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Something Wicked: Witches and Rhetorics of Resistance

Abstract

This project joins other academic conversations regarding the dynamics of power, modernity, witchcraft, and magic within the contexts of Western hegemony. Occasioned by kairotic cultural events and the reinforcement of ideologies like those found in the Dobbs decision, QAnon conspiracy, and rise of Christian Nationalism, this project contends that evaluating the potential political power residing in witchery is necessary in understanding some of the nuances of hegemonic control and resistance to oppressive authority. Predominantly following rhetorical evaluations of magic found in the works of Gunn and Covino, I maintain a non-universal methodological practice that works to understand the various instrumentality presented in the subjects of analysis. In line with William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary Copeland, I too contend that “universal, abstract, methodological strictures and formulae for critics” are ill-suited to/for contemporary rhetorical criticism – especially analyses like this project in which the topic demands attention to idiosyncrasies in order to gauge the discursive ‘bigger picture.’ My methodological praxis engages in what McKerrow (2017) calls the “new instrumentality” of critical rhetoric “that demands alternative approaches, especially in relation to reclaiming the utility of a meaning-centered orientation.” Though this project concerns itself with witchcraft and magic, the methods and theories deployed herein work to demystify dominant power structures by illustrating how, as Mckerrow (1989) states, “rhetoric conceals as much as it reveals through its relationship with power/knowledge.” Magic is a convoluted idea. This project seeks to attend to unpacking some of that mess in addition to analyzing the discourses and rhetoric of contemporary witches doing the same.

The supposed eradication of witchcraft and magic is the creation myth of modernity; it has and continues to be the foil for standards of propriety, righteousness, civility, and rationality. The witch has picked up many meanings on her/their journeys throughout historical space and time. Some of the witches presented in the chapters of this project exist in different, fictional Elsewheres. Others exist at different points in linear time and different conditions of materiality. There are other practitioners, not of marginalized identities, who are not heretical and instead deploy magic to reinforce the existing power symbolic/social order. Like Covino (2000), I dub the latter magi as “sorcerers, and they are markedly different than their witch counterparts. Unlike sorcerers, witches threaten the status quo because she/they transform the material with their transgression. In the chapters contained herein, I have tried to illustrate that witches all live and transgress differently. There is no singular image of the witch. There is no one generalizable truth for practicing the craft. The consistent characteristic seen among those analyzed is magic as a response to symbolic/social marginalization. The witch is a near-universal idea applied to femme bodies/characteristics, but it has been applied differently based on the conditions of slavery, colonization, neoliberalism, and variations in which epistemic violence has been enacted. The witch shapeshifts but agency remains the evergreen characteristic pinpointing her/their existence. This makes the archetype of the witch a point of identification for marginalized bodies – historically femme bodies – to gather around. Working as a type of discursive umbrella, the historical deployment of the witch archetype as a means to civilize and assimilate others into the standards of European modernity has had the unintended consequence of creating a broad but nuanced symbol for others across intersections to gather under. Witchcraft offers the exiles of society an alternative symbolic/social order that aids in their survival on the peripheries of hegemonic boundaries. Occult languages, connotations, and symbols offer a vocabulary for their experiences that ‘ordinary language’ has made ineffable. Witches’ spells are made impolite because they are deployed from mouths already considered dangerous and clamorous.

Within this framework we can see witches’ spells as a rhetoric of subalternity. Rhetorical meanings (re)/create in ways that defy traditional delineations of the ‘real.’ Witches’ spells are a priori impolite because they are deployed from twitching tongues already considered dangerous and clamorous. Like the

ancient Cynics before them, spellcasting by witches/heretical magi is a form of parrhesia – an expression of truth telling that exposes the simulacra of absolute order conjured by the state. This, in turn, can inspire imagination, fantasy, and invention of a world considered unreal under current material conditions. Rejecting hierarchical placement in the symbolic/social order is in a sense, supernatural, paranormal, other-worldly. When we consider spells as rhetoric, we consider the available means of persuasion and agency for the powerless. These subaltern conjurations enact what Covino (1994) asserts is “the dynamic complexity of celestial and terrestrial intelligences that attend any word [and] render it a calculus of possibilities.” Such possibilities include altering the material conditions of systemic and systematic oppressive forces.

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Christina Foust

Second Advisor

Santhosh Chandrash

Third Advisor

Bernadette M. Calafell

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Presented to

the Faculty of the College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

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–

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

–

by

K. Scarlett Harrington

June 2023

Advisors: Christina Foust and Santhosh Chandrash

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Author: K. Scarlett Harrington
Title: Something Wicked: Witches and Rhetorics of Resistance
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Chapter 1 All Them Witches: Witches as Subaltern Threats to the Symbolic/Social Order

"To think is always to follow the witch's flight."

– Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*

The magnanimous millennial Lisa Simpson once asked, “why is it whenever a woman is confident and powerful, they call her a witch?” While satirical, Lisa’s question hints at both the long history of the witch and its inextricable gendered and othered meanings. Pam Grossman, a writer and self-identified witch argues that “magic is made in the margins.”¹ With monstrosity being a discourse of otherness, the witch is undoubtedly our first modern monster whose legacy is being reclaimed from the ashes of history. For decades now, scholars throughout various disciplines have noted that women were falsely persecuted and institutionally murdered as witches, but many conversations continue to denigrate the witch’s legacy with castigations that magic is antithetical to reality, therefore framing contemporary witches as not living in “the real world.” The only antonym for “magic” is “reality.” Countless synonyms but only one antonym. Is magic really antithetical to reality or what we think a seemingly universal reality is? Are witches “not living in the real world” or are they threatening the stability of what we think the world is and could be?

¹ Grossman, *Waking the Witch*, 8-9.

Chris Goto-Jones asserts that “it’s not very clear what magic actually is,” in that magic is a word with incredibly convoluted meanings that can never fully be negotiated because they are so contradictory yet deeply imbedded in Western society.² Denotatively, magic refers to the influence of a mystical force – a definition that is broad enough to attend to an almost endless postulation of what a mystical force is. Yvonne Chireau’s articulation is both broad and nuanced: “magic refers to the beliefs and actions by which human beings interact with an invisible reality [...] Magic is the religion of the other.”³ As other scholars discussed in this dissertation, Chireau accounts for colonization, slavery, and other institutionalized violence against Othered bodies in her definition. Famous Victorian occultist Aleister Crowley insisted that *magic* was stage performance whereas *magick* was the “science and art of causing change to occur in conformity with will.”⁴ Underlying all definitions of magic is the capacity to act, to enact agency; to utilize and call upon “symbolic action in the service of social or individual transformation”⁵

Within the academy magic has largely been seen as a frivolous and ‘primitive’ artifact of the past – a remnant of an ‘uncivilized’ age where humanity has not ‘progressed’ with civility of rationality by erasing the “influence of myth, magic, and mystery.”⁶ Academic discourses of witchcraft and magic have largely centered on these

² Goto-Jones, *Conjuring Asia*, 2-5.

³ Chireau, *Black Magic*, 2-3.

⁴ Urban, *New Age, Neopagan*, 161.

⁵ Covino, “Walt Disney Meets Mary,” 153.

