonplace, well-worn arguments about how mass publicity is just a kind of brainwashing that distracts from our supposedly real interests. Let us surmise, first of all, that the illusion at issue is not that I can be intimately—as it were authentically—addressed by the magician’s phantasm; I can. The illusion, rather, is retroactive. Having been addressed and having responded, I tell myself almost immediately that I was always already *actually*—as opposed to

virtually—the person with the desire that the phantasm appears to address (although it would be better to say that it actualizes it). The magic is in the work that the phantasm does. One might say that the phantasm seizes on my *virtual* dimension—which is to say on those latent correspondences that can be activated in many different ways but which, once activated, seem inevitable, as if they were fated. Again, this sense of a fated encounter is one of the hallmarks of magical efficacy. Second, when Couliano writes that my feeling of being addressed exquisitely as myself is a “total illusion,” he is perhaps prefiguring an argument about public communication that has more recently been developed by Michael Warner. Warner’s basic proposition is that the public message that, as it were, *hits its mark* is the message that addresses me intimately insofar as it also, and by the same token, addresses a potentially infinite number of unknown others: “Public speech can have great urgency and intimate import. Yet we know that it was addressed not exactly to us, but to the stranger we were until the moment we happened to be addressed by it” (Warner 2002: 57). As such, the efficacy of public speech remains haunted—but also energized—by what I have elsewhere called the open edge of mass publicity (Mazzarella 2013). Or in Warner’s words: “the trace of our strangerhood remains present in our understanding of ourselves as the addressee” (Warner, *op cit*: 58). This is why Couliano is able to claim, in an apparent paradox: “Bruno’s magician is altogether aware that, to gain the following of the masses, like the loyalty of an individual, it is necessary to take account of all the complexity of the subject’s expectations, to create the total illusion of giving *unicuique suum*” (Couliano, *op cit*: 90).

On occasion Couliano seems to wax Jungian, as if the magician’s work ultimately refers back to a timeless repertoire of signs: “Sounds and images are not chosen at random; they stem from the occult language of the universal spirit” (91). Be that as it may, the *phenomenal form* of the chosen phantasm cannot be reduced to some standardized archetype. The magician’s work is creative in a similar way to that of poets and artists. And yet, like the advertising professional, the magician, especially what Couliano calls the “integral magician,” the magician working in the service of institutional interests, operates right on the ambiguous line between autonomous creativity and heteronomous constraint (otherwise

known as the client's wishes or, even more bluntly, the bottom line): "There are only particular professions that demand the *voluntary* application of imagination (the poet, the artist); as for the rest of them, the realm of imagination is settled by external causes" (92). The magician needs to be able to divine resonant potentials between orders of being far beyond any literally mimetic like-affects-like scheme of sympathetic magic.

Because the resonances are, as it were, immanent or virtual, because it is only the magician's act that actualizes them, we cannot fall back here on a simple culturalist explanation for why certain messages resonate and others don't. Consider the strategic agreement that marketing and anthropology reached, sometime in the 1970s, regarding the explanatory value of the culture concept. It's not that many anthropologists or even all that many market researchers put much faith in the concept nowadays. Like the magic of advertising, the magic of culture is these days largely something that other people are supposed to believe in. But its great ideological advantage, when it comes to the relation between marketing and anthropology, is that it permits a fusion, without apparent contradiction, between irreducible difference and the alleged universality of *homo consumens*.

Starting in the 1970s, a wave of North American anthropologists, largely trained in the structuralist-tending symbolic anthropology of the period, made their way into advertising and marketing. The question, then, is how and why this kind of culturalist anthropology resonated so comfortably with the marketing imagination. As Timothy Malefyt and Brian Moeran remark: "The compelling notion that 'culture' is the invisible glue that holds together the unexplainable behaviour of consumers, or that it taps into underlying motivations and needs, or that it can even, at times, stand for the value of the brand, is simply too alluring an ideal for marketers to pass up" (Malefyt and Moeran 2003: 9). In the mid-1980s, anthropologically trained market researchers absorbed the critique of representation that hit anthropology courtesy of James Clifford, George Marcus, Michael Fischer, and others. So, for instance, Rita Denny and Patricia Sunderland acknowledge, as an earlier generation of marketing anthropologists did not, that the work of mass publicity is itself a powerful force in the *making* of culture (Denny and Sutherland 2009).

Just as Marshall Sahlins has for many years forcefully polemicized against the would-be universal homo economicus of *la pensée bourgeoise* (Sahlins 1976, 1996), Denny and Sutherland make the crucial point that reminding marketing folk about culture is valuable in itself, given the long-standing tendency for marketing theory—in both its academic and folk variants—to list towards psychological individualism. The reminder is perhaps more urgent than ever today, when “these hucksters of the symbol” (Sahlins 1976: 219) are jumping on a vulgar neuroscience bandwagon in order to lend reductive and ethnocentric presumptions about human behaviour the spurious authority of biological “hardwiring.”

And yet the culturalist reflex in marketing has itself become a trap, in that it presents only two analytic alternatives: either the universalizing individualistic psychology of homo economicus or the integrally pluralized culturalist song that anthropologists have been trying to teach the world to sing for the last century or so. That this is a false choice already becomes evident as soon as one notices that marketing discourse itself often operates not with *either* homo economicus *or* the culturalist quilt but rather with a particular *kind* of culturalism that permits an underlying assumption of autonomous, rationally economizing subjects to survive fully intact.

So, for example, marketing discourse will assert, simultaneously and without contradiction, that subjectivity and desire are culturally mediated, *and* that today’s consumers have more choice and are better informed than ever before. Homo economicus simply puts on differently coloured clothes as he travels from one country or “culture area” to another.⁶ While this reconciliation of rational choice and cultural specificity may seem like a kind of sublation, this too is an optical illusion. On both sides of the equation, the individual is really just a secondary product of a structure that is presumed to be primary. The only difference is that the anthropologists call this structure “culture” and stress its historical contingency, while the marketers and the economists understand the underlying structure to be universal and invariant, simply a function of human nature.⁷

The culturalist *détente* between marketing and anthropology thus turns out to be based on a critical dead end: marketing keeps faith with the figure of rationally choosing consumers and anthropology chips in

to affirm that their choices will always be conditioned by culturally specific regimes of value. The consumer remains sovereign and everyone else gets paid.

But Couliano's take on magic as mass publicity is much more provocative. He's not saying that the magician is able to "bind" someone because the magician knows what his target wants, as if all that was necessary was some solid market research. Rather, Couliano is suggesting that the magician (and the advertising professional, and the psychoanalyst and...) understands which phantasms to mobilize in order to actualize those *latent* resonances and correspondences that exist *virtually* in a social or interpersonal field and that we only in retrospect come to experience as pre-existing preferences and desires. In this sense, the phantasm generates the desire, not the other way around. But it does so out of immanent potentials waiting to be actualized in one of a number of possible ways: "For all parties, the preliminaries of desire consist in setting up a phantasm within the subject" (Couliano, *op cit.*: 39).

Bruno insists that magic will only work if all concerned believe in it: "Faith is the strongest bond, the chain of chains [*vinculum vinculorum*]" (quoted in *ibid.*: 93). But how does this faith work when it comes to the magic of mass publicity? We might say that critics of mass publicity often hang onto the question of whether consumers believe in advertising or not so that they don't have to confront the more complex and ambivalent problem of our resonant entanglements with mass-mediated images. It's as if the question of belief helps to salvage the figure of the autonomously self-legislating subject, even as salvaging that autonomy is precisely what allows one to *choose* to be seduced by advertising.

At the level of belief, I might adopt a sceptical, adult stance the better to be a child at the level of resonance. I want to have it both ways, to sustain my sense of autonomous self-determination just enough so that I can choose to be seduced. The agony of perfect addressability is averted by making sure that I stand, as it were, to one side of myself—this too is a kind of *ekstasis*, only this time in the name of an ambivalent compromise between self-preservation and self-yielding. As Slavoj Žižek suggests: "such a self-probing attitude, far from effectively threatening the predominant ideological regime, is what ultimately makes it 'livable'" (Žižek 1999: 104).

In a 1962 essay significantly titled “Advertising, the Magic System,” the great literary critic Raymond Williams accuses consumers not of being too materialistic but rather of not being materialistic *enough* (Williams 1980). A sensible relation to an ad, Williams suggests, would be to accept that a beer, for example, is really just a refreshing drink that might make you a bit tipsy, not a virility enhancer. A car is a means of transport, not an emblem of sophistication. And so on. Williams is not wrong to call advertising a magic system. The anthropologist Roy Wagner echoes the point: “Success depends on the ability to objectify convincingly, to talk about the product in terms of other things in such a way that those other things seem to be qualities of the product. In this way advertising is like the ‘magic’ of tribal peoples” (Wagner 1981: 62–63). But like so many strenuously sober critics, Williams is apparently too impressed by its enchantment to credit its magic to anything other than naïve belief. For Wagner, too, belief is decisive for advertising to work: “Its effectiveness [...] depends upon the user’s belief in the spell and the significance of the transformation. [...] All the consumer has to do is believe in the magic and buy the product” (63, 66).

Of course, no one affirms the power of advertising more than the adbuster, just as the iconoclast is the one who really brings graven images to life. The iconoclast participates in—reactivates—the aura of the icon, just as the person who steadfastly rejects fashion is still rigorously conditioned by its tides, precisely through the rhythm of their refusal.⁸ Just so, the greatest threat to the auratic object is not sacrilege but rather indifference. Most of us, perhaps, come to arrangements with ourselves that hover somewhere between the drama of defacement and the ennui of detachment.

The Norwegian novelist Karl-Ove Knausgård suggests that, paradoxically, it is precisely our disenchanting insistence that an ad is “not real” that allows us both to be enchanted by it and, in another paradox, thereby boost our sense of ourselves as self-determining agents: “we know very well that it is trying to manipulate us into buying a particular product, but that doesn’t stop us from looking at it; [...] We know someone wills it, and we know that the connection between the product and the ad for it is incidental, so that whether we buy it or don’t buy it is our own decision. No one has deceived us. The peculiarity of advertising is that it

works and doesn't work at the same time" (Knausgård 2013 [2011]: 474, my translation). Of course, advertising itself also often collaborates in this suspension by adopting an ironic tone: "we're not really selling you anything, so you don't really have to take us too seriously." One might add that in the age of the new subliminal, when advertising messages are stealth-embedded in all kinds of communications, this whole question of believing or not believing has become quaint, even nostalgic. For doesn't it depend on being able to tell the difference between advertising and non-advertising? And who can confidently draw that line today?

At the same time, the question isn't just what isolated individuals believe or don't believe; it is also a matter of what each of us believes about the belief of those around us. An iconoclastic critic of, say, consumerist ideology—just like a standard anthropological analysis of religion—presumes the belief of others.⁹ As Jean Baudrillard once remarked: "Not believing in [advertising] still means believing sufficiently in other people's belief in it to adopt a skeptical stance" (Baudrillard 1996 [1968]: 194). Such well-meaning pedagogical paternalism is, of course, widespread and familiar. Against Williams one might declare, with Claude Lévi-Strauss: "The barbarian is, first and foremost, the man who believes in barbarism" (Lévi-Strauss 1952: 12). The theorists of the primitive settlement projected the naïveté and terror of total belief onto the savage because they could not confront it in their own thought—and yet their writings are full of it, from the anxious investment in the transcendent authority of science to dystopian scenarios of mass-mediated brainwashing. By contrast, there is plenty of ethnographic evidence that those "primitives" onto whom moderns projected their own superstitious natures were in fact quite comfortable with an ambiguous world. E. E. Evans-Pritchard said it best: "Faith and skepticism are alike traditional" (Quoted in Taussig 2006: 145; see also Gable 2002).

I might say, with Žižek, that my belief in the belief of others sustains ideological fantasy while at the same time allowing me to disavow any direct belief on my own part (Žižek 1993). If this sounds needlessly convoluted, consider the sociologist Michael Schudson's insight regarding the motivations of corporate advertisers (Schudson 1984). It's not that corporations necessarily believe in the efficacy of advertising, Schudson explains. Rather, they advertise because their competitors advertise. In

the same way, as a consumer of advertising, I don't need to believe in it as long as I believe that someone else believes in it. As such, and like magic, advertising works, as it were, by itself; it doesn't require anyone to believe in it directly. Indeed, the condition of its efficacy is my "self-determining" and "autonomous" scepticism towards its claims. My supposedly immunizing critical scepticism allows me to resonate in good conscience.

Perhaps this is a distinctively modern mind trick, obsessed as we are with questions of individual self-determination, agency, and all that. But what is self-determination without self-remembering? Perhaps this is how we should understand Couliano's claim, building on Bruno, about the necessity of belief: the magician's art of eros works only, Couliano reminds us, insofar as he is an "artist of memory" (Couliano, *op cit.* 92).