⁶ Suddaby, Ganzin, & Minkus, “Craft, Magic,” 2.

ideas being the antithetical to rationality, ultimate truth, and objectivity and therefore, have also gone largely unexplored under frameworks that assess the dynamics and effects of these ideas: “institutionalism has duly explained the inexorable expansion of rationality and disenchantment in the world. But it has been willfully blind to the contradictory evidence of the stubborn persistence of myth, magic and re-enchantment.”⁷ The reasons for this scholarly predilection are varied but are mostly situated in the fact that “social power is at stake in theory-making, but the workings of this power are often unacknowledged.”⁸

We are currently experiencing “the season of the witch” in which marginalized identities, particularly women, are identifying themselves as witches across intersectional lines.⁹ Writing for the conservative leaning publication *The American Interest*, Tara Isabella Burton somewhat condescendingly notes that millennial witches are using “the rhetoric, imagery, and rituals” of witchcraft “as both a political and spiritual statement of identity”:

For an increasing number of left-leaning millennials—more and more of whom do not belong to any organized religion—occult spirituality isn’t just a form of personal practice [...] Rather, it’s a metaphysical canvas for the American culture wars in the post-Trump era.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid, 7.

⁸ Styers, *Making Magic*, 23.

⁹ Dominant meanings of the witch are gendered and usually aligned with womanhood. However, this does not preclude non-binary, trans folks, and even men from practicing. To avoid TERF-iness seen in contemporary magical philosophies, I will try to use the pronouns of she/they when applicable.

¹⁰ Burton, “The Great Awakening.”

Despite the condescension, Burton is not wrong. Millennials and Gen Z are proudly proclaiming to be the descendants of the witches who would not burn and proliferating the public sphere with magic. From WitchTok, the Yembala Collective, politically minded digital covens, and the ritualistic hexings of figures like Brett Kavanaugh there are new generations of witches who are waking up and finding social/personal meaning in magic like never before.¹¹ Why is this phenomenon occurring? Magic! Just kidding, but not really. Self-identified witch and journalist Grossman contends that “being called a witch and calling oneself a witch are two vastly different experiences. In the first case, it’s often an act of degradation, an attack against a perceived threat. The second is an act of reclamation, an expression of autonomy and pride.”¹²

Witches and meanings of magic have been common in public discourses throughout time but not imbued with widespread nefarious meanings until the onset of modernity during the late Medieval and Renaissance periods. In tracing the figure of the witch throughout recorded history a few important things are evident: 1) the ties between spells and rhetoric are clear in many pre-modern cultures; 2) ideas of magic are deeply ingrained in nearly all epistemologies throughout time and space; 3) the power(s) witches hold are complex but center on knowledges that provide them with the (social) power to change the material conditions in which people live; 4) the witch is a near universal designation applied to almost all marginalized bodies, but applied differently based on intersections of identity.

¹¹ “Witchtok” is vernacular for the presence of witch-centered material on the social media platform Tik Tok.

¹² Grossman, 8-9

We lack understanding of how meanings of magic live in the bodies of those most likely to be accused of witchcraft and reclaim the witch as a symbol of agency. The complicated perceptions and history of witches/ magic undoubtedly live within the bodies of those who reclaim such a spellbinding symbol which in turn influence(s/d) how they move in our social/political worlds. We lack a nuanced understanding of why the witch continues to be reclaimed by marginalized bodies (particularly women/femmes) throughout literal centuries. We lack an explanation for why meanings of magic connect across various intersections of marginalization. We do not know why such witchery is a threat to the status quo and such ineffable reasoning is what ultimately might connect witches throughout space, time, and lived experiences.

This dissertation project explores the archetype of the witch as the agential radical feminist and the various ways the witch is embodied and enacted throughout history in various intersections of identity. Specifically, this project examines the meanings applied with witches/witchcraft, magic, and the power of spells to act as a rhetorical vehicle of/for change. The preliminary argument I forward is that when wielded by the hegemonic, meanings of magic create the witch as the heretical other who utilizes spells as rhetoric to challenge the material conditions that make her/them monstrous. Discourses of magic and witchcraft act as a civilizing process wherein othered bodies are assimilated into white heteropatriarchal standards of acceptability and civility. The witch is threatening because her/their otherness is monstrous, abject, and refuses assimilation – an enactment of agency; the language of spells is her/their tool to enact change. When marginalized bodies, particularly women/femmes, reclaim the symbol of the witch they draw on haunted memories of oppression to subvert and challenge the status quo. They

recall these memories to enact the agency that made their forebearers so threatening and similarly, utilize spells as rhetoric to change the material conditions in which they live. In what follows, this chapter lays out support for my argument by reviewing relevant literature and providing necessary context.

1.1 A Hexing History

It is important to recognize that nearly every ancient and premodern culture has their own idiosyncratic magical traditions which inform their contemporary incarnations. Unfortunately, the depth of the topic conflicts with the need for brevity in a dissertation. While I attempt to briefly call attention to some of these early conceptions, this project locates the onset of modernity as the central context needed to understand how we got to this contemporary enactment of the witch. Additionally, it is necessary to note that while many of the spiritual practices below are considered magic/witchcraft under Western hegemony, those ideologies are not always represented in the original practices. Many of the practitioners of (still-living) spiritualities do not perceive their practices to be mystical in the Western sense and/or do not consider themselves to be witches. However, epistemologies of an animistic cosmology underlie many of the rituals and rights that are hegemonically considered magical and therefore, practitioners have been subject to violence while their spiritualities are commonly co-opted in contemporary New Age appropriations. Chris Klassen asserts that colonization has also rendered a white-washed sanitized version of the feminist witch through which a “universal oppression” is declared as truth and in doing so, erases the experiences of people of color who experience(d)

differing forms of oppression than white women.¹³ Klassen posits that the notion of the feminist witch often conflates sexism with racism and while I concur, I diverge in understanding the witch and witch-hunts as a truly intersectional enactment of control. Modern notions of magic are inevitably wrapped into conceptions of the past. Western society associates magic with all that is improper – through either spiritual maleficence or ‘primitive’ unenlightenment. Notwithstanding such connotations, perceptions of magic can be found in nearly every society and culture throughout time.¹⁴

Premodern gods, goddesses, and exemplars from across the world embody and are even the deification of magic. Sun Wukong, also known as the “Monkey King” of Mandarin Chinese mythology was born from stone and has supernatural abilities like being incredibly strong and super-fast. Hī iaka is an indigenous Hawaiian goddess of hula and sorcery. Heka of ancient Egypt was the literal deification of magic and considered a vital force of life. In the indigenous Muisca religion, Huitaca is a goddess associated with witchcraft, sexual liberation, and rebelling against the father god, Bochica.¹⁵ Kabbalah, the mystical discipline in Judaism, is said to date back to Eden. In 2016, archeologists discovered 2000-year-old binding spells written in Aramaic buried with people believed to be from what would now be modern-day Syria.¹⁶ The legal ramifications for

¹³ Klassen, “The Colonial Mythology,” 3.

¹⁴ It should be noted that many ancient cultures do not have a witch figure as we contemporarily know it. However, I am drawing on ancient/premodern spiritual practices that are associated with witchcraft under Western modernity because such amalgamation becomes relevant later on.

¹⁵ Admittedly, English translations of Muisca practices are hard to come by, so I am relying on translation that may not be accurate/ able to fully convey what she means to the Muisca peoples. I am relying on a translation of Javier Ocampo López’s *Mitos y leyendas indígenas de Colombia – Indigenous myths and legends of Colombia* (2013).

¹⁶ Reuters in Kostolac, “Mysterious Magic Spells Unearthed.”

accusations of magic are even outlined in The Code of Hammurabi wherein the first institutionalization of “swimming the witch” arguably occurred.¹⁷

Deep connection(s) with animals and nature are present among many frameworks of magic. In ancient Japan, witch animals are common figures that are portrayed as shapeshifters that can possess the human body and work alongside of magical practitioners. *Tsukimono-Suji* are hereditary witch families with magical lineages passed down matrilineally, endowing them with abilities to employ snakes, dogs, and foxes to help them acquire wealth and/or act against a perceived enemy.¹⁸ Such relationship is similar to witch familiars present in Europe.

Unlike other religions, many ancient indigenous African spiritual practices do not have historical founders, privilege sacred oral traditions over written scripture, uphold reverence of ancestors, and defer to spiritual specialists over an ultimate religious authority (like the Catholic Pope).¹⁹ Lilith Dorsey expands on these regional similarities by also noting that the concept of *Ashe* also is present in most of these traditions. *Ashe* is “the universal life force” of all “everyone and everything.”²⁰ *Ashe* is simultaneously universal and specified – even though everyone and everything holds *Ashe*, that energy is nuanced and specified to each individual enactment.²¹ Salmah Eva- Lina Lawrence

¹⁷ “Swimming the witch” was an “interrogation” and/or judicial tactic for determining the guilt or innocence of an accused witch. Unlike the European version popularized by James I, The Code of Hammurabi outlines that if the accused sorcerer survives the sacred river they are legally “innocent”, and the accuser will be executed.

¹⁸ Blacker, *The Catalpa Bow*, Chapter 3.

¹⁹ Grilo, van Klinken, & Ndzovu, *Religions in Contemporary Africa*, 108.

²⁰ Dorsey, *Orishas, Goddesses, and Voodoo*, 6-8.

²¹ Ibid.

highlights the traditional perceptions of magic in Milne Bay and explains that all magical practitioners are *alawai* or *balau*; simultaneously feared and revered. However, *masigili* are associated with nefarious intent and darkness – making them more feared.²²

Within Western perspectives, Kristen Solleé attributes the first inception of witchery with Eve, but it was actually Lilith.²³ Lilith was Adam’s first wife made in the same way as Adam – not of him. Lilith, is often venerated among contemporary witches as the “mother of witches.” With Lilith being the mother of witches, it makes sense that conceptions of magic within Hellenistic/Western paradigms start with her.” Like other premodern cultures, “magic could be considered a common practice in early Greco-Roman practices. “Beliefs about the magic powers of words occupy sophistic, hermetic, gnostic, cabalistic, and patristic philosophers from antiquity forward.”²⁴ Gods and demigods usually held divine powers in Greco-Roman/Hellenistic myths and heroes were usually bestowed a fragile and temporary power by the gods that favored the, between them “was the human purveyor of magic and miracle.”²⁵ Though having a long-held and ‘common’ tradition, “magic was presupposed in all forms of the miraculous, and in medicine, alchemy, astrology, and divination. Even so, magic retained its dubious reputation, and there were always those few who viewed it with total skepticism.”²⁶

Kimberly B. Stratton pinpoints the shift in magic as a routine ritualistic practice began to

²² Lawrence, “Witchcraft, Sorcery, Violence,” 54.

²³ Solleé, *Witches, Sluts, Feminists*, 21.

²⁴ Covino, “Magic and/as Rhetoric,” 251.

²⁵ Griffiths, “Hellenistic Religions,” 3903.

²⁶ Betz. “Magic in Greco-Roman Antiquity,” 5572-5577.

change in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.²⁷ Charges of *gohteiva* (magic/sorcery) were levied against magicians and philosophers alike (as the two were not mutually exclusive) and were largely motivated by perceived slights.²⁸ Notwithstanding the ‘uncommon’ meanings associating witches with alterity, it was the beginning of an all-encompassing civilizing discourse that assimilated the bodies and knowledges of others to be in line with standards of hegemonic Western modernity.

Like with so many other facets of the world, modernity changed everything. The rise of capitalism and colonization asserted hegemonic power structures that exist to this day - having indelibly altered how we move through and with the world around us. As noted earlier, our current understandings of magic are largely derived from this period and the effects of such discourses are still being enacted. “Modernity is a rhetorical rather than an intellectual [or inherent] construct,” and the boundaries demarcating the proper, civilized subject have been laid around ideas of magic as transgressive to the social order.²⁹ According to Styers, “magic has assumed the role of modernity's foil, and debates over magic have provided an important site for the articulation of modernity's norms.”³⁰ Witchcraft and magic as subversion is the creation myth of modernity and meanings applied to them served as discourses of difference that were “readily deployed in the effort to confirm Western self-identity.”³¹ Here it is important to note that while the

²⁷ Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 2.

²⁸ Addey, *Divination and Theurgy*, 3.

²⁹ Machielsen, “Bad Reasons,” 408.

³⁰ Styers, 13.

³¹ *Ibid*, 21.

early modern period is when witchcraft became inextricably linked to otherness it is also the time in which European powers were deploying magic for state use (which was denied and/or classified under the designation of “alchemy”). A useful framework for understanding the power dynamics between uses of magic at the onset of modernity is Covino’s sorcerer vs the witch duality. For Covino, the sorcerer is an agent of the state “whose purpose is to maintain and contain the culture in power” through invocations of “the rhetoric of the culture in power.”³² The sorcerer is not transformative but conservative – they cast conjurations “materializing simulacra that reinforce established values and discourage critical thinking” among subjects.³³ A recognizable sorcerer from folklore emblematic of these characteristics is Merlin. Sorcerers like Gianfranco Pico, Cornelias Agrippa, Johannes Reuchlin, and Marsilio Ficino assimilated mystical traditions like Theurgy, Egyptian Hermeticism, and Kabbalah into Christian epistemologies in what is now called early Western/Christian esotericism. Agrippa described these endeavors as “occult philosophy” and these magi drew on Neoplatonic and Aristotelian paradigms to justify the rationale for engaging in such endeavors.³⁴ We can also see how renaissance sorcerers worked at the behest of sovereigns in the example of John Dee, an unrepented alchemist/sorcerer who was first imprisoned by Mary I of England only to be released by Elizabeth I to work as a close advisor.³⁵ The antithesis of the sorcerer – the actual foil for standards of modernity – lies in the witch whose magic is

³² Covino, “Walt Disney Meets Mary,” 153-155.

³³ *Ibid*, 154.

³⁴ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 39.

³⁵ Oliveira, “One Devil Too Many,” 8-9.

identified with radical, counter-hegemonic change.³⁶ Stratton argues that under the status quo, accusations of witchcraft and magic are always about control.³⁷ Situated in the first steps of Western modernity, meanings of Otherness were also developed during this era. Through the lens of monstrosity, it is clear to see that meanings of Otherness and meanings of the witch are joined, separate, and necessary to establishing order through a *civilizing* process.³⁸ As women were being slaughtered in mass for being witches, male sorcerers gained social power with their engagement with alchemy, divination, astrology, and other practices considered a threat when practiced by those without social power. Meanings of witchcraft always shift in socio-cultural periods of upheaval.³⁹ With modernity changing our socio-cultural-political-geographical-body landscapes for the foreseeable future, it did the same to meanings of the witch. In her seminal work *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*, Silvia Federici traced available historical documentations the Burning Times to illustrate shifting meanings of the witch from spiritual communicator, healer, representative of the divine feminine to demoness, malevolent, and evil. This shift in meaning was a necessary condition in establishing hegemonic powers through capitalism and colonization because women were/are the primary agitators against these efforts.⁴⁰ Precolonial feudal European women had much more agency than what is usually recognized, and while a division of

³⁶ Covino, "Walt Disney Meets Mary Daly," 154.