Couliano calls the magician a manipulator. Just as our present-day culture industries are sometimes imagined as grand conspiratorial operations, sorting each of us into some category the better to offer us up to capital, so Couliano writes: "Like a spy wanting to procure material for future erotic blackmail, the magician must collect all the indices that permit him to file his subject under some classification or other" (95–96). Couliano's magician has to know his target the way only a lover can, and yet at the same time remain above the fray—utterly unsusceptible to the erotic resonance. What an extraordinary *askesis*; what superhuman discipline! "Bruno's manipulator," says Couliano, "is the man who knows all about love, *in order to learn not to love*" (97, original emphasis). In other words, for the true magician, the practice of magic requires a paradoxical stance: a kind of erotic impartiality—a kind of utterly committed disinterest: Bruno recommends "that the manipulator be *continent* and, at the same time, *ardently desire* the subject" (101, original emphasis).

Who or what, really, is capable of this kind of enamoured detachment? Perhaps only the algorithms that today do their impersonal work the better to reveal our personhood to us. The merely human magician, Couliano warns via Bruno, must learn "to regulate and control his emotions and his phantasies lest, believing himself to be their master, he nevertheless becomes dominated by them" (92). In Bruno's own words: "Be careful not to change yourself from manipulator into the tool of phantasms" (quoted on 92). A whole tragic mythos opens up here: the figure of the magician undone by his own magic, unable to resist the seduction of the

forces he has awakened, perhaps even killed off by his victims, targets who believe that the magician is the real source of the vital turmoil that he engendered in them. There are plenty of historical versions of the myth: politicians caught up in and laid low by their own charisma, rock stars devoured by collective tabloid hungers in their early 20s, *Mad Men*-style advertising stars, driven to alcoholic self-destruction by the very performances upon which their clients have come to rely. For better or for worse, the story of Ioan Couliano's own rise and fall is sometimes narrated according to this script as well.

But if we are to take seriously Couliano's claim, following Bruno, that "no one can escape the magic circle: everyone is either manipulated or a manipulator" (95), then we would also have to grant that perhaps the truly provocative possibility is that, when it comes to the magic of mass publicity, no one is actually in control of this vast network of resonances. Brian Moeran's and Daniel Miller's pioneering ethnographic studies of advertising production in the 1990s showed that marketing is so messy and subject to so many contingencies that it becomes hard to sustain the image of the culture industry as a seamless ideological relay mechanism (Miller 1997; Moeran 1996; see also Kemper 2001; Mazzarella 2003; Malefyt and Moeran 2003). And yet, here, one is reminded of the bumper sticker: just because you're paranoid doesn't mean people aren't out to get you. Or as Adorno remarked in a letter to Horkheimer: "if one is faced with a choice between a paranoid fantasy about paranoid reality and the stupidity of healthy common sense, [then] paranoia is still more productive" (quoted in Wiggershaus 1994 [1986]: 457). Just because mass publicity may not be a seamlessly functioning top-down mechanism of command and control doesn't mean that it doesn't operate through the reproduction of particular ideological effects.

If no one is fully in control, then it's not just because it's pragmatically impossible to "know everything" such that one could *be* in perfect control. More profoundly, no one is in control because there is no stable set of subjects and objects over which one *could* be in control. The magic system, whether of Bruno's Renaissance magician or of our present-day publicists, is *emergent* and *performative*—that is to say, it produces the entities that it claims only to manipulate. The real magic trick—and one senses that Ioan Couliano knew this very well, perhaps all too well—is to convince others that you're the one pulling the strings.

Notes

1. McCreery 1995 first brought the reference to my attention.
2. Had Couliano known of Malinowski's intervention, he might have been at once pleased and disappointed: "How are these things looked upon from the point of view of anthropology, which is not directly called upon to give its verdict on the mental health of its subjects?" (Couliano *op cit*: 124).
3. Thus runs Malinowski's speculative linguistic history: "having started using language in a manner which is both magical and pragmatic, and passed gradually through stages in which the magical and pragmatic aspects intermingle and oscillate, the individual will find within his culture certain crystallized, traditionally standardized types of speech, with the language of technology and science at one end, and the language of sacrament, prayer, magical formula, advertisement, and political oratory at the other" (Malinowski 1935: 236).
4. It was in fact Sloterdijk's *Bubbles* that first led me to Couliano's work—despite my having worked, by that time, on the campus where Couliano was murdered for 14 years.
5. See Mazarella 2013: 209–218 for one version of such an argument, which theorizes the obscene as public punctum.
6. For a bracing discussion of such appropriations in the domain of marketable ethnic identification, see Comaroff and Comaroff 2009.
7. Again, Marshall Sahlins has, more eloquently than most, repeatedly deconstructed homo economicus by showing its socio-historical determinants. See, especially, Sahlins 1996.
8. See Taussig 1999 on the auratic powers of defacement and Simmel 1971 [1904] on the dialectics of fashion.
9. Jean Pouillon: "it is the unbeliever who believes that the believer believes" (1982 [1979]: 4).

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12

Occult Economies, Revisited

Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff

I

In an essay written 20 years ago—of which this version is an update¹—we sought to explain an unforeseen effect of the rise of neoliberalism and, with it, the spread of democracy to places it had not been before. These two processes, then widely thought to infuse each other, were attributed an almost magical potential to transform the human condition for the general good; magical in that the means-ends relations involved, and the causal circuits that linked them, were taken on faith rather than subjected to critical scrutiny. This millennial mood of expectation, of an eternal path to prosperity primed by the end of the Cold War, was driven by radical realignments in the received order of things—things at once political, economic, social, techno-scientific, ethical, even ontological—that shook existing inter/national institutions and eroded long-standing visions of society and world-making. New levels of global integration were experienced almost

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everywhere: an increasingly planetary division of labor notable for its mobility and flexibility, for instance, and an electronic commons that circulated capital, knowledge, images, consumer goods, and cultural practices with unprecedented speed, thus to compress space-and-time and to promote “free” trade. This was felt especially in places like South Africa, Latin America, and Central Europe, so-called transitional societies, where the collapse of authoritarian regimes had been accompanied by an uneven infusion of liberal freedoms, freedoms long deferred.

The sense of possibility that characterized that moment also brought with it new forms of uncertainty and precarity. In a world that saw the rapid ascendance of finance capital, a world in which unfettered market forces and entrepreneurialism were held to be the alchemic key to abundance, liberty, and opportunity for all, huge amounts of wealth accrued in some quarters, leaving an ever larger sediment of poverty in its wake; this as “jobless growth” became a measure of national well-being, as manufacture moved to ever cheaper, less regulated elsewhere, as the unbot-tled genie of “new” capitalism fed rising Gini-coefficients, separating affluent from disposable populations, the insured from uninsured, the propertied from propertyless. And leaving many caught more or less in/securely between. It was in this context, itself heavily inflected by race, gender, and generation, we argued, that there had been a turn, in many places, toward “occult economies”: to what appear to have been arcane modes of attempting to generate value, often by experimental means, thus to access the hidden mechanisms held to operate behind conventional forms of accumulation. Hence the upsurge, we suggested, of “fee-for-service” theologies and prosperity gospels, “get-rich-quick” scams, and pyramid schemes of various sorts that eroded the clear line between the mundane and the miraculous (West and Sanders 2003; Wojcik 1997; Stoll 2013). Hence, too, the rise of locally inflected satanic scares and witch hunts. And a palpable preoccupation with magical practices: with mimetic performance of all kinds, from conjuring with body parts to the practices of voodoo economics—among them the turn to derivative financial instruments to charm assets from abstractions. All of which spoke, at once, to efforts to make sense of the mysterious possibilities of the “new way of the world” (Dardot and Laval 2014) and, to one degree or another, to act upon them.

Our conceptualization of occult economies, elaborated below, has received its fair share of critical attention, although it has also been productively deployed across several disciplines. Leaving aside disagreements over details, a few serious objections have been raised. One is that the concept “indiscriminately aggregate[s] ... disparate phenomena” (Murray and Sanders 2005: 295). As Ranger (2007: 279) notes, this critique arises from the view that the various practices that we take to be interrelated—witch killings, medicine murders, ponzi schemes, whatever—ought each to be analyzed in its own (“local”) right; this because they have different motivations and determinations. The argument here, he adds (p. 276), is a foundational one between “splitters,” who insist on treating those practices as if each were discrete unto itself, and “lumpers,” who prefer to look for, and find explanations in, the connections among them, hypothesizing that they are cognate elements in an embracing economy—itsself conditioned by larger historical forces. In point of fact, in our original essay, *pace* those who accuse us of not taking indigenous beliefs seriously in and of themselves, we stressed that occult economies are *always* mediated by the substance of local signifying practices. However, our intention was not to write yet another micro-anthropology of witchcraft. It was to seek out higher order articulations, pragmatic and expressive, between patently different, but interrelated efforts to engage with changing material and social conditions: conditions that, to many, either appeared unpropitious or seemed to hold the key to great wealth—if only one could unlock the secret of their workings. The object of interrogating an occult *economy* is precisely not to look at its component elements in isolation. It is to account for the way they are subsumed in a *logic* of concrete practices and rationales. Whatever the specific ends those practices seek to accomplish, whatever the specific means they use to do so.

This is also why another critique—that our approach to the occult is functionalist, that it revives old anthropological arguments about social breakdown (Kapferer 2001, 2002; Rutherford 1999: 102)—is frankly spurious. We should, says Kapferer (2002: 18), have “rather” seen contemporary sorcery and witchcraft as “being generated in specific kinds of structural dynamics which ... generate forces that are embodied in the forms that magical beliefs and practices take.” This is exactly what we *did*

do in showing how occult practices concretized the structural contradictions of everyday life in *fin de siècle* South Africa. Far from treating “sorcery and witchcraft as pathological indicators of social breakdown,” this being the original sin of British functionalism, we showed these practices to be directed toward explaining and acting on an historically labile world, thus to produce new forms of knowledge and creative action—and pointed out the parallels to, among other things, casino capitalism in New York City. Unless *all* historical change is taken to be “social breakdown” and hence “pathological”—which may be Kapferer’s view, but is certainly not ours—our account of occult economies has nothing to do with functionalism. Unless, of course, any explanation, any analysis of cause or determination, is dubbed “functionalist,” a common, if often meaningless, term of abuse in anthropological discourse these days. As we put it in another essay (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012: 169), “witches and zombies are to be read as aetiological principles that translate structural contradictions, experiential anomalies, and aporias ... into the argot of human agency, of kinship, of morality and passion.” Their “symbolic excess and expressive exuberance ... gesture towards an imaginative play infinitely more elaborate than is allowed by purely pragmatic, functionalist explication.” It is a play, we took care to show, that involves subtle dis/continuities between past and present (see Moore and Sanders 2001: 14).

A further objection to the concept of occult economy is tied to the question of rationality: Bastin (2002: 169), for example, has it that we “cast sorcery and witchcraft as ... an irrational response to the world by the impotent.” Really? Even when we relate them to the workings of finance and venture capital? To be sure, we take care to extend the concept of occult economy to those among the wealthy and powerful everywhere who seek new, unconventional ways to become yet wealthier and more powerful. Mark also our stress on the fact that, at core, occult practices seek to produce knowledge by experimentation with means and ends. This is true of, and no more ir/rational than, most other techniques of knowledge production, which have their own enchantments—as do such “hard” scholarly disciplines as economics, itself sometimes viewed “as a religion” (Rapley 2017). This line of critique appears also to project onto our account other preoccupations. One, addressed elsewhere (Comaroff and Comaroff 2003), is that we have imposed a Eurocentric master-narrative of modernity on African

beliefs and practices (Englund and Leach 2000)—as if Africans are not actively concerned to construct their own cutting-edge modernities, are unconscious of the colonizing effects of Euro-modernity on their life-worlds, and do not engage in critical debate about the relationship between the two.

Which, in turn, responds to one last critical point: Ruth Marshall (2009: 25, 28) asks “[w]hat allows [us] to assume that these [occult] practices are principally modes of interpretation and understanding? Why might they not be, rather, principally forms of political practice, modes of *action* on the world?” Again, it is hard to take this seriously. As will be plainly evident below, we emphasize how occult practices *are* precisely that: modes of action on the world whose culturally grounded means and material ends have both political intention and consequences—unless one intends “political” in the most narrow, formalist, and literal of senses of the term. But why, *ab initio*, do we say that occult practices “are . . . modes of interpretation and understanding”? Because, unless one refuses interpretation entirely—which Marshall (p. 29) appears to do on *a priori* grounds—actions on the world, not least political ones, usually have some foundation in cognition; unless, that is, one treats those engaged in them as unthinking automatons, as zombies. Which *we* refuse to do. Our preference, by contrast, is to listen “principally” to indigenous voices. Says one South African scholar, Sibusiso Masondo (2011: 37), who has heard the same voices, those practices *are* just this: “a mode of producing new forms of consciousness, of expressing discontent with modernity and dealing with its [structural] deformities.”