³⁷ Stratton, 3-5.

³⁸ Khair, *The Gothic, Postcolonialism*, 11-15.

³⁹ Stratton, 8.

⁴⁰ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 12-17.

labor existed between men and women in many regions, those divisions did not necessarily carry negative connotations until the first steps of Western modernity. Family and the collective were largely seen as one entity in many communities and work was not devalued based on what sex performed it – everything was for the betterment of everyone. The medieval proletariat worked collectively and self-governed (with little to moderate oversight from feudal lords) collectively. In many communities across Europe women had the rights to possess land and pass down inheritance.⁴¹

Precolonial feudal Europe had a period of endless wars during the 11th – 15th centuries, occurring alongside the devastating waves of Bubonic Plague which ultimately left laborers in short supply. Feudal lords and the Church began to take/commercialize lands used as communal Commons, forced men to fight in wars without training, and raped women with impunity. In the Commons, an emphasis on the collective and communal living made banding together against the feudal lords more ‘accessible.’ The bodies of these women, traditionally witches, were thus disrupting the supply of laborers and labor – an undeniable threat to the social order. Women who enacted traits now associated with diabolical witchcraft (healing, wisdom, holders of generational and community knowledges) were often leaders in their feudal, serf Commons. They held knowledge(s) of their communities which could be used against their oppressors.

Women are the generators of community. Federici argues that institutionalizing violence against women “paves the way for land grabs, privatizations, and wars.”⁴² As

⁴¹ Ibid, 25.

⁴² Federici, *Witches, Witch-hunting, and Women*, 48.

the physical bearers of children, historical healers, arbitrators of conflict, and those that house ancient communal knowledges, women must be attacked and controlled if the ruling class is going to assimilate and dominate the subaltern. Capitalist structures could/cannot exploit ideologies of the body being innately autonomous or ancestral knowledges as communal.⁴³ Because women house these powers in their bodies, they are the first point in control. Modern discourses of witchcraft are directly linked to the print revolution. With the printing press, Church, feudal, and secular officials were able to disseminate meanings of the witch as a woman who was antithetical to authoritative standards. The witch was everything a good and righteous woman was not. *The Malleus Maleficarum* (Hammer of Witches) was published in the late fifteenth century and would ultimately become the “Inquisitors Handbook” due to its large circulation being possible with the the printing press. To say that this text was/is misogynistic would be an understatement, and at this point – trite. One particular line that I just **love** outlines this inherent misogyny. Citing Saint John Chrysostom, Institoris declares: “what else is woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours! [sic]”⁴⁴

Castigation of the witch accompanied discourses outlining a harsh social code that relegated any action outside of church or state function as sinful, criminal, and harmful to

⁴³ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 27.

⁴⁴Institoris, *Malleus Maleficarum*.; I want this engraved on my tombstone.

the entire community.⁴⁵ She was the monster who represented the other who transgressed duality. She was a creature of fire and desire that lived in between spheres of reality and acceptability. She shattered the fragile illusion between what was supposedly *is* vs what is actually being *lived*. Erasing knowledges of medicinal plants that could induce abortion meant increased (re)production of labor(ers) for the ruling class. Controlling women's bodies meant controlling the supply of labor. Federici explains:

Women, in capitalist development, have suffered a double process of mechanization. Besides being subjected to the discipline of work, paid and unpaid, in plantations, factories, and homes, they have been expropriated from their bodies and turned into sexual objects and breeding machines.⁴⁶

“Capitalist development began with a war on women” and women's bodies have been a battleground for all following capitalist and colonial wars.⁴⁷ European women were the test trial to the industrialized mechanisms of control ruling powers sought to utilize in lands they colonized. With colonization, the marker of “witch” became even more embedded with meanings of otherness – drawn upon racialized lines. Amber Murray asserts that the title of witch was easy to impose on indigenous folks upon colonization because meanings of otherness and presumed evilness were constructed with discourses of the “dark continent” in Medieval Europe.⁴⁸ As colonization emerged to sustain European capital, the witch hunts became about dividing women. Federici elucidates:

It divided women. It taught them that by becoming accomplices of the war against the ‘witches’ and accepting the leadership of men in this regard, they could acquire the protection that would save them from the

⁴⁵ Federici, *Witches, Witch-hunting, and Women*, 22.

⁴⁶ Federici, *Beyond the Periphery*, 14.

⁴⁷ Federici, *Witches, Witch-hunting, and Women*, 47.

⁴⁸ Murray, “Decolonising, the Imagined Geographies,” 159.

hangman or the stake. It taught them above all to accept the place assigned to them in the developing capitalist society, for once it was accepted that women could become servants of the Devil, suspicion of diabolism would accompany a woman every moment in her life.⁴⁹

It could be argued that under this notion, “witch” and the implications of that descriptor were instrumental in framing early colonial relations between white women and women of color. Colonization brought violence with the first target commonly being witches. Western imagined geographies of ‘witchcraft’ have been central to a racial system of social classification with judgements of indigenous spiritualities being labeled as ‘savage’ and ‘uncivilized.’ Colonization and slavery forced conversion to Christianity on indigenous populations and slaves kidnapped from coastal and central Africa. Dominant (read: Christian) delineations of magic and witchcraft are demarcations of ‘proper’ boundaries that cannot (or should never) be breeched. Maria E. Posse Emiliani explains “cultural hybridity has been a strategy of survival for Indigenous and oppressed people under the various forms of colonization. The process of hybridization is therefore ongoing; it transforms itself constantly.”⁵⁰ Discourses of magic have been and continue to be an important “ideological tool in the aid of European and American imperialism and colonialism,” and pushing the peripheries of such limitations must be addressed through discipline.⁵¹ A violent psycho-cultural territorialization takes place inscribing the

⁴⁹ Federici, *Witches, Witch-hunting, and Women*, 23.

⁵⁰ Emiliani, “From the Caribbean,” 87.

⁵¹ Styers, 21.

colonized as other, as monstrous, therefore producing a social reality whereby white heteropatriarchy is asserted and maintained.⁵²

Because witchery becomes a fundamental base for oppressive actions, it can do the same for resistive and transgressive measures. Despite the innumerable attempts to eradicate practices of witchcraft, magical epistemologies still exist – a representation that the monstrous other has survived despite/ in spite of all that has tried to eradicate them. The witch and her/their magic ignites “subversive passions among the dispossessed” and have continuously acted as a threat to the established ‘proper’ order.⁵³ Echoing Dorsey, Yvonne Chireau explains that spiritual traditions of black folks are dynamic processes that are fluid and mutate with specific contexts with slavery being a context that forever altered practices through necessary hybridization with Christianity.⁵⁴ Dorsey elucidates:

The African traditional religions – both in their homeland, and in all the places they traveled to – were forced to remain shrouded in secrecy. This was to keep both the practitioners and the knowledge they possessed safe from persecution. The veil of mystery has only just begun to lift after almost five hundred years.⁵⁵

The inclusion of Christian themes, practices, and iconography was a necessary to subvert colonial power structures that forbade African and indigenous slaves from practicing their ancestral spiritualities, sometimes under the penalty of death. This was a strategy to “allow the practices to remain literally under cover,” but also “through tribute and participation, the individuals and the religions themselves gain strength. It is in this

⁵² Yancy, “Colonial Gazing,” 2.

⁵³ Styers, 9.

⁵⁴ Chireau, 6.

⁵⁵ Dorsey, 4-5.

process that new loa [Voudou ancestral spirits] and orishas can emerge.”⁵⁶ It is an ever changing dynamic and is strengthened with each adaptation because *Ashe* is fluid yet static in strength. Chireau’s illustrations of charms and spells for protection, truth, and wealth demonstrate that practitioners utilized the agentive means that were available/accessible with goals of changing their materiality. Indigenous African spiritualities made kinships between Indigenous American and European spiritualities and created distinct characteristics. These practices represent cross cultural lineages emblematic of the geographies and bodies transgressed and reterritorialized. Ultimately, she notes the “emanations of poetry, dance, jazz, and literature” in and of Conjure tradition are “metaphorical representations of a resilient African spirituality.”⁵⁷ Similarly, hybridization exists in many communities subjugated through colonial forces. These acts represent that magic and witchery were/are conduits in which marginalized bodies could declare agency and maintain survival of their indigenous practices and epistemologies.

Knowledge and power are inseparable. In the history of Western ‘progression,’ scientific knowledge and rationalism is largely considered the peak advancement of civilization required of society, with inclusion into civility being predicated on rejecting ‘primitive’ ways of being like magic. This era is venerated with the designation of “Enlightenment,” notwithstanding the expectation to practice various forms of Christianity still existed. Intellectualized and standardized by scholars of the day,

⁵⁶ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁷ Chireau, 152.

Christianity “served as the standard against which alternative cultural configurations and modes of behavior were measured.”⁵⁸

As the fires of the Burning Times turned into embers the threat witches posed shifted. Instead of an outright danger, magical epistemologies became a disorder keeping civilized European society from achieving its true potential. Magic as the foil for modernity – provides a clear demarcation for all that was legitimate, appropriate, and civilized.⁵⁹ Randall G. Styers explains:

The position of magic within the intellectual and cultural terrain of the modern West has thus been a product not only of the distinctive confluence of social and material factors that gave shape to modernity but also of modernity's need to consolidate its own identity.⁶⁰

Notions of reality must be firmly established in creation/maintenance of dominant symbolic/social orders. Of course, those boundaries ruling class – those who, it can be argued, often demonstrate less critical (self) awareness than a rock. Like Renaissance magi before them, scientists like Issac Newton and Robert Boyle were known to practice “natural magic” and alchemy while maintaining they held themselves to strict standards of European rationality.⁶¹

The tensions between knowledge, rationality, and synthesis comes to a catalyst during the Victorian and *fin de siècle* eras when secret societies, spiritualism, scientific thought, and social dominance were pervasive in the public sphere like never before. This

⁵⁸ Styers, 5.

⁵⁹ Chireau, 6.

⁶⁰ Styers, 26.

⁶¹ Ibid, 49.

is the part in the proposal where any strict post-positivist would disregard the project in a huff because it borders on conspiracy theory levels of weirdness and absurdity, yet I assure you, dear readers, that the ties between hegemonic groups, secret societies, magic, and societal control are not only provable under disciplinary standards but also a major context providing us with contemporary meanings of magic. Magical orders like the Hellfire Club, Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Ordo Templi Orientis, Fraternitas Rosae Crucis, and others appeared simultaneously with spiritualism and magic-centered religions like Theosophy and Thelema in what scholars call the “Third Great Awakening.”⁶² Also known as the “mystical revival,” these eras saw the proliferation of occult practices that drew from a variety of sources including mistranslated readings of ancient texts being discovered through colonial archeology, Renaissance Hermeticism (slightly hinted at above), and the appropriation of colonized religious practices – most notably Hindu rituals like Tantra. Here it is important to outline an essential characteristic of Victorian/ fin de siècle occultism because it has direct impact on philosophies of Western esotericism today. In this time, with these European practitioners, ideologies of *Orientalism* became a formative feature present in occultic rituals. Additionally, *Orientalism* influenced the construction of ideological esoteric fascism. Because these epistemes exist under many, confusing names, I have chosen to designate them under the umbrella designation of “metaphysical traditionalism” for clarification. Metaphysical traditionalism traces its origins to the late 19th/early 20th century European occult revival

⁶² Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 161; The distinctions between magical orders and a faith-based practice during the Victorian Era are often blurred but the main distinction is that magical orders were mainly fraternal organizations that required dues and limited membership while faith-based organizations did not require dues and were seemingly “open” to the non-elite – but that was more in theory than practice.

and the pursuit of the *Primordial Truth*.⁶³ Western occultism is largely built on ideas of ‘secret’ (read: exclusionary) knowledges living in ‘ancient texts’ from a ‘lost past’ seemingly capable of bestowing ‘qualified’ (read: highly privileged) practitioners with the wisdom to understand the grand cosmology of the universe and how it is intended to be made.⁶⁴ Occult circles found these supposed ancient secrets in spiritualities and landscapes they believed represented the past. While some magi looked for these mysteries in Europe and North America most searched to the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Africa for the Primordial Truth:

[Westerners] started dreaming of a revelation received at the dawn of human history. This revelation, according to the traditionalist mystique, had remained for a long time concealed under the veil of forgotten languages – in Egyptian hieroglyphs, in the Celtic runes, in the scrolls of the little-known religions of Asia.⁶⁵

Their choices on where to seek Primordial Truth was not coincidental, especially considering the time period. During colonization culture and civilization were defined by “the modern significance of the past” – specifically, parts of the world Europeans considered to represent the past (the “Arab world,” Southeast Asia, the entire African

⁶³ This concept has also been dubbed with other synonyms like “primeval” and “primal.” Likewise, the notion of truth also appears as a “revelation” that is bestowed upon the few select gifted with the knowledge to understand it. I have made the decision to use “Truth” because it represents Platonic absolutism in which much Traditionalist thought is based.

⁶⁴ Several authors cited in this chapter and previous chapters discuss or allude to the “Primordial Truth” or “Primordial Revelation,” specifically Eco, Lachman and Goodrick-Clarke. Additionally, the reason “secret,” “ancient texts” and “lost past” are put into quotation marks is because the historicity of these ideas is, to put it nicely, utter nonsense. Aside from ideas stolen and appropriated from living ancient religions like Hinduism and Buddhism, scholars cannot verify any metaphysical grimoires before the Renaissance (except for maybe the Chaldean Oracles but even that is a little iffy).