But a number of more pressing matters here: Was the turn to occult economies in the late twentieth century merely a passing, ephemeral phenomenon? Or did it bespeak something more enduring sewn into the fabric of polity, economy, society, and personhood with the triumphal rise of neoliberalism? How transitional *was* the moment at which we first wrote this chapter? What has happened as the millennial mood has given way to a new normal, a time of “entrepreneurial governance” (Dardot and Laval 2014)? As global integration and deregulation have yielded yet greater accumulations of wealth in certain quarters, deepening inequality and some of the dystopic effects of contemporary capitalism in others? As nation-states, often unable or unwilling to ensure the viability of many of

their subjects, condemn them either to a life of immobile disposability or to a desperate, migratory search for more secure footholds elsewhere? As means of communication, knowledge production, and conflict extend in both range and accessibility, linking local intimacies to political and economic processes of ever larger scale? As “truth” itself becomes harder and harder to plumb? How, in sum, does our argument about enchantment and the violence of abstraction hold up two decades on? With these questions in mind, let us return to our reflections on millennial capitalism and occult economies in the late 1990s. We begin, as we did our earlier version, with a clutch of ethnographic fragments; different from our three original ones, they are drawn from a more recent South African archive.

II

The First: from a report in *Times Live*, South Africa, 26 February 2014 (Sapa 2014a):

There has been an increase in occult-related crimes reported in Gauteng [South Africa], police said on Wednesday. In the last three months, 78 ... were reported, Lt-Col Hendriek de Jager, head detective of harmful and religious practices in Gauteng, said in JohannesburgOccult-related crimes “are on the increase, especially in the black areas where young boys and girls are promised fame and riches”...

“It’s all over Gauteng. It pops up, goes down and then appears again,” he said.

Occult-related killings were not limited to Gauteng, but were reported across the country.

The second: from *The Daily Maverick*, 13 October 2013 (Munusamy 2013):

In the Gospel according to Jacob (Zuma, that is, not the son of Isaac and grandson of Abraham in the Old Testament) a whole lot of us are going to Hell for sins against the government ... “When you are carrying an ANC membership card, you are blessed. When you get up there, there are different cards used but when you have an ANC card, you will be let through to go to Heaven ...”

In the build up to the 2014 elections, there will be lots more sermons and laying of hands, not only with Zuma as the anointed one but many other political leaders desperate for spiritual guidance, endorsement and support from the faithful. [Julius] Malema² has already ventured beyond the borders for his spiritual enrichment when he led the EFF's "central command team" on a visit to the Synagogue SCOAN Church of All Nation International of the great Prophet of God T B Joshua in Nigeria.

It might be indulging in the "opiate of the masses" or "drinking from the well of living water", but making election promises is so much easier if it comes sanctioned by God.

Like the Lord, politicians work in mysterious ways.

The third: from *IOL News*, 24 January 2009 (Kgosana 2009):

[In January 2009, a doyen of the ruling African National Congress, industrial tycoon Tokyo Sexwale, accused the founders of a breakaway political party, the Congress of the People (COPE), of using witchcraft to attract support, JC/JLC]

Businessman and ANC leader Tokyo Sexwale fiercely attacked Congress of the People for parading 'old women' on TV, using them as witchcraft to attract support. Sexwale was speaking at an ANC rally in Zwide township, outside Port Elizabeth, hardly 10km away from a COPE rally in the same city.

Speaking mainly in isiXhosa, Sexwale said: "Our mothers are taken, house to house, they are also paraded on TV, these people are performing witchcraft with our mothersThey are liars. You can't have respect for people who use older people in that fashion," said Sexwale ... The defectors include the 92-year old mother of President Thabo Mbeki, Epainette and a veteran ANC MP Lillian Ma-Njobe.

The fourth: from *Inquisitr*, 1 February 2016 (Sewell 2016):³

Customers of a sangoma (or traditional healer) in South Africa are angry after the woman has failed to raise their loved ones from the dead as she promised. She reportedly claimed to be able to put the life back into "zombies" and return them to the heart of their families.

Nolonwabo Mangele, 50, appeared in the Stellenbosch Magistrate's Court after being arrested in the Eastern Cape of South Africa on January 18. She is now facing fraud charges for conning victims into believing she could raise the dead and bring back their loved ones.

Victims reportedly had paid R2800 (\$231) plus a consultation fee of R60 (\$4.95) to Mangele after she claimed she could “heal” dead people, or “zombies” as she called them, and bring them back to life within a year ...

According to Mangele’s alleged fraud victims, she told them to buy clothing, blankets, toiletries and even airtime for cell phones and to deposit money into their dead relatives’ bank accounts. [H]er clients didn’t question why the clothing sizes kept changing as Mangele requested more to keep the “zombies” warm ...

According to a story on *Eye Witness News*, sangomas in South Africa ... now advertise their services on Facebook.

As these snippets suggest, forces at once spirited and ostensibly arcane remain vibrant actants in South Africa. While they may seem lurid exotica from the cool distance of *Academia Americana*,⁴ in their own context they seldom appear so, capturing a near-ubiquitous preoccupation—at times curious, at times playful, at times desperate, defensive, therapeutic—with those forces. And with the ways in which they may be wielded to gain advantage, private or collective, licit or illicit. This, moreover, has plenty of parallels elsewhere; although, to be sure, what counts as magic, and equally as rationality, varies across time, place, and cultures of knowledge production. Euro-America produces its own share of the late modern fantastic, the occult, and magical thinking (Kerr and Crow 1983; de Blécourt and Davies 2004; J. Comaroff 1994; Schwartz 1976). Commentaries on the turn to faith as “mysterious opiate” abound: *vide*, for instance, Jeff Sharlett’s (2016) account of Donald Trump as “American Preacher, [b]uilding a congregation for his prosperity gospel” that offers “belief in return for relief.” So does a vibrant discourse, especially in the conservative Christian press, about resurgent Satanism in a USA “‘Submerged’ in the Occult”; also about witchcraft that, some claim, “is on the uprise” and has gone “mainstream” (Gryboski 2013).⁵ But not only in religious contexts. The turn to the paranormal, spirits, and magic, notes Annette Hill (2010: 1f.), is on the “uprise” across all contemporary Western societies. Even more, adds Eric Kurlander (2017: 299), the “renaissance in supernatural reasoning, shadowy conspiracy theories and extraterrestrial powers” has gone global in this age of uncertainty; significantly, Kurlander documents the centrality of the occult in

other structurally similar times and places, among them Nazi Germany, where, among other things, the Schutzstaffel (SS) actually set up a “witch division.” In sum, occult economies are not new. Those of the present day have any number of precedents, each one taking on the form and substance of the social, cultural, political, and economic context in which it emerged.

The recent explosion of electronic communications has greatly accelerated the dissemination of narratives of the supernatural, digging deep into the archive of gothic, transcultural, and futuristic exotica: of zombies, vampires, revenants, wiccans, genies, jinns, and tokoloshes, all of them pulsing with the realistic half-life of digital animation. In tune with this, the boundaries of the post-enlightenment human are increasingly being called into question. Hence the fascination with *transhumanism* of one or another kind: with werewolves, changelings, or invading aliens clothed in ordinary physical form. And with paranormal processes like mind-uploading and digital immortality.⁶ Africa has long been replete with accounts of the ways in which powerful people deploy devilish pacts and freakish familiars, the better to attract capricious wealth, political power, personal invincibility, ever more so in libertarian times (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). Where postcolonial, post-totalitarian societies have been baptized anew in the gospels of democracy and *laissez faire*, a yawning gap has opened up between promise and possibility, means and ends. It is a gap that has been widened by the dizzying, apparently uncharted flow of goods, money, and influence across local horizons.

These “new situations,” to evoke the ghost of Evans-Pritchard (1937: 513), have called forth “new magic.” And new organic theories to account for the hidden forces driving the moral and material economy of wealth creation, many of them decidedly unorthodox in repurposing old knowledge to fresh ends, thereby to divine the mysteries of the moment. In Africa, amidst the extremes of affluence and destitution that followed the impact of structural adjustment, stories abounded about visceral forms of extraction and exchange, about the sacrificial logic—the violence, fast and slow—said to underwrite unnatural accumulation: stories of traffic in organs (Scheper-Hughes 1996; White 1997; Durham 2004); of blood drawn by “electric vampires” for illicit medical ends (Weiss 1996: 203; Bastian 1993); of trade in AIDS-impregnated clothes (Vision Reporter

2015); of commerce in indentured workers, sex slaves, brides, and the bodies of albinos, thought to hold the secret of power, prosperity, and health (Masanja 2015; Schühle 2013).

Often referred to as rumors or panics, terms that speak to their unauthorized, provisional, even perverse quality, these persistent suspicions tend to resonate at the interface of the corporeal and the commodity, captured by images at once apocalyptic and banal. Hence headlines like “Child Abductions at Spur Restaurants” (Sapa 2014b),⁷ a South African restaurant chain, which tell of new frontiers of consumerism both eminently benign—blacks frequenting establishments once the sole preserve of whites—and deadly. Similarly, the spreading rumors, around 2001, of organ trafficking in Chechnya: Russian forces, it was said, were murdering Chechen youths in order to sell their body parts, marking out new horrors of war-as-commerce (Regamey 2012). As elsewhere in the world, this traffic is suspected of charting new forms of imperialism, in which the vitality and procreative capacity of impoverished “others” is siphoned off in an increasingly corporate, transnational system of extraction for the benefit of those at the centers of power and affluence. The point is brilliantly captured in Stephen Frears’ film, *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002), about a London hotel staffed by over-worked immigrants, alike licit and not, that hosts a clandestine operation in which desperate illegals swap kidneys for forged passports.

Given that many of these panics, especially nightmares of organ stealing, have deep histories, having long marked out the fault lines of colonial extraction, is there anything distinctive about the arcane, enchanted visions of economy and society characteristic of the present? Or about the occulting of the relations of means to ends that they invoke? Or about the preoccupation with the literal use of the bodies of some for the empowerment of others (cf. Meyer and Geschiere 1999)? Why *now* the acute anxieties about reproduction, physical, and social? What, if anything, has any of this to do with processes of globalization and the particular forms of capitalism associated with it? With postcoloniality? Or with the sociology of post-revolutionary polities?

We pose this problem as both a general matter of anthropological interest and, more specifically, one of concern in contemporary South Africa. Is it not surprising, for example, that the thoroughly modernist

African National Congress saw it necessary, among its earliest gestures in government, to appoint a commission of enquiry into witchcraft and ritual murder in one of the new provinces (Ralushai et al. 1996)? That it found itself presiding over a so-called epidemic of mystical evil? That this “epidemic,” far from abating with the end of apartheid, *increased* with the democratic dispensation, despite the rationalist predictions of theorists of modernization? That, according to a former head of the Occult-Related Crimes Unit of the South African Police Services—itsself a curious, oddly enchanted creature—the devil had been “[making] a revolutionary re-appearance” here (Gevisser 1995)?⁸ What are we to make of the strange longevity of this Unit, which survived legal challenge on the ground that its treatment of witchcraft and Satanism violated the constitutional recognition of all religions and cultures? Officially disbanded in 2006, it was soon revived again, according to an internal police memo leaked in 2012. Now called the SAPS Harmful Religious Practices Unit, it strives, like its predecessor, to combat crimes driven by “belief in the supernatural, ritual, and spiritual coercion”—all held to be on the rise, as our opening fragment makes plain. Its 40 officers remain active across the nation (Kemp 2015).

In short, the story we told continues to unfold. If anything, even more palpably, more urgently.

III

The popular preoccupations that, in late 1990s, sedimented in the spread of an occult economy—with the pursuit of prosperity by all possible means; with the rising incidence of witchcraft, real, or imagined (Ashforth 1998: 505); with killing those suspected of magical evil; with zombies, Satanism, the piracy of body parts, Faustian bargains, and much besides—waxed behind the more mundane surfaces of the “new” South Africa. This, to paraphrase Julian Barnes (2016: 125, 91), was the “whisper of history” beneath the more audible, more strident “noise of time.” Primed by the expanding horizons of the post-Cold War world (cf. Piot 2010), with a sudden awareness of new geographies, new media, new means of mobility and accumulation, these preoccupations, as we have repeatedly

said, drew on cultural elements with deep local pasts. But, in probing circumstances at once familiar and uncanny, they also invoked the narrative of liberal transition that beckoned them into the “brave neo world”: the narrative of democratization and development, of rights, resources, redress. And, above all, of the free market, the salvific spirit of millennial capitalism—which, in the global south, was experienced, ambiguously and ambivalently, as an uneasy fusion of the modern and the postmodern, utility and futility, promise and its perversion (Comaroff and Comaroff 2001).