⁶⁵Eco, “Ur-Fascism,” 5.

continent, etc.).⁶⁶ Orientalism was a central ideology to both magical and nonmagical colonial violence with Joseph A. Massad asserting:

As Orientalism assumed a central place in the colonial campaign, its pretensions encompassed defining who the subject people to be colonized were, what their past was, the content of their culture, and how they measured up to the civilizational, cultural, and racial hierarchies that colonial thought had disseminated.⁶⁷

The production of European knowledges about the lands and people they brutalized was directly “linked to colonial authority and the imperial project,”⁶⁸ in order to be ruled, the Orient had to be “known.”⁶⁹ Western objectivity is actually Western *subjectivity* and thus not actually representative of how people lived in those cultures. Instead the “knowledge” obtained by colonists framed “the Orient [as] less a place than a topos,” compiled of amalgamations from various incomplete sources (also usually Western-written) that were in turn “then re-created by scholars, soldiers, and judges who disinterred forgotten languages, histories, races, and cultures in order to posit them.”⁷⁰ A mystical aura underlies the Orientalist topos that drew European occultists to the “mythic East” in order to ‘discover’ the hidden Truth of the universe.⁷¹

Supporting Said’s evaluation of the circular productions of Orientalist epistemes, European occultists traveled to all parts of the colonial Orient, “drawn by the popular

⁶⁶ Massad, *Desiring Arabs*, 1-5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, 92.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 92 & 177.

⁷¹ Goto-Jones, 15-17.

accounts of anthropologists and the new class of travel writers, who seemed to locate ‘real’ magic outside the modernity of the West,” in order to study “secret, esoteric, and occult arts of magic with gurus, adepts, and mahatmas of various kinds.”⁷² Disenchanted with modernity and seeking a magical answers in the perceivably secret knowledges found in “lost” tomes: “magic was something preserved elsewhere and/or elsewhen, enabling it to be recovered back into the modern West.”⁷³ The Primordial Truth was one of those magical concepts European magi sought to ‘uncover’ in places like Egypt, India, Pakistan, Syria, Indo-China, and (later on) Japan. Traditional Orientalist writers maintained that there was an essence that constituted the “real” Orient and this ideological positioning was likewise taken up by occultists; their supposed training making them the divine inheritors of religious teachings. In both accounts:

This essence is both "historical," since it goes back to the dawn of history, and fundamentally a-historical, since it transfixes the being, "the object" of study, within its inalienable and nonevolutive specificity, instead of defining it as all other beings, states, nations, peoples, and cultures— as a product, a resultant of the vection of the forces operating in the field of historical evolution.⁷⁴

Such ahistorical historiography provides meanings of certainty that metaphysically (and materially) sediment a fictional tradition of existence, dictated by divine authority, with rightness framed as unquestionable.

Essentially, it was believed that revelation of Primordial Truth would unveil the complete anthology of reality and human existence as intended by the universe (in the

⁷² Ibid, 29. It should be noted that their ‘training’ is often dubious and rarely verified.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Said, 97.

form of deities, spirits, forces, etc.). Occults prescribed to the idea that nearly all of the world's religions had bits and pieces of this Truth but because they also believed anyone other than them was inherently dumb (it is important to remember the vast majority of European occultists were aristocrats), all of those in human history have misread the universe's signs. Beliefs found cross-culturally/spiritually (like not murdering) seemingly spoke to the universality hidden and it was up to the/a learned magi to discern the parts from each faith investigated that were in fact, unknowingly part of the singular cosmological authoring of reality. Disenchantment was rife under modernity because the civilized (read: European) world under Enlightenment had inverted the Primordial Truth of a "literalized body politic based on universal principles in which everyone has [their] proper place, and in which there is little room for what we think of as democracy."⁷⁵ European's disenchantment with modernity was not with technological advancements but with changes to the traditional socio-cultural-political structures that were expanding with colonization. This crisis of disenchantment with modernity was indicative of "Western culture passing through an important phase, whose main feature is the crisis imposed on it by such threats as barbarism, narrow technical concerns, moral aridity, strident nationalism."⁷⁶

The synarchy advocated by occultists like René Guénon, Julius Evola, and Savitri Devi was basically copied and pasted from Plato's *The Republic* (but with Orientalist and occultic themes). The gnostic promise of the Primordial Truth is metaphysical

⁷⁵ Lachman, *Dark Star Rising*, 160.

⁷⁶ Said, 258.

traditionalism wherein a special, learned elite rule by cosmological divine right.

According to Lachman, traditionalist occultists believed that the world (and their social standing) was in decline, so they sought to create:

Technologically advanced empire whose millions of inhabitants are in perfect harmony with their place in the social hierarchy. They are fitted into their social slot as a cell is to a human body. And like cells, they cannot rebel against their fate without making the entire body politic ill. Ages ago, all of the earth shared in this harmonious rule. But a schism circa 4000 BCE fragmented the world into a plurality of states and marked the start of the *Kali Yuga*, our present dark age, and forced the Sovereign Pontiff and his people underground. There he and they have waited ever since.⁷⁷

The age of *Kali Yuga* is the primary Orientalist topos in metaphysical traditionalism, and occultists (like those mentioned above) saw the *Kali Yuga* as a ‘dark age’ of Western ideologies and expansionism.⁷⁸ Economic bases of government (like capitalism or communism/socialism) were of little concern. Instead, occult traditionalists argued the ‘humanistic’ concern birthed from Enlightenment had shifted humanity’s concerns from ‘transcendent’ absolutism to the importance of consciousness, socio-political emancipation, and *becoming* something different than their *being* dictated.⁷⁹ “Sacred authority and metaphysical absolutes” were needed to combat “chaotic liberalism” proliferating in the modern world.⁸⁰ This is the history in which the Indo-Aryan myth

⁷⁷ Lachman, 162.

⁷⁸ It must be noted that while these themes are present within many texts of metaphysical traditionalism, the term *Kali Yuga* was coined by Julius Evola. Themes and descriptions of a ‘dark age’ are commonly used in writings of metaphysical traditionalism. Additionally, I would like to suggest the music video for “Dana-Dan” by Indian folk metal band Bloodywood as another, possibly more apt, response to *Kali Yuga* and Evola’s writings in general.

⁷⁹ Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 57.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

would be created (as justification for metaphysical traditionalism) and caste (or lack thereof) metaphysically proposed as cosmological predisposition, a ‘higher order’ that if/when inverted would be the catalyst for the end of civilization (read: Western society). Occultists like Guénon took a “stand aside and watch it fall,” approach to Western society while others like Evola and Devi took a more militant and violent approach to their traditionalism believing that a traditional spiritual hierarchy could be instilled upon the Western brutal modernity.⁸¹

In line with colonial and Orientalist endeavors history and science were contested and rewritten – with a common rebuke being biological/evolutionary Darwinism while simultaneously being socially Darwinistic. Race was reconceptualized as “spiritual, subject to spirit and tradition,” yet who was determined to have a soul was entirely based on racism, ableism, misogyny, antisemitism, etc..⁸² A notorious antisemite, Evola would often cite *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (and even wrote an essay on the matter: “The Authenticity of Protocols as Proven by Jewish Tradition.)”⁸³ Savitri Devi was a French convert to Hinduism who wrote prolifically about “an extraordinary synthesis of Hindu religion and Nordic racial ideology involving the polar origin of the Aryans, the cycle of the ages, and the incarnation of the last avatar of Vishnu in Adolf Hitler.”⁸⁴ Evola, an Italian aristocrat, fascist sage, and grifter, peddled his services and

⁸¹ Like the footnote above, this information was garnered from several sources but most specifically Lachman and Goodrick-Clarke.

⁸² Goodrick-Clarke, 53-64.

⁸³ Ibid, 66.