As this suggests, the roots of the rising occult economy are not to be found simply in poverty or deprivation; local populations had suffered these things, and worse, for a very long time. They were grounded, rather, in a doubling. On one hand was the perception that, behind the ordinary, visible workings of the market lie mysterious mechanisms that hold the real key to its bounty: to the rapid, often immaterial, invisible flow of value across time and space, converging in the gray spaces where the local meets the transnational. This perception was authenticated by glimpses of vast wealth passing through many postcolonies into the hands of a few of their citizens. On the other hand was a dawning sense—not only among the poor, also among those caught in the middle—of having been left out of the full promise of prosperity. In South Africa, after all, the end of apartheid held out the prospect that *everyone* would be free to speculate, accumulate, and indulge repressed desires. But, for many, the millennial moment went by without payback, either economic or political. While those who enriched themselves *openly*—political “big men,” cultural producers, property tycoons, prosperity preachers, sports stars, even “great” criminals—became objects of fame and admiration, others whose sudden affluence had no discernible source were subject to suspicion and scandal. And were thought, by virtue of their presumed control of the dark arts, to be potentially dangerous to those around them. This, in turn, underlies an essential tension at the core of many occult economies; or, more precisely, the fact that they tend to manifest themselves on two inimical fronts at once. The first is the search for the key, the hidden means—often taken to lie in the power of profanation and the flouting of moral conventions—to tap into the arcane knowledge that yields this new kind of wealth-without-work. The

second is the effort to identify and eradicate those held to have enriched themselves by those very means.

Partly because of the nature of the struggle to end apartheid, partly because of the legacy of racial capitalism here, partly because of the economic and political history of South Africa since 1994, most of those who experience the present as privation and thwarted aspiration, and who engage most visibly in enchanted commerce, are young. It is they, progeny of the digital age, who held out the greatest expectations for “the revolution.” They see themselves, with good reason, as the repressed for whom the promise of postcolonial return has been most obviously blocked by the hardening materialities of life. As a result, the dominant line of cleavage across the land has become generation. Post-1994 South Africa, to put it bluntly, has been attempting to construct a modernist nation-state under postmodern conditions, a historical endeavor fraught with contradictions and impossibilities. Black underclass youths embody those contradictions and impossibilities most tangibly. And volubly. It is the males among them, more than anyone else, who have to face up to the contemporary situation: to the difficulties of social reproduction in an age that once held out fervent hopes of rebirth. But, as we have already intimated, it is not only them. Entry into the occult economy transects color, culture, age, and sex.

In order to illuminate this, and to explore how locally grounded occult practices retool culturally familiar technologies for new ends, how they give voice to discontent with prevailing the social, economic, and political order, how they produce new forms of consciousness, and how they express themselves as one variant of a global phenomenon rising in response to similar structural conditions, we focus on a particular ethnographic setting: the northerly provinces of South Africa, just before the end of apartheid. And after, into the continuing present.

IV

In March 1995, in response to a mounting sense of emergency in the countryside (above, p. 00), a *Commission of Inquiry into Witchcraft Violence and Ritual Murders in the Northern Province*⁹ was established by

the new provincial administration. Not unlike official commissions in colonial times (Ashforth 1990), this one was an uneasy hybrid of governance and ethnography: an effort at once to regain control over a runaway world and to grasp persistent lived realities, its terms of reference drew both from the tropes of scientific universalism and from the language of cultural difference. Chaired by Professor N.V. Ralushai, it comprised nine members, eight of them Africans. Their report is a rich, barely analyzed, amalgam of informant accounts, case records, first-hand observation, and recommendations. These recommendations voice two impulses: (1) civic rationalism, expressed in a call for liberation through education and for a rigorous response to witch-related violence, including possible reinstatement of the death penalty and (2) frank, even assertive cultural relativism. Consistent with the latter, the report declares that most Africans regard magical attacks as “normal events of everyday life,” a reality incompatible with the legacy of European law, which criminalizes witch-finding (p. 61). The report also notes (p. 63) that most black police believe in witchcraft, making them reluctant to intervene when suspects are attacked. The conclusion? That there is “no clear-cut” solution to the legal problem—other than to advocate various strategies to stem the brutality with which accused witches are hunted down. The actuality of witchcraft itself, however, was never called into doubt.

On the contrary. The urgent tone of the commission, the sense of crisis to which it spoke, was underscored by a rising demography of violence: between 1985 and 1995 there occurred over 300 cases of witch-related killings in the Northern Province (p. 31); in the first half of 1996 there were 676, a 45-fold increase. Similarly in the Northwest Province where, although the overall incidence was lower, it also increased over the decade. Two decades later, in 2014, as we saw in our first fragment above, it was also said to be rising in Gauteng Province. Little wonder that many people, here as elsewhere in Africa, feared that witchcraft was “running wild.” Many still do. The mood of alarm was well captured in the opening remarks of the report (p. i): “[A]s the Province continued to burn,” as “witchcraft violence and ritual murder” were becoming endemic, “something had to be done, and very fast.”

The countryside was burning alright. But there were lots of ironies in the fire. For one thing, this was a much heralded moment of exodus from

colonial bondage. And yet rural populations were convinced that their communities harbored trenchant human evil; that familiar landscapes were alive with phantasmic forces of unprecedented power and peril; that the state, past and present, had failed to shield them from malignity, leaving them to protect themselves. For another thing, it was youths, not persons in authority, who felt most moved to cleanse their towns and villages by executing “instant justice.” They had greeted Nelson Mandela’s release from prison, viewed by the world as a sign that reason had prevailed at last, with a furious spate of witch burnings—often to the august chanting of freedom songs (pp. 62, 244). All this was accompanied by a growing fear, in the northerly provinces, that some people, mainly old people, were turning others into zombies: into an army of ghost workers whose lifeblood fueled a vibrant, immoral economy pulsing beneath the sluggish rhythms of rural life. The margin between the human and the inhuman had become permeable, ruptured by the living dead and their depraved owners. Along with a grisly national market in human body parts, these zombies bore testimony to a mounting confusion of people with things.

None of this, we repeat, is entirely new. In much of Africa, the colonial encounter gave rise to the sorts of frictions that ignite witch hunts (e.g. Richards 1935; Auslander 1993). To be sure, witchcraft has proven to be every bit as protean as modernity itself, thriving on its contradictions and its silences, usurping its media, puncturing its pretensions. Yet longevity does not imply continuity. Whatever their putative powers, witches cannot escape history. Neither is their flexibility infinite or random. Shifts in their cultural conception often speak, if often indirectly, to the impact of large-scale structural transformations on local worlds. Indeed, their very durability stems from a genius for making the parochial language of intimate, interpersonal affect register the impress of abstract social forces. It is this articulation, in both senses of the term, that has underlain the intensification of witch-finding in South Africa, and throughout the continent, since the late twentieth century (Geschiera 1997; Meyer and Geschiera 1999). The parochialism of witches, it seems, is an increasingly global phenomenon.

Because witches distill complex, diffuse material and social processes into comprehensible human intentions and actions, they tend to figure in

narratives that tie translocal forces to local events, map them onto proximate landscapes, and translate them into vernacular vocabularies of cause-and-effect. In rural South Africa, the 1990s rise in witch-finding coincided with an efflorescence of other occult technologies that linked the arcane and the ordinary by thoroughly modern, even postmodern, means; means that evoked, parodied, and contorted the mechanisms of the market. Thus ritual murder was widely reported in the media to have become “big business” in northerly South Africa. In 1995, for example, stories spread about dismembered corpses found in the freezer of a casino in Mmabatho, capital of the Northwest Province, formerly the “independent” Tswana “homeland” of Bophuthatswana. The casino had been built for tourists during the apartheid years, when betting and interracial sex were illegal in South Africa—but not in the ethnic “homelands.” There, over the border, in the gray interstices of the transnational, white South Africans came to gamble and purchase sexual services. After 1994, as we have noted, black bodies were still for sale, but in different form; the gruesome trade now nested within the orbit of everyday commerce, circulating human organs to whomever could invest in them, thus to abet their undertakings by occult means.

Much the same thing was apparent, too, in all the talk about the “fact” that some local entrepreneurs were turning their fellows into working zombies, a practice that conjures with a foundational law of the market, namely, that rates of profit are inversely related to labor costs; as our fourth fragment makes plain, zombie-conjuring remains part of the social and media landscape in South Africa. But the most fabulous narratives, especially in the Northwest Province, concerned Satanism, held to be the most robust, most global of all occult enterprises. Less a matter of awesome ritual than mundane human greed, dabbling in the diabolical was said to be particularly captivating to the young. In 1996, when the Setswana TV network broadcast two programs on the subject, the “reformed” ex-Satanists featured were juveniles. Taking calls from the public they told, in prosaic terms, of the translocal power of the black arts, among them an ability to travel great distances at miraculous speed to garner fabulous riches at will.

We shall return to ritual murder, zombies, and Satanism in due course. Here we note merely what our local interlocutors insisted on telling us:

that the available array of enchanted, often visceral, modes of producing value was expanding rapidly. Visceral, yet also oddly banal. In the past, divination and resort to occult means involved a clandestine encounter with a human expert. Now anxieties about witchcraft, money magic, ritual murder, and unnatural death are ventilated in a public sphere comprising “electronic” churches, radio, TV, and social media; newspapers, magazines, and online websites regularly advertise “dial-in-diviners” and “short time call” consultations with traditional healers on WhatsApp (see e.g. Gumtree n.d.). The multimediated quality of this communication is neatly captured in innovative ritual technologies. One is divining by “mirror” or “television” (Ralushai et al. 1996: 6, 148, 177): it requires clients to visit a “screen-room,” where they imbibe a fermented drink and watch a white, wall-mounted cloth, on which appear figures of miscreants, both human and animal. Their transmission mimics the way in which satellite dishes, broadcast networks, and long-distance magic condense images, objects, and sounds from afar. Such technologies, moreover, keep evolving, like those facilitated by texting, whose enchanted potential has not been limited to Africa, as the haunting movie, *Personal Shopper* (2016, dir. Olivier Assayas), makes plain.

Once these theaters of mundane magicality render their verdicts, who are revealed as the witches? And who take responsibility for acting against them? According to Ralushai et al. (1996), the purported malevolents were, as they continue to be, the usual suspects of African witchcraft—men and women of unshared, conspicuous wealth (pp. 219, 253)—although those physically attacked were typically old, often socially isolated, and defenseless. As to taking action against them, “[i]n general the community is responsible ... but the youth who are called ‘*comrades*’ are in the forefront” (p. 15). Not only were these young men the primary perpetrators of witch-related violence but they seem often to have forced neighbors and ritual experts to do their bidding.

Let us take a closer look at the most extended case recorded by the Witchcraft Commission, the Ha-Madura witch hunt (pp. 193f).¹⁰ The defendants, who ranged from 14 to 35, were charged with having murdered an elderly woman by “necklacing” and attacking two other elderly persons. Witnesses recounted that, on the afternoon of 21 March 1990,

“the majority of the youths” of Madura, most of them male and unemployed, gathered under a tree near the primary school. Speakers urged them to exterminate the witches in their midst (p. 202), and they set off in search of suspects. The vacant homes of a couple of suspected miscreants were torched before the youths moved on to the yard of the deceased. When they found her, they doused her with petrol and set her alight. She tried to flee across a nearby field but the crowd caught up with her. “Why are you killing me, my grandchildren?” she wailed. Her assailants responded: “Die, die you witch. We can’t get work because of you!” (pp. 206, 212).

There could scarcely be a more bald statement of deadly antagonism between generations. Or the reasons for it. Or its political consequences. For these youth, mass action might have vanquished the *ancien regime*. But it did not bring them the wealth or empowerment that was supposed to follow. South Africa threw off the shackles of apartheid just as global processes were compromising the sovereignty of liberal nation-states and their control over economic growth, as the manufacturing sector was shrinking, as multinational capital found more exploitable sites of production, as the service sector and the immaterial economy grew, and as other features of the neoliberal turn took root—all of which made un- and under-employment increasingly chronic, disproportionately so in the countryside. The fact that the living standards of a growing urban African middle class were rising at the same time (Mabandla 2013) only underscored the predicament of those rendered disposable in the post-apartheid moment. Complex historical forces, these: forces that brought deep structural change in their wake—but, to underscore our point, distilled into the vernacular idiom of occult evil. And into a proximate, human cause, one that was actionable. Thus the cry from the youths as they killed the alleged witch: “We can’t get work because of you!”

It is no wonder, then, that the most spirited witch-finding tends to occur where conditions are especially straitened, where raw inequality is especially blatant, and where contradictions inherent in the new order of things are most acutely felt.¹¹ Limpopo, the former Northern Province (see note 9), is the second poorest in the country;¹² the remote reaches of the Northwest come close behind. The failure of plans for reconstruction,

development, redistribution, and accelerated growth has been most evident in these regions. Agriculture is still practiced, largely by women, but much of it is pitifully limited. Along with social grants, petty business—beer-brewing, food vending, construction, service- and piece-work—supplements household budgets. At the same time, the migrant wages that had long subsidized faltering agrarian endeavors, and had granted young men a modicum of autonomy, have diminished markedly. Concomitantly, cash assets vested in the elderly, like pensions and grants, have risen in relative value; as disposable income, they are the object of fierce jealousy and mystical activity (e.g. Ritchken 1994: 361, 357). Also, conditions in the countryside have facilitated the emergence of modest new elites there too, if on nothing like the scale of the rising urban middle class. And so, in places like Madura, material distinctions, albeit of widely variable magnitude, have become apparent among neighbors. Such differences are embodied in the kinds of commodities that index prosperity: houses, cars, televisions, even cell phones. The alleged witch of Madura owned some of these luxuries. She was, in fact, the occasional employer of several of her attackers and sometimes let them watch her TV (p. 212). The petrol that consumed her was seized from local men who now could afford cars by young men who saw little chance that they would ever do so.

Witch-hunting youth in the Northern Province acted as a cohort, much like an age-regiment (*mophato*) in Sotho-Tswana society of old. Ridding the countryside of *baloi*, witches, was all of a piece with the other forms of mass action that had fought a repressive social order; during the struggle, it should be noted, urban “comrades” denounced their parental generation as passive sellouts to colonial oppression. Indeed, the war against mystical evil fused political and ritual means of both recent and older vintage. In addition to singing songs of freedom as they carried out their exorcisms, “comrades” in Venda and Giyani also intoned a well-known circumcision chant (pp. 50, 179, 244).

Age, of course, is a relational principle. The young comrades forged their assertive identity against the foil of a gendered gerontocracy; significantly, those attacked were referred to as “old ladies,” even when they were men (p. 211). The antisocial greed of these predators was epitomized in the idea of unnatural production and reproduction, in images

of toxic, ungenerative sexuality, of adultery, rape, and abortion (Ritchken 1994: 325, 363). The Commission, for example, made repeated reference to the inability of witches to bear children, to their “red” vaginas, and to their lethal, “rotten” sperm (pp. 141, 150, 158, 168). Killing these “perverts” by fire, a vehicle of simultaneous destruction and rebirth, bespoke an effort to engender, literally, a more propitious, socially constructive mode of reproduction.

Threats to local viability, as we have noted, were also ascribed to the creation of a zombie work force. Thus, the following fragment from a case record (pp. 50, 158):

On a certain day ... [when] the accused arrived ... [people] shouted from the street that she is a witch with a shrunked [*sic*] vagina. They further said that she had killed people by means of lightning and that she has a drum full of zombies. They also said that her son “Zero” has no male seed and that he could not impregnate a woman.

It is hard to imagine a more pointed portrait of perversion: of witchcraft as a negation of life-giving, social exchange. In place of fertile procreation, and the forms of wealth that nurture community and enrich others, the witch makes ghost workers out of the able-bodied. She thrives by cannibalizing people, especially robbing the rising generation of a legitimate income and the wherewithal to marry and establish their own families, indeed, of becoming fully adult.

This sense of illegitimate production and reproduction pervades youthful discourses of witchcraft in much of South Africa. Many young black men, their adult masculinity ever more at risk, blame their incapacity to ensure a future for themselves on an all-consuming, aged elite. Their concern is underscored by the preoccupation with zombies (sing., *setlotlwane*, Northern Sotho; *sethotsela*, Tswana). Long a feature of Caribbean vodoun, their appearance here owes much to a diasporic flow of occult images (Appadurai 1990), although they resonate with an indigenous affliction known as *seffi*, a state of “living death” first described by nineteenth-century missionaries (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 143). Spliced into local mystical economies, these shadowy figures take on the color of their surroundings. As one of our opening fragments suggests,

they are persons who are thought to have been killed and revived by witchcraft. The living dead exist only to serve their creators—generally, in the South African context, unrelated neighbors. Bereft of tongues to give voice to their alienation, they are believed to work after dark, mainly in agriculture (Ralushai et al. 1996: 5; Ritchken 1994: 329). Ghost workers can also be magically transported to urban centers, in fact, to any place where they might toil for their owners. In this era of casualization, there are even “part-time zombies” (pp. 224–225): people who awake exhausted in the morning, having toiled unwittingly at night to feed the greed of their masters

Reduced from humanity to raw labor power, the zombie, like the murderous criminal, is a nightmare citizen of contemporary South Africa. His absent presence makes tangible the sort of violent abstraction that fuels otherwise inexplicable accumulation; to be sure, he dis/embodies that mode of abstraction. Existing solely for the benefit of its owner, the toil of the living dead is pure surplus value (Marx 1976: 325): it has “all the charms of something created out of nothing.” Zombie production is thus an apt image of the inflating occult economies of postcolonial Africa, of their ever more brutal forms of extraction. As spectral capital, it will be evident why these forms of extraction are typically associated, as is witchcraft in general, with older people of apparent affluence: why they are thought to have multiplied as wage work has become scarce among the young and unskilled. Not only does the rise of a phantom proletariat consume the life force of others. By yielding profit without cost, it destroys the labor market, conventional patterns of social reproduction, and the legitimate prospects of “the community” at large. This, in essence, was the point made by striking workers on an Eastern Transvaal coffee plantation in 1995: they demanded the dismissal of three supervisors accused of killing employees to gain control of their jobs and keeping zombies for their own enrichment (*Weekly Mail & Guardian* 1995: 8). Spectral times also yield spectral crimes: the power of zombies to materialize wealth in the guise of ordinary things that mark the good life—clothes, toiletries, cell phone airtime—also shapes the fraudulent imagination; *vide* the case of the fake *sangoma* we encountered above in our final fragment.

But zombie production is merely one means among several. Recall that there has also been an increase in recent years of the incidence of ritual murder, of killing for the purpose of harvesting body parts. As Ralushai et al. (1996: 255) explained:

[B]ody parts are used ... to secure certain advantages from the ancestors. A skull may ... be built into the foundation of a new building to ensure a good business, or a brew containing human parts ... buried where it will ensure a good harvest.

While they have long been part of the ritual repertoire of southern African societies, these practices appear to have been rare in the past. But a great deal of evidence confirms that, in this domain too, market forces have spurred production. In addition to stories of mutilated remains, the press purveys matter-of-fact details of such things as going rates for various body parts (Khoza and Mapoma 1994). Evidence from court cases in different regions of the country confirms that would-be entrepreneurs, most of them young, engage in the sale of organs.¹³ These youths appear to act on the assumption that the occult economy feeds the malevolent ambitions of their elders, said to be the most ready consumers of the purloined parts. Already in 1988 it was noted that, in the (future) Northern Province, any disappearance of persons, especially children, was “immediately linked to businessmen and politicians” by young activists (p. 271). Across the border at Mochudi, Botswana, public discontent over the handling of a girl’s ritual murder in 1994—allegedly by local entrepreneurs, abetted by her father—brought youth onto the streets of the capital, prompting the Office of the President to call in Scotland Yard to help solve the crime (Durham 2004).

We reiterate that, just as the traffic in human organs is not new, neither is it restricted to South Africa: that there is a well-established, global economy in body parts (e.g. Frow 1997; White 1997: 334; Scheper-Hughes 1996), which flow from poor to rich countries, south to north, east to west, young to old; that some governments are said to raise revenue by farming corneas and kidneys for export; that, from the Andes through Africa to East Asia, mysterious malevolents are believed to extract blood, fat, members, and living offspring from the unsuspecting (Scutti 2014). At issue in these panics about corporeal free enterprise is a fear of

the creeping commodification of life itself. Among Sotho and Tswana, people speak apprehensively of a relentless process that erodes the humanity (*botho*) of persons and renders them susceptible as never before to the long reach of the market.

Notice the emphasis on distance. The translocal dimension of the occult economy is crucial to the way in which its workings are understood in rural South Africa. Throughout the northerly provinces, people ponder the role of mobility and the means of abstraction—specifically, the capacity to siphon goods and people across space in no time at all—in producing new forms of wealth. Preternatural movement adds value. But how? How are its mechanics to be mastered? As South Africa has cast off its pariah status and has sought ever greater integration with transnational markets, the growing velocity of long-range transaction, of the almost instantaneous flow of signs and styles and commodities across the earth, is discernible all around. This, to wit, underlay the fascination in the Northwest with Satanism (see above), itself a feature of the millennial moment in many parts of the world (e.g. Wright 1995; La Fontaine 1998; Meyer 1999).

Remember, in this respect, the television programs mentioned earlier, the ones in which “reformed” devil worshippers spoke to callers. When asked to explain the relationship of the diabolical to *boloi* (witchcraft), one laconic youth said, in a fluent mix of Setswana and English: “Satanism is high-octane witchcraft. It is more international.”¹⁴ So it is that old ideas are extended and new tropes domesticated to meet altered conditions. The devil’s disciples were rumored to travel far and wide, fuelling their accumulation of riches with human blood. As the petrochemical image suggests, the basis of their potency was, again, the capacity to “ride the tiger of time-space compression” (Harvey 1990: 351): to move seamlessly between the parochial and the translocal—here and there, then and now—thus to weave the connections of cause-and-effect that hold the key to the mysteries of the history of the present.

V

It will be clear now why, in post-1994 South Africa—and elsewhere in a world of whose epochal shifts South Africa is symptomatic—there has been a palpable intensification of appeals to enchantment. The rise of

occult economies has tended to occur, at the turn of the twenty-first century at least, in contexts in which an optimistic faith in the free market has encountered the realities, indeed the “crises,” of neoliberal times: unpredictable shifts in sites of production and increasingly casualized, increasingly scarce, increasingly insecure labor, exacerbated, for many, by the contraction of real wages; the rising power of corporations and, with it, explosive levels of inequality; the dis/ordering of space, time, and the flow of value that has accompanied tightening global integration and the spread of a digital commons; the devolution of many of the functions of state to the private sector, rising authoritarian populism, de-democratization, and the dissolution of received political alignments—without any obvious coordinates, beyond identity and interest, along which new ones are taking shape. In South Africa, still struggling to cast off the legacies of apartheid, these things have been felt especially acutely, along with the dawning realization that the dream of liberation, its promise of new freedom, prosperity, plenitude, has given way to a new normal. It is a “normal” characterized by state capture and epidemic corruption, by mass concern with violent crime against persons and property, and by the highest levels of debt in the world. Almost daily protests—for the delivery of basic services among the poor, for free and decolonized education among students, for safety, protection, and ethical government among the public at large—express spreading political disaffection. And urban environments continue to juxtapose the comfortable neighborhoods of the propertied against the violent, insecure streets of their less privileged, racially marked compatriots.

Such are some of the corollaries of the new age of capital. At the same time, of course, all sorts of legitimate ventures, some of them strikingly inventive, prosper and propagate themselves. From the quiet backyards of rural homesteads through the teeming taxi ranks of large townships to sedate urban corporate quarters, African entrepreneurs “do business,” dissolving many, if not all, older cleavages of color. And a goodly number of whites continue to live in paradisiacal comfort. A politics of optimism is actively purveyed by the ANC, not altogether in vain; the broadcast media envisage an Afropolitan future in which black is not bleak. Cultural production, often exhilaratingly experimental, spirited, intense, thrives across the country. Still, the dystopic undersides of the

moment persist, although they evince ups and downs. At times they recede in the popular imagination, at other times—in the wake of the 2008 economic recession, for example, or with spikes in official crime rates and fresh revelations of corruption in the upper reaches of government—they grow increasingly baroque, medieval almost.

Perhaps all this will turn out to be transitory, a mere passing moment in the *longue durée*. For now, however, enchantment in its diverse manifestations, far from slipping away with the resolute march of modernity, seems virtually everywhere on the ascent, from back country Limpopo to an American presidency deeply mired in millennial thinking. In South Africa, as we saw in our opening fragments, it is palpable in police reports of spiraling occult crimes, especially killings, across the country; in “the Gospel according to (ex-)President Jacob Zuma,” according to which an ANC membership card is not merely a guarantee of direct access to heaven, but a ticket to electoral success and the privilege it conveys; in the claim by leading public figures that witchcraft has the magical capacity to attract electoral support; and in the fact that zombie conjurers advertise their services in the national media, even, allegedly, on Facebook. No wonder, then, that, in July 2017—amidst a rush of bewilderingly complex scandals surrounding state capture and political corruption—a public intellectual wrote, in the largest national newspaper, that, “against a backdrop of precipitous economic decline and a total collapse of governance,” the country at large has become “[an environment] fertile for purveyors of miracles” (Zibi 2017). The conditions that gave rise to the occult economy with which we were concerned almost 20 years ago, it seems, have not disappeared. If anything, that economy has become endemic, constantly reinventing itself in step with the contingencies of the historical present.