⁸⁴ Goodrick-Clarke, *Hitler's Priestess*, 4.

philosophies to Mussolini and the Third Reich. Even though they never enacted his “Solar Civilization,” they did incorporate his paradigms of metaphysical traditionalism on varying levels. In doing so, these two traditionalist occultists would ingratiate himself to younger generations of neo-fascists who become “irresistibly drawn to [these] oracle[s] of violence and revolution.”⁸⁵

Outside of metaphysical traditionalist enclave, other organizations (like those mentioned above) and their cult-like leaders became celebrities in their own right by authoring a preeminent script of Western esotericism. Occultists like Aleister Crowley, Paschal Beverly Randolph and Helena Petrovna Blavatsky were figureheads who encouraged the masses to access the arcana denied to them through the Church with the goal that such knowledge would allow them to access their *True* potential. If members/adherents were diligent (read: rich) enough, they could access this “universal ancient lineage.” Followers of these magical traditions were either ignorant of leaders’ pursuits of power (though unlikely) or they were more enchanted with mystical paradigms reifying social power perceived to be lacking by practitioners (more likely). Magical orders usually centered their practices on what is called “ceremonial magic” in which rituals had to be carried out to exact instruction and knowledge could only be obtained through study/ mastery of natural magic (and again, a bunch of money). Some groups were open to women but overwhelmingly catered to men with the means to keep their activities clandestine and exclusive.⁸⁶ This differed slightly in the United States

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 5.

where individuals like Russian-American spiritualist and founder of Theosophy, Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and mixed-raced occultist Paschal Beverly Randolph were prominent figures in 19th century American spiritualism/occultism.

Religious studies scholar Hugh B. Urban illustrates the tie between these subversive spiritualities and the American suffrage movement through his analysis of nineteenth century American spiritualists. Urban posits that “spiritualism was also important not simply as a religious phenomenon but as a key part of several larger social movements in the nineteenth century, most importantly the abolitionist and early women’s rights movements.”⁸⁷ Sollée reports suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony to be adherents of spiritualism while Nell Irvine Painter’s evaluation of Sojourner Truth advances that she practiced an amalgamation of religious practices that could be categorized as magic and witchcraft.”⁸⁸ The same spiritual practices labeled as savage and uncivilized by Westerners was then appropriated as ‘new,’ ‘enlightened,’ and ‘secret’ (read: exclusionary) only a few centuries later by the descendants of those Westerners. European and American occultists like the ones described above inevitably set the stage for hegemonic constructions of magic in the contemporary era. Notwithstanding this undoubted influence, notions of witchcraft as a practice of subalternity persisted through to the current era and is often in conflict with magic that is assimilable with Western neoliberal standards.

⁸⁷ Urban, *New Age, Neopagan*, 68.

⁸⁸ Sollée, 50.

Meanings of the/a “new age” are located in occult lineages and are generally associated with “the arrival of a new level of human consciousness, the so-called Age of Aquarius, in which people are harmoniously united as one.”⁸⁹ Prominent in the latter half of the twentieth century, New Age philosophies and practices are still visible and a major element in contemporary enactments of magic/witchcraft. While past iterations of magic and the occult focus to locate knowledges of the past and reconfigure them within the present, New Age centers on how adherents acquire knowledges that will aid them in surviving the future.⁹⁰ Perception about how the future will be are just as diffuse as the philosophies present in this broad spiritual movement. New Age is by no means homogenous and includes a wide variety of practices and ideologies including psychic phenomena, UFO’s, Chakra, Tantra, trance channeling, reincarnation, and countless others.⁹¹ Urban explains that the proliferation of New Age and the amalgamation of differing magical practices is closely tied to the process of globalization wherein spiritual satisfaction/salvation could be acquired through neoliberal consumption.⁹² Like many aspects of globalization, Western spiritual satisfaction/salvation came at the cost of cultural appropriation.

Many New Age groups and principles seek to align themselves with an “unbroken lineage” of a “world religion” that provide practitioners with a sense of “authenticity”

⁸⁹ Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric*, 56.

⁹⁰ Urban, *Magia Sexualis* 221.; Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age*, 10-11.

⁹¹ Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 220.

⁹² *Ibid*, 15.

when enacted.⁹³ Like Victorian/ fin de siècle occultists, the synthesis of indigenous spiritualities with Western esotericism act as the foundation for many connotations of witchcraft still present today. Though scholars like Urban contest the focus of analyses being primarily centered on cultural appropriation it is a context that cannot be divorced from the subject and attempting to do so further perpetuates neocolonial efforts in erasing marginalized spiritual practices. Many followers of New Age are white, middle-class Americans who are drawing predominantly on American Indigenous, Tibetan, and Indian spiritual practices.⁹⁴ As a rejection of Christianity, many New Agers appropriate othered spiritualities “with total, and frequently uncritical, acceptance.”⁹⁵ Nazrul Islam calls these actions “New Age Orientalism” in which “American romanticism to idealize the East and to critique the West that has become a source of new stereotypes of the East.”⁹⁶ Islam further explains that the difference between traditional Orientalism and New Age Orientalism is that the former is concerned asserting superiority whereas the latter centers on claiming authority over marginalized practices and positioning white people as the gatekeepers to these rituals.⁹⁷ Though focused on the appropriation of Hindu and South East Asian traditions, Islam’s assessment can be extended to cover a range of New Age appropriations in which white New Agers limit access to a ritual to the very people who inherited it – maintaining a social power of whiteness. During this time, several magical

⁹³ Gilmore, “Pagan and Indigenous Communities,” 182.

⁹⁴ Crowley, *Feminism's New Age*, 7.

⁹⁵ Pike, *Earthly Bodies*, 124.

⁹⁶ Islam, “New Age Orientalism,” 225.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

organizations and broader philosophies elevated themselves in the public sphere enough to receive some sense of institutional legitimacy – whether through tax exemption and/or visibility. Wicca is one such organization that can now be classified as an organized religion. I could write an entire dissertation on the often-weird details about Wicca’s formation but of main relevance is to this project is “founder” Gerald Gardner’s penchant of appropriating American Indigenous culture into Wiccan rituals, including the “smudging” of white sage (a closed American indigenous practice). The broad Neo-Pagan movement is yet another example of prevalence in appropriation.⁹⁸

Notwithstanding the appropriation of othered rituals, there are also Neo-Pagan philosophies like Wotanism, Odinism, Heathenry, and Ásatrú are explicitly and unapologetically white supremacist.⁹⁹

While many New Age conventions exclude and/or romanticize the other, they also pinpoint self-empowerment, particularly for women, in their tenants.¹⁰⁰ Andy Smith, Sarah M. Pike, Karlyn Crowley, and others note that white women often flock to New Age practices to explore their self-identity for the first time but do so without examining their own privileges and researching beyond mainstream New Age sources to really examine the history of what is being discussed. Smith, co-founder of Women of All Red

⁹⁸ Some scholars argue that both Wicca and Neo-Paganism should be separated from one another because they focus on retrieving knowledges from the past and invoke an “ancient past” in their texts instead of the future, but such criticism ignores the fact that many other New Age Enlightenment calls forth the same authority of the past and also arose in the New Age moment.

⁹⁹ It should be noted that Heathenry is not necessarily a unified philosophy/theology. Some self-proclaimed Heathens are social justice oriented while many others are violently white supremacist. Since there is no real guiding organization for Heathenry, it appears often as a broad term self-applied to broadly pagan practices.

¹⁰⁰ One only needs to recall Lilith Fair to know exactly what I am talking about.