Notes

1. The original essay (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999) was first delivered as the Max Gluckman Memorial Lecture in Manchester, UK, in May 1998. We give the present, updated version—which also has new front and back ends—a different title to avoid bibliographic confusion.

2. Julius Sello Malema, charismatic leader of the Economic Freedom Fighters [EFF], a South African political party, which he co-founded in July 2013.
3. *Inquisitr* is an online website.
4. In the original version of this essay, we stressed that, while some non-African scholars are reluctant to speak of witchcraft and sorcery for fear of “exoticizing” Africa, the ontological reality of these phenomena are taken for granted and spoken about more or less openly across the continent (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Meyer and Geschiere 1999). Further, we take care not to treat these things as part of an atavistic “tradition.” They are elements in an historically labile repertoire of knowledge and practice. Since the point has been made repeatedly by many scholars over the past decades, there is no need to explicate it again here.
5. This article reviews *Dancing With the Devil* (Harshbarger 2012), said to be “in the top 100 Christian books in the UK and has been received in the US in a powerful way.”
6. For an enlightening account of the current vibrancy of transhumanism—and the longer history of esoteric futurism—in Russia, see Bernstein (2015).
7. One report (Chawane 2015), which called this an “urban legend,” went on to note that “[s]ome users of social media have ... [suggested] that waiters are actually being paid to distract patrons while their children are being abducted.”
8. The man in question, Colonel Kobus Jonker, head of the Unit, is known by the nickname “Donker,” Afrikaans for “dark.”
9. The Northern Province was renamed Limpopo in 2003. To avoid cumbersome citation, we refer to the report of the commission as Ralushai et al. (1996), and to content in it by page number alone.
10. See also *State v Mutshutshu Samuel Magoro and Others*, CC36/91, Supreme Court of Venda, heard 5–27 May 1992, delivered 3 June, 1992.
11. On the incidence of witch-related violence in the Northern Province, see *Weekly Mail & Guardian* (1996: 9).
12. Limpopo ranks just behind the Eastern Province in this regard; see (Vid 2016).
13. One such case was heard in the Bisho Supreme Court; see Wright (1996: 1). Another is *State v Edward Nkhumeleni and Others*, Venda Supreme Court, CC17/94, February 1995.

14. The series of programs was entitled Metsweditswedi (“Source of Sources”). This particular show was broadcast by Bophuthatswana TV on 31 July 1996.

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13

The Enchantment Effect: A Semiotics of Boundary and Profit

Greg Urban

The philosopher Montaigne recalled a 1562 visit between three leaders of the Tupinamba tribe from coastal Brazil and the then 12-year-old French King, Charles IX, along with members of his court. The Tupinamba were asked what “things of note” they had observed about French society. According to Montaigne:

They had perceived there were men amongst us full gorged with all sorts of commodities, and others which, hunger-starved and bare with need and povertie, begged at their gates: and found it strange these moyties [i.e., this half of society] so needy could endure such an injustice, and that they tooke not the others by the throate, or set fire on their houses. (Montaigne (1908: 270))

What struck these observers from a foreign land was the apparent French acceptance of gross inequities in material wealth, something that these Tupinamba would have found intolerable in their own society. For the sons of the New World, it was as if a magical spell had been cast over the

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population of France. The “hunger-starved” people failed to perceive their true lot in life. Consequently, they languished, unable to take appropriate action. As the Tupinamba saw it, the people of France lived an enchanted existence.

The idea of property rights has been central in the European social theory tradition, with Locke, for example, arguing: “no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions”; while Marx viewed private property as a phase in the evolution of human society that created simultaneously profit and the exploitation of labor, with its attendant poverty (Locke 1824 [1690]: 133). Indeed, Marx set for himself the task of disenchantment, unmasking the naturalness of property rights, so as to liberate a true Tupinamba-like spirit of equality trapped within.

In this chapter, I propose to look at the enchantment¹ effect, as I call it, through a semiotic lens. The effect is essential not just to the creation of a notion of private property, that is, a boundary between what is mine and what is not mine. As I attempt to show, it is also a factor in the case of temporal boundaries—that is, claims about the creation of new and better products, as well as those in which entrepreneurs recognize the early signs of a new temporal boundary in formation and capitalize on it before others are able to do so. Because enchantment makes these boundaries seem so real, the enchantment process is a condition—perhaps a key condition—for the generation of profits.

When I use the words “enchantment” and “magic,” I do not mean to suggest chicanery, since it may well be true that accepting the existence of profit-creating boundaries produces the greatest good for the greatest number.² Outright trickery can be a factor. The recent Volkswagen scandal, in which engineers installed in some vehicles software that activated emissions control only when a test was being performed, comes to mind (Gates et al. 2016). Under actual driving conditions, the controls would deactivate, with the cars producing up to 40 times government mandated limits for nitrogen oxide pollutants. Moreover, were the emission controls to actually function during normal operations, the claimed fuel efficiency of the vehicles would drop precipitously. Arguably, Volkswagen’s duplicity benefited their bottom line. False advertising was likely a factor in boosting corporate profits. But it is not this type of purposefully deceitful enchantment in which I am interested.

Rather than outright deception, I mean by enchantment the largely invisible semiotic processes that make culturally specific patterns seem natural, that make it possible for us to tell ourselves: “that’s just the way things are.” Enchantment gives credence to a state of affairs. In so doing, I propose, it makes profit, in the normal course of economic transactions, possible.

If we think of communicative signs as operating through a hierarchy of semiosis, from signs closest to sense perceptions at the bottom to discursive and other symbolic processes at the top, enchantment results from people coming to understand the world through the upper semiotic layers. Especially critical in these upper layers are “entextualizations,” that is, representations of semiotic interconnections in forms that appear to be detachable from the contexts in which they occur—seemingly replicable texts (Silverstein and Urban 1996). This is what gives the enchanting discourse its seemingly timeless effect. The present world is just the way things are.³ While any given text can become a focus of contestation, the discernible patterns woven into countless widely circulating texts are not questioned but rather presupposed as reality, as a natural order.⁴

The specific contribution of this chapter is to explore the processes by which the enchanting semiotic layers are not only maintained and renewed but also transformed. I present here a view of signs in motion, reproducing themselves through the agency of identifiable actors but also undergoing change, again through the efforts of identifiable actors. Actors who realize profits do so not only by (1) staking ownership claims and asserting mine/not-yours boundaries; but also (2) innovating, and thereby asserting a future/past boundary; and even (3) recognizing the emergence of a future/past boundary in a cultural trend (or wave) before others notice it. The three processes of enchantment are interconnected, each contributing to the making of profit. In this chapter, I separate them for analytical purposes by focusing attention on each process through a different empirical case.

Case 1: Enchanting Property

To the 1562 visitors from the New World, the French appeared to be entranced, under a spell of private property and possession that enabled taken-for-granted disparities in wealth. The spell assumed the form of a

widely accepted idea of property and ownership among the French that their Tupinamba visitors did not share. That idea forms one key semiotic layer making market-based exchange and, hence, profit possible. However, a semiotic approach reminds us that the circulation of the idea of property cannot be taken for granted. While the idea may be part of inertial culture, passed down from prior generations, it is also an achievement. It must be reproduced time and time again in magical acts small and large.

Earlier I alluded to the circulation of discourse in the form of property theory, and to the contributions to the spread of property discourse made by specific individuals, such as the philosopher John Locke. If we were to look back historically at the achievement of an entextualized idea of property as taken for granted, we might perhaps start with the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament: “Thou shall not steal.” That fragment of discourse has gained currency in the Judeo-Christian world, with its assertion of a clear-cut mine/not-yours boundary.

However, the entextualization of property, while depending on such widely circulating discourse, also takes place in individual acts through which property is declared. The declaration occurs thanks to the magic of words, but it also depends on other signs and symbols, of which I examine in this section—the gate as a demarcator of geographically bounded property. The creation of ownership through such signs contributes to the renewal and reproduction of property as enchantment in each instance. Putting up a gate is thus itself an enchanting act—an instance of sprinkling fairy dust onto the world causing people to “see” that world in a peculiar way, and to shape their own conduct accordingly.

The first story I have to tell is about the creation of property through a specific act of enchantment. The story’s original narrator was Lawrence Coben, a PhD in anthropology from the University of Pennsylvania with a specialization in Bolivian archaeology. Coben came to archaeology later in life, having had a different career for many years. After receiving a BA in Economics from Yale, he studied law at Harvard, earning a JD. For a year he worked as a lawyer representing business people engaged in deal-making. Deciding that deal-making was “more fun” than lawyering, he switched career paths, moving into the energy sector, where he co-founded Catalyst Energy Corporation. The company was among the first in the US to specialize in alternative energy. Today, Coben is the CEO of

Tremis Energy Corporation and also Chairman of the board of NRG Energy, Inc., a major energy-producing company whose stock forms part of the S&P 500 index.

After Catalyst Energy, Coben went on to own and run power companies in Bolivia. It is there that he fell in love with archaeology. In the middle of a successful business career, he went off to graduate school, completing his PhD in 2012 with a dissertation entitled *Theaters of Power: Inca Imperial Performance*. As part of his research, he investigated the archaeological remains at Incallajta in Central Bolivia. This is a monumental site some 80 miles to the east of Cochabamba, not far from the town of Pocona. In 2003, it was added to the candidate list for UNESCO World Heritage sites.

While working on the site, Coben noticed that tourist cars would occasionally drive up. Their occupants would get out, walk around, take pictures, and then leave. On the site, the local residents played soccer or engaged in other activities. This was not a wealthy area. Residents here earned typically at most a few hundred dollars per year. Coben wanted to preserve the archaeological site, but he also wanted to help the local population.

Coben observed that there was touristic interest in the site. In effect, the ancient Inca culture, at least insofar as it could be gleaned from the archaeological remains, was freely available to all visitors. In more technical language, one might say that interest was the driving force behind this movement of culture from the archaeological remains to the tourists. Coben was also aware that the tourists came from wealthier areas. So, he reasoned, wouldn't it make sense to charge the tourists to come in to see the site? This way the local population could earn some money, and, if all went well, they would see that the site was worth protecting. Coben thus hoped to do two things at once: help the local population economically and create a sustainable way in which the archaeological remains could be preserved.

How could he do it? Here is where enchantment comes into play. His thought was to put up a gate on the road leading to the site, to, in effect, fence off the area. Coben proposed the project to the local residents, suggesting that they charge roughly \$10 per visitor. The fee applied only to foreigners; Bolivians entered for free. Coben would pay for the gate, and

he would pay initially for someone to sit at the gate and collect the fees. The local residents were skeptical that anyone would give them money to see the remains, but they went along with Coben's plan. To the surprise of the local population, the tourists paid the entrance fee. The community began to make money. So how did this happen? How was it possible to extract profit for the local community from the archaeological remains. The answer is that those remains were turned into community property. And this happened through the seemingly enchanting power of a symbol—the fence or gate as boundary marker, sign of property, force capable of controlling human conduct.

Let's take a closer look at the semiotics of this act of enchantment. From the perspective of sign theory, the gate acts firstly as an icon. It resembles other boundary markers with which people are already familiar. It is a token of the type, one that participates in culturally understood ways of acting. Of course, the gate can serve as a physical barrier to prevent movement, but it is important in this instance, as Coben tells it, that people could have easily walked around. Its efficacy lies in the realm of signs. It draws upon the known in creating something new, an impediment to the free flow of culture in this specific case.

The gate or fence is also interpretable as an index. It is spatially and temporally contiguous with a line in space through which an imaginary boundary of property is created. It points to that line, orienting individuals who are capable of interpreting it. To appreciate this, one need only contemplate how the gate affects non-human animals. They simply go around it or they go under it or they go over it. Because the gate fits into a culturally intelligible scheme of signs, however, those familiar with the gate as sign know how to interpret it and they know what behavior is expected of them.

The enchantment effect is not just the set of behavioral routines that get activated by interpreting the gate as an iconic and indexical sign. It is the connection between the gate as iconic-indexical sign, on one level, and the circulating discourse about property on another level: "thou shalt not steal," in biblical words, or "no one ought to harm another in his Life, Health, Liberty, or Possessions," in the words of Locke.

The link to this discursive layer of semiosis occurs via a conversion of the iconic and indexical interpretations of the gate into a potentially

articulable text. The entextualization connects the here and now of the tourist's encounter with the gate to a seemingly more eternal realm of property and ownership: "beyond this gate lies the property of someone other than me." It is the meaningful contextualization of the discursively circulating ideas about property that makes the remainder of the ritual—the paying of an entry fee to pass through the gate—seem reasonable and justifiable.

To put this enchantment process into perspective, however, I note that the gate as an iconic-indexical sign not only evokes a set of robotic behavioral routines, such as paying an entry fee; the gate may also bring to mind the sanctions associated with property, such as punishment for having taken what is not one's own. That official-looking guards reminiscent of police often staff gates reminds us that power in the form of threat of force is still a component of the property equation. In the case of Coben's Incallajta gate, if tourists did not want to pay, minimally they would have to confront the gatekeeper.

Still, the enchantment of property is a fact of everyday life in the US and many other places around the world. A palpable threat of force is unnecessary. Although a fraction of the population may be restrained in their trespass only or primarily by threat, others take property rights for granted, especially if they see themselves as benefitting from a collectively shared orientation to property rights. In the US, where the ideal of owning one's own home has been touted, a homeowner may be more inclined to respect the property rights of other homeowners because adherence to the ideals of property helps to secure his or her own rights. Whether for that reason or simply because the ideal of property is part of inertial culture, received from the past, the construal of property through its entextualization becomes a lens that brings the world of iconic and indexical signs into focus.

Coben's Incallajta story is not just about the demarcation of property. It is also about profit. And it is about Coben as entrepreneur on behalf of the local community, recognizing the prospects for profit through the process of demarcation. His is a story of actively creating an orientation to the world by turning property into profit. How did he do this? To return to his story, the first step was to recognize the interest that others—the tourists—had in the community's archaeological remains. Until

the gate was set up, tourists had unrestricted access. They had no need to pay to see these ruins. By asserting that the archaeological remains belonged to the community, Coben was able to convert that interest into the tourists' willingness to pay. What had been freely flowing culture was, so to speak, captured by the assertion of a property boundary. To perform that capture, Coben relied on the tourists' prior enchantment with the idea of property and their ability to cognize the gate as signaling ownership. A property assertion by itself produces no profit unless others are interested in that property, unless they have a desire for it. Profit is a product of property plus interest/desire.

The Incallajta story dates back to the middle of the last decade. As Coben explained to me, the situation has since changed. A politician raised enough money to build a visitor center at the site. According to Coben, the center now sits empty. The community failed to preserve the capture. The original symbol was dismantled. Still, the general idea that motivated this act of enchantment has been repeated elsewhere. Indeed, it is the main focus of the organization Coben founded: Sustainable Preservation Initiative. According to their website, the goal of the organization is to empower entrepreneurs, alleviate poverty by creating jobs, and preserve archaeological remains of the past.

Important about this story in the present context is not just that the Incallajta gate depended for its success upon an pre-existing enchantment on the part of the tourists with property, including their familiarity with entrance gates at parks, movie theaters, museums, and the like. It is that the community's act signaling ownership reproduced the enchantment layer of semiosis in a new context. It renewed the enchantment and expanded its scope, contributed to its movement through both space and time. The enchantment layer may be in large measure inertially transmitted in much of the US as well as in other places. However, without renewal, it runs the risk of entropic dissipation. Further, without specific acts of reproduction, as in the Incallajta case, it cannot expand or move into new areas. In fact, every time we engage in an explicitly economic transaction, whether we purchase a cup of coffee at Starbucks or sign a mortgage contract, we participate in a ritual through which property is re-enchanted.

Case 2: Enchanting Innovation

The mine/not-yours enchantment can assume different guises. We can well imagine that ancient forms of property enchantment underlie the original rise of complex social formations, in which certain individuals or groups accumulated more material wealth than others; the high-level interpretive semiotic layers make sense of such disparity in ways that have appeal, and that therefore achieve wide circulation. For example, the spell of property might derive from a claim that an individual or group was descended from the gods, as in the case of Anglo-Saxon royal genealogies, where royal descent was traced to the god Woden.⁵ More generally, the right to property based upon descent has played and continues to play an important role. The claim can even be an argument that organizing the world in terms of property is the best way of satisfying the needs of the greatest number.

At the same time, property, however the enchantment takes place, is insufficient to account for the phenomenon of profit. There must be as well an interest, on the part of those lacking the specific item of property, in acquiring that item, a desire to possess it. Moreover, it must be possible for individuals with interest in acquiring the property to actually do so. If property is based on the enchantment of the mine/not-yours boundary, such that the boundary is taken for granted as simply in the world, or a “natural right,” as Locke might have it, a second boundary presents itself as a necessary condition for profit, namely the boundary of not-yours/potentially-yours. This boundary inserts temporality and hypothetical futures into the equation: “this property can be yours if you are willing to give me something I want in return.”

The enchantment consists in convincing people that something they do not already possess is desirable, that they should want to possess it, that a boundary exists between what they have and what they could have, and that there is a way to traverse that boundary. I should make clear again that the enchantment is not a matter of deception or falseness. It is a matter of coming to see the world in a particular way, to view it through a lens. In accepting a view of the world in terms of property, one is not necessarily accepting an erroneous understanding. Rather, one

is accepting a specific understanding for which alternatives are imaginable. Arguably, enchanting the world in terms of property may be a better way than others when evaluated in terms of the greatest good for the greatest number. Similarly, enchanting innovation may produce something better, measured in terms of some standard, than the status quo the innovation supplants. Enchantment in this case consists in making the innovation appear good and desirable.

Steve Jobs, the immortalized founder and former CEO of Apple Computer, Inc., now Apple, Inc., is reported to have said, when asked whether the company should do research to find out what their customers wanted, “no, because customers don’t know what they want until we’ve shown them” (Isaacson 2011: 143). Jobs, of course, was famous for creating fanfare around each new Apple release. Perhaps more than any company, Apple succeeded in enchanting technology, making it appear desirable. We can argue about the relative significance of Apple’s innovations but in labeling the promotional work as enchantment I am not suggesting that Apple’s claims were false. In fact, as an Apple user since 1984, I have largely bought into Apple’s enchantment of technology, and I do see many of its innovations as advances. It is precisely the enchantment of this boundary of innovation or advancement that I want to explore here.

Here I propose to explore the boundary through the case of Boston Scientific Corporation and its co-founder and former Director, John Abele. When Abele tells his story, he begins with college—Amherst College in Massachusetts, where he studied physics and philosophy. He is a man with wide-ranging intellectual interests and the desire (like Larry Coben) to make the world a better place. His interest in betterment these days far transcends any specific business goals. He is concerned about the world at large and the problems it faces.

After graduating from Amherst, Abele found a job selling a specialized type of lighting, and he discovered, in the course of that work, that he liked interacting with people. He answered an ad for someone producing a medical device out of the basement of a Catholic church in Watertown, Massachusetts. Abele’s role was to develop the device—a steerable catheter. A catheter, of course, is: a small long tube that can be inserted into the body for various purposes. For example, it can be slipped into arteries

and veins and used to inject medicines or to remove blockages. The innovation that came out of the basement of the Catholic church was a catheter of this sort but one that could be guided or steered to its destination within the body.

The company was called Medi-Tech, and Abele's role was to help develop the devices and sell them to doctors. In the course of his work, he met and talked to numerous people, especially doctors. He recalls that they "gave an enormous amount of their time to teach me. But I reciprocated and provided them with information they might never had otherwise."⁶ In this regard, Abele's attitude was the opposite of Steve Jobs's. Abele wanted to find out how doctors used existing catheters, as well as what they would like to be able to do with catheters. He was doing a form of what we now call design ethnography, although he did not call it that. In the years I have known him, I have found him to have an anthropologist's sensitivity to culture, and he made good use of that sensibility in developing the steerable catheter.

While Abele learnt from doctors and others, however, he also enchanted the Medi-Tech innovations for them. He gave them an idea of what they might be able to do with the new devices. The crucial step was to listen to the doctors and to convert their desires into better devices, and then to convince yet others of the benefits of adopting the new technology. The enchantment consisted in getting medical professionals to imagine alternative futures and to bring those alternative futures into reach. Thanks to Abele, the professionals came to see the world in terms of a not-yours/potentially-yours boundary that was traversable, and, moreover, one that is was desirable to traverse.

As Abele describes it, this was an "elaborator business." Abele, working in conjunction with the doctors, was the elaborator. The force of interest in, or desire for, the constantly improving devices led to increasing sales. The profit derived from the imagined world Abele fashioned for the doctors and transmitted to them, a world built around the satisfaction of their desires for new uses of the catheter.

Here it is worth pondering whether anyone could contemplate the possibility of not adopting these advances. Didn't the advances speak for themselves? Or, perhaps, when might the advances not speak for themselves? There is, of course, the problem of getting doctors to notice the

advances in the first place. That was Abele's original job. If even one doctor found out about the new technology and appreciated it, the doctors themselves could produce the enchantment, getting other doctors interested in acquiring the new equipment. This is still a form of enchantment, as one doctor becomes enthralled by another's account, although it leaves out the "elaborator" component.

Abele's experience, however, also reveals another possibility: the potential consumers, doctors in this case, might be content with the status quo. Rather than seeing an innovation as an improvement, they might regard it as a threat to the way they are currently doing things. In more technical language, habitual inertia might counteract the interest in the new technology.

In fact, this is what happened when Abele's company developed a new use for the steerable catheter. In addition to delivering medicine or draining fluids, where it serves as a conduit, the steerable catheter could also be used to perform surgical procedures. According to Abele, this potential purpose met stiff resistance from surgeons. Their world was enchanted by a view of themselves as cutting open the body in order to enter it to perform repairs. They did not insert tubes in them. Many of the surgeons told Abele that they would block the introduction of surgical uses for the steerable catheter. This meant that he would have to find those brave souls who were adventurous enough or iconoclastic enough to try out the new device. Looking back on that past world today, of course, we know that the innovation eventually did catch on as the adopting surgeons helped to convince others, especially doctors in training. Today such minimally invasive surgical procedures are commonplace and widely accepted throughout the profession.

An initial observation: the surgeons, when first contacted by Abele about the possibilities of using the steerable catheter for surgery, lived in an already enchanted world. They possessed a view of the world transmittable through discourses about themselves and who they were. They were under the spell of a prior enchantment. Their prior enchantment was incompatible with Abele's proposal. Abele suggested that surgeries could be done without major incisions to open up the body. It could be minimally invasive. This alternative view did not sit well with the surgeons' existing self-understand.

A second observation: Abele's role in enchanting the world was distinct from that of Coben. In proposing to build a gate, Coben imagined a world that looked like one already familiar to international tourists, his prospective customers.⁷ He renewed their enchantment with the idea of property. He confirmed the way they were already looking at the world. In proposing minimally invasive catheter surgery, in contrast, Abele challenged the world of his potential customers.⁸ He told them they were not who they thought they were. This was more than a matter of technological innovation. It was a matter of worldview innovation. Abele proposed a new enchantment; he directed the attention of the surgeons to a possible new reality.

Here I note that disruption is a matter of quantitative difference—the extent to which the possible new world, as formulated in words and images by Abele, differed from the existing self-understanding of the surgeons. Had Abele been proposing a less radical rupture, say a new type of scalpel or advanced cutting instrument, something more in line with what the surgeons were already used to, he likely would have met with less resistance. Change of an incremental sort—a new type of scalpel, for example—seems compatible with an evolving worldview. A talented salesman could enchant such a micro-innovation more readily. The innovation Abele proposed, however, was disruptive. Hence, it met with resistance.

A third observation: the resistance could be construed as a matter of bodily habits (Mauss 2006 [1935]; Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). Inertia was at work in how surgeons did things, what repetitive activities they engaged in. Those activities involve certain neural-muscular habits. There is an analogy here to the inertia of habits associated with producing spoken sounds within a particular language. Our efforts to acquire new linguistic sounds while learning a new language meet with resistance, the neural-muscular habits associated with the old language. From the point of view of enchantment, however, what is most intriguing is that the resistance was to Abele's words and images of a possible future. It was not directly kindled by the pattern of bodily habits. In other words, the existing enchantment, the way surgeons were accustomed to thinking and talking about themselves and what they did, itself participated in inertia. It was the resistance of an existing enchantment that Abele confronted and had

to overcome. The resistance took place in the higher realms of semiosis, in particular, in the realm of discourse encoding of identity, of a way of making sense out of one's self and its activities and purposes.

The steerable catheter used for minimally invasive surgery is what Abele himself refers to as a disruptive technology. What this case shows us, however, is that the disruption takes place first in the higher semiotic planes, that is, in the realm of enchantment. Disruption occurs when a new enchantment of the world appears to be incompatible with an old one. The disruption brings into focus a boundary that exists between a present worldview and a possible future one. Insofar as the future proposed by the new enchantment is an appealing one, profit is possible. A company can extract profit from customers if the future they conjure up is sufficiently desirable that the consumers are willing to pay handsomely for it.

Why does a disruption like this one succeed despite the initial resistance to it by the surgeons? Here we enter a realm that, since the nineteenth century, most anthropologists have found it unfashionable to contemplate. Does culture evolve or grow or accumulate in some progressive fashion? Bourdieu indirectly raised the question by suggesting the need to bring high culture, what is sometimes called "Culture with a capital C," back into the anthropological idea of culture, that is, with a small "c" (cf. Bourdieu 1984 [1979]: 1). He was referring to the notion of high and low culture especially in the realm of fashions, however, which made the idea of high culture seem less cumulative than it had appeared to Kant, in his anthropology, who had in mind the progress of science (Kant 2006 [1798]). Kant's view became that as well of the nineteenth-century theorists of cultural evaluation.