Nations, explains that white New Age feminists assert themselves as a neo-colonial force that trivialize oppression and position themselves as authorities and consumers:

These practices also promote the subordination of Indian women to white women. Many white “feminists” tell us how greedy we are when we don’t share our spirituality, and that we have to tell them everything they want to know because prophecies say we must [...] ignoring our realities, the New Age movement sees Indian women as cool and spiritual and therefore, available to teach white women to be cool and spiritual.¹⁰¹

Crowley further illustrates Smith’s critiques and ties them to behavior present within the larger mainstream feminist movement:

White women participate in New Age culture in part to negotiate the long, complex, and some would say failed political alliances with women of color. Just when women of color challenged feminism and women’s and gender studies for its racist foundations in the 1980s and 1990s, many white women turned toward New Age spiritual practices that “allowed” them to live out fantasy unions with women of color that were disrupted in the public, feminist political sphere.¹⁰²

Even though New Age saw the rise of the “Goddess Movement” with philosophies like Dianic Wicca, these conventions are often the very embodiment of white feminism in that they nearly erase anyone other than white middle-class straight women from the conversation while colonizing othered belief systems. These issues go beyond the exclusion of non-white practitioners and appropriation of rituals and extend to exclusion of non-binary, trans, queer, disabled, neurodivergent witches and anyone who does not abide by their authoritative authoring of magic/witchcraft.

As the New Age merged into the twenty-first century, ideas of the witch and magic remained largely static. Though gaining some measure of legitimacy within the

¹⁰¹ Smith, "For All Those," 44.

¹⁰² Crowley, 8.

public sphere, magic has largely been acceptable only if it has been practiced by white folks but not necessarily practiced publicly. However, the stark generational differences between Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, and Gen Z would make themselves visible within our contemporary enactment of witchcraft and magic. Authors like Dorsey, Sollée, Grossman, Juliet Diaz, Frances F. Denny and others contend that the witch is having a moment like she/they have never seen before. Empowerment has been a characteristic associated with feminists and witchcraft since at least the middle nineteenth century but in this new millennium, witches are the ones doing the burning (down of oppressive systems). Sady Doyle advances that “the witch has always been the feminist monster of choice” with women embodying the characteristics of the witch and resisting by being the monsters they were thought to be.¹⁰³ This new generation of witches are exploring empowerment through a painful investigation of history, self-reflection, the desire to reclaim witchcraft to the benefit of the community and resistance to oppressive power structures.¹⁰⁴ *Vice* (and their former subsidiary *Broadly*) have reported about a variety of contemporary incarnations of witches that highlight examples of intersectional and decolonial practices. Bri Luna owns and curates the web platform *The Hoodwitch* where she details her experiences recalling and reclaiming the spiritual magic of her Afro-Latinx ancestry. Though she uses her site as a platform to describe her personal, intersectional experiences, it is also a space for witches from all identities to find information about cross cultural mystical practices.

¹⁰³ Doyle, “Monsters, Men and Magic,”

¹⁰⁴ Sollée, 13; Denny, *Major Arcana*, 5-8.

Similarly, spotlight on witches of color like Luna has allowed these spellcasters to summon their ancestors and their stories back from pre-Inquisitorial pasts. Indigenous Cuban witch Juliet Diaz describes the generational crafts passed along through the lineage of women/femmes in her family. Diaz's spellbook *Witchery* has become well-known for offering insights into the self and ethical practicing of the craft in addition to spells. *Bruja* is the Spanish term applied to a variety of Latin-X and Afro-Caribbean rituals including pre-colonial spiritualities, Santeria, and Yoruba. Feminist skateboarding collective *Brujas of the Bronx* tie their magic with *wicked* kick-flips and a mission to teach about institutional oppression and power.¹⁰⁵ The main element stressed in this modern-day invocation of the witch is an importance of what I call 'emancipatory witchcraft'. Contemporary witches are positioning the realities of systemic and systematic oppression as necessary knowledges in craft practices. A recent Tweet authored by "Witch Cake" (@hollycassell) that was shared to me explains this ethic perfectly: "if you call yourself a witch you are taking on the mantel of hundreds of years of oppression and ostracism. It is your duty to stand beside those who suffer injustices. If you do not, your "spirituality" is aesthetic only." This sentiment is echoed and expanded on in countless online articles detailing the importance of decolonizing magical practices and ending New Age appropriations.

Though contemporary actions indicate a radical shift in witchcraft perspectives and magical epistemes, hegemonic issues of whiteness still persist. Jess Joho and Morgan Sung explain: "as the Trump era turned witchery into a symbol of feminist resistance, the

¹⁰⁵ They are great. They made and disseminate a syllabus to assist in their mission. You can find it here: <http://brujas.nyc/assets/documents/EACH-ONE-TEACH-ONE-SYLLABUS.pdf>

New Agey self-care crowd began intermingling with the “mysticore” pop culture aesthetic to turn crystals, tarot, and astrology into a whole ass vibe.”¹⁰⁶ An aesthetic, capitalist driven element is another prominent feature of present-day witchcraft with “witch influencers” a common sight on social media, the prominence of “Witchtok” and selling of “spell kits” from trendy retailers like Urban Outfitters and Sephora. As contemporary witches negotiate the tensions, they also lay the groundwork for how future witches will envision and practice magic. With a little craftiness, this new generation of witches looks likely to demonstrate that the season of the witch is an ever-present one.

1.2 Civilizing the Witch: Methods for Attending to Monstrosity

Briefly mentioned above, the associations of witchcraft with subalternity and nonconformity to Western standards has been a significant means through which hegemonic powers assimilate othered bodies into ‘ordered’ standards. The cohesion of social identity is derived from adherence to the symbolic order – the “agreed” upon symbols of communication in which any given society takes part in signifying processes that outline distinctions of law, order, and civility.¹⁰⁷ That which perverts and disrupts the symbolic/social order is considered *abject* and must be rejected, repulsed, and expelled in order to maintain order.¹⁰⁸ Tabish Khair argues that European delineations of otherness are deeply imbued with theological justifications and meanings

¹⁰⁶ Joho & Sung, “How to be a Witch.”

¹⁰⁷ Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender,” 169.

¹⁰⁸ Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror*, 13-16.

of civilized.¹⁰⁹ Demarcations of civility mirror other divisions of the abject including human/inhuman, citizen/exile, empowered/powerless, monster/hunter, and of course civilized/primitive. With theological justifications that benefitted the state, symbols of the demonic (Judeo-Christian) were placed on ‘non-civilized’ others along racial, gender, sexuality, class (feudal), and religious identifiers.¹¹⁰ According to Julia Kristeva, abjection is “the place where meaning collapses and therefore, disturbs identity.”¹¹¹ Presence of the abject in order exposes the fragility of boundaries set between differences in being/existing in which prevailing systems are built upon.¹¹² Abjection that cannot be contained is monstrous and the threat they pose can only be ameliorated by eradicating the monsters and/or civilizing the potentially abject into the subject.

Joseph A. Massad explains the process of civilizing as power-centered endeavors with goals of “epistemological normalization,” which assimilates how one thinks and what they think about.¹¹³ Epistemologies outside of the usually Eurocentric hegemonic are condemned and responded to harshly (read violently). Framing the witch as evil and demonic was a necessary precursor to the civilizing of witches across Europe and colonized lands during modernity. Witches carried epistemologies that threatened androcentric, Eurocentric, and Christian ideologies that comprise(d) hegemonic thought. Levying the charges of heresy (literally subversive speech) with indictments of witchcraft

¹