Looked at from the point of view of enchantment, boundaries, and profit, the question of accumulation is at the heart of economic capital as well. Is the steerable catheter used for minimally invasive surgery an "advance" over older forms of surgery? It must have come to appear so, however, grudgingly, even to those enchanted by an older worldview. We might venture that the worldview surgeons held at the time Abele pitched the new idea must have permitted recognition, however dim, of a possible step forward. Despite their resistance, some surgeons could see the device as a potential advance, an innovation, even if a radical one.

Although an advance, the idea could, simultaneously, preserve enough of the older worldview to be recognizable as contributing to the accomplishment of goals held to be fundamental by those in the profession. The worldview in some sense contained within it a dynamic trajectory, rendering the advance possible. The not-yours/potentially-yours boundary appeared traversable, and traversing it seemed desirable.

As the idea of cultural accumulation solidified in nineteenth-century anthropology, cultural evolution rigidified as a stage model. Accumulation occurred in a kind of lockstep fashion such that a “society,” as it was imagined then, transitioned from one evolutionary stage to the next (e.g., Service 1970). Twentieth-century multilinear evolution models presented an alternative to the stage model, albeit one still concerned with the trajectories of societies over time (e.g., Steward 1955). The case of the steerable catheter suggests a further refinement, namely, that cultural advances appear as such within worldviews. Those worldviews themselves map trajectories into the future, such that a new enchantment, even if disruptive, is rendered compatible with the existing enchantment.

Case 3: The Wave of Enchantment

Since worldviews consist of discourse and other high-level semiotic representations, innovations in enchantment spread, like the rest of such semiotically high-level culture, through processes of social transmission and social learning. In this regard, nineteenth-century diffusionism provided a complement to evolutionism. The central idea of diffusion was that innovation was difficult and occurred at certain specifiable sites—centers of diffusion.⁹ The innovation spread out from those centers in waves.

To translate that idea to the concept of worldview as discourse, we might say that enchantment comes in waves. What appears as an innovation within an existing enchantment spreads out to new areas. But that wave is not necessarily geographical, as in the nineteenth-century view. Within the framework of modern capitalism, it can spread out within professions, such as surgery, and manifest itself in complex socio-geographical patterns. The key characteristic of the enchantment wave is

not geography per se, like the wave formed by a stone dropped into still water. Rather, it is a wave characterized by an increase in acceptance by people. It is, in other words, a popularity wave, like the rise in popularity of songs on the pop charts.

To bring together the idea of the enchantment wave with the notion of enchanting innovation as the basis of profit, my sample case is the restaurant business. In the restaurant business, innovation looks to an outsider more like Bourdieu's fashion and cultural capital model than the advances in surgical procedures (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]). Because we are dealing with enchantments in both cases, however, the principle is the same: profit can be had by providing people with something they want and are willing to pay for in return. However, in the restaurant case, we are dealing with profit accruing not to those who introduce the innovation in the first place but rather to those who recognize before others that a wave of innovation is taking shape and spreading.

The entrepreneur, in this instance, is someone who has "opened up about nine different restaurant concepts for different people."¹⁰ He has been successful in making profits in this highly competitive business because of his seemingly magical ability to foresee a rising wave of enchantment and get on board early. Although the time scales are different, the waves of enchantment in the restaurant business resemble the rise and fall of songs on the pop charts.

The entrepreneur relates: "I'm always trying to figure out what the next new concept will be." He endeavors to detect trends that are already out there in the world, but that the vast majority of people haven't noticed. This isn't, it would seem, so much invention as copying, itself a key form of cultural motion. But it is copying at the right time, being an early adopter of a trend. As he puts it: "if you're gonna do something you have to do it as the wave is going up. If you don't catch it then, you're dividing the market so many ways that you can't stand out any more."

In some of his accounts, he seems to be more of an innovator than an early adopter, but it could be that he noticed the trend elsewhere and brought it to the Philadelphia area. He mentions, for example, KatManDu restaurant, "an outdoor seasonal, open for three months of the year. It was a tropical theme, tropical style food, basically for the summer months ... Bring in half a million dollars worth of palm trees and decorate it so

that you can't tell if you were in Jamaica. It was based on a place I had been to in Jamaica, so that's what I was basing it on." An online source described it as follows: "Complete with palm trees and white sand beaches, Katmandu looks like the film set for Gilligan's Island" (ClubPlanet n.d.).¹¹

It is the entrepreneur's awareness of the interest "wave," as he calls it, and when to get on and when to get off that is important. In his words, "I've always tried to just be looking around, see what's going on. I happened to be out in Las Vegas, and if you want to see what's really going on in the hospitality industry, you go to places that are the leading areas where people who have major money are going to take a gamble and try to do something new and exciting." There he observed the rise of interest in Chipotle-like restaurants. Regarding this venture, he concluded: "I was trying to think how I could take what I saw there and start doing something here. But by the time I worked out my recipes and learned how to make the food, I really missed the wave."

The entrepreneurial magic, in this case, lies in seeing what others do not, that a wave of interest is taking shape and beginning to spread—a wave of enchantment, that is, a desirable future, just on the other side of a traversable property boundary. The clues are there in the world but not just anyone can assemble a picture out of them, make a diagnosis, calculate the risks, and undertake a successful venture. This entrepreneur was and is particularly good at it. KatManDu, for example, among his many ventures, was highly successful and rode the wave of interest from 1991 until 2002, when it closed—at least the one in Philadelphia closed; another in Trenton, New Jersey continued on for another decade.

A final point in connection with this story: insofar as profit is concerned, the enchantment wave is a discourse wave, consisting of talk and writing about the cultural property that is for sale, as well as other representations of it. It is an explicit metacultural wave. Advertising plays an important role in this wave, though it is complex semiotically, often employing lower-level icons and indices that may create a desire to acquire without a great deal of explicit discourse. However, the enchantment wave necessarily includes an explicit representation of not-yours/potentially-yours, since it involves a purchasing decision.

Not all cultures spread through such an enchantment wave. Bourdieu's acquired cultural capital, for example, was conceived as non-commodified albeit potentially interconvertible with economic capital. In fact, a vast amount of culture spreads not through the intermediary of high-level semiotic enchantment but rather through the direct copying of cultural forms. One need think only of so-called Valley Girl talk or the recent spread of "vocal fry"—an exemplar of creaky voice, which forms one component of ritual lamentation styles around the world but in the US is used primarily by young adults to communicate world-weariness as a marker of in-group social status. Because no property boundary has been drawn around such vocal styles, they are there for the taking, so to speak. They can be freely copied. The same is true of given names, which exhibit patterns of rise and fall over time similar to trends in the restaurant business but which can spread by simple copying without high-level semiotic enchantment. Profit, however, depends upon the enchantment of the temporal boundary, of the possible future surrounding acquisition.

Conclusion

What is the enchantment effect? It is the effect whereby words, especially their referential content, make sense out of the icons and indices through which the world is more directly apprehended, such as Coben's gate in our earlier example or Abele's steerable catheter or our restaurant entrepreneur's "palm trees and white sandy beaches." The words make the interpretation of the world they offer seem, to use Geertz's (2017 [1973]: 128) phrase, "uniquely realistic." As a first tentative conclusion, I propose that the widespread, albeit not always uniform, sharing of words pertaining to property rights and ownership, is a necessary condition for the possibility of profit. The tourists visiting the archaeological site readily handed over their ten dollars in exchange for the right to enter, just as the diners at Katmandu did, and just as surgeons ultimately did, despite their initially fierce resistance.

However, this specific view of property—namely that large disparities in property ownership are possible—is not a given in the world. Alternative formulations, such as those of the sixteenth-century Tupinamba chiefs, are imaginable. At the same time, the words cast a spell over us, influencing

our judgments, guiding our actions. We find it difficult to see through them or beyond them to other possible visions of reality.

A second conclusion is that the possibility of profit also depends upon a mine/not-yours divide. Insofar as desire exists on the part of some people for what is regarded as the property of others, the possibility of profit from property exists. The extra ingredient needed is an agreed upon not-yours/potentially your boundary, with mutually understood and accepted conditions for how to traverse it. The not-yours/potentially-yours boundary is, again, the result of an enchantment, an interpretation of social reality formulable in words.

Because enchantment takes place through the magic of words, it moves through the world like culture more generally, obeying a kind of inertia susceptible to entropic change. That inertial view appears to map a trajectory in which incremental change is understandable and on the horizon of which desire for acquisition operates. However, disruptive change takes hold only grudgingly and with protest, as John Abele's experience with attempting to convince surgeons to adopt the steerable catheter for surgery attests. What had to change in this instance was the inertial enchantment to which surgeons were attached. The medical specialists had to come to appreciate that they could perform—and perform as well or better—some of their surgical operations without the need of radically invasive procedures, and that, simultaneously, this did not diminish their identity as surgeons. While the change was grudging, it did finally make sense to many surgeons in light of their professed goal of healing through operative procedures. The redefinition of what it meant to be a surgeon involved including among those procedures the use of steerable catheters. A third conclusion, therefore, is that the inertial frame enchanting the world of surgery was able to finally allow recognition of the development of surgical catheter procedures as a better way, in some cases at least, to do what surgeons were already trying to do. That is, their articulable worldview included the possibility of progress, with better operative procedures discernible as such.

A final conclusion draws ethnographic inspiration from our restaurateur. He viewed innovation in the restaurant business—the “next new concept”—as coming in waves, a view not unlike that of nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropologists studying diffusion. The conclusion I draw is that the waves are real. They are waves of enchantment. They

spread outward from centers as the popularity of the concept takes hold. But like songs on the pop charts, although exhibiting perhaps a different temporal trajectory, interest in the new concept eventually fades. The initially alluring grows old. While I do not at this point pretend to understand what the time frames for the fading of enchantment are in different instances, the tentative conclusion is that the enchantment of new commodities has a temporal life. Over time the spell dissipates.

The story I have told here is about enchantment as the basis of profit. It is about the ability of words to cast a spell over us, leading us to apprehend the world in peculiar ways. It is a story about the spell of property, of the acceptance of inequalities in material wealth, and about the origins of profit in the desires people have to acquire the wealth of others. Simultaneously, it is a story about innovation as creating desire for the new but also resistance to change if the innovation is too new. And it is a story about the waves of enchanting words that sweep across space and that rise and fall over time. It is ultimately a story that reaffirms the truth of Marcel Mauss's (1972: 178) claim many years ago: "Though we may feel ourselves to be very far removed from magic, we are still very much bound up with it."

Notes

1. I adopt the term "enchantment" from Brian Moeran (2017). Moeran references Alfred Gell's (1992) "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology." Gell's focus, however, is the relationship between technology and enchantment. My own usage focuses on the role of words.
2. Jeremy Bentham's (1998 [1776]: 3) "fundamental axiom" was formulated as: "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong."
3. The enchantment effect as described here thus builds upon the concept of "essentialization" or "naturalization," that is, viewing the world in terms of "essences", qualities or characteristics predicable-as-true of individual things (including persons, events, signs of all sorts), and in particular predicable-as-true independent of the micro-contextual instance of presentation of the thing at issue. That is, to the ideological perception, essences perdure, and, when naturalized, they are grounded in cosmic

absolutes, or at least relatively more cosmic and absolute frameworks-of-being than the micro-contextual indexicality with respect to which they manifest themselves: ‘Boys will be boys!’—meaning, of course, that this/these boy(s) as (mis)-behaving are grounded in—their behavior indexes—the cosmic essence—maybe even a ‘natural’ essence—of ‘boy’hood” (Silverstein 2003). See pp. 202-3. However, enchantment refers to broader patterns of discourse as well as to timeless propositions made about specific things.

4. Except during revolutionary periods, such as happened in France beginning in 1787, when large portions of the population came to see their society the way the Tupinamba saw it. Property ceased to hold them in its spell.
5. See, for example, Bede (n.d.).
6. The quotations in this section are drawn from transcriptions of Abele’s presentations to my classes at the University of Pennsylvania.
7. Although it did not resemble the world as understood by the local population, for whom the archaeological remains simply could not command tourist dollars or Bolivianos.
8. In this regard, the surgeons were more like the local Bolivian population, resisting the innovation.
9. The wave theory goes back to the work of Johannes Schmidt (1872). For more recent work on waves in linguistic diffusion, see Labov (2007).
10. Except where noted, all quotes reported in this section are taken from an interview with a Philadelphia-area restaurant entrepreneur. My then research assistant, Abby Graham, conducted the interview on April 8, 2015.
11. The notice indicates that the restaurant closed in 2002. The restaurant was located at 417 N Delaware Ave., Philadelphia, PA 19123.

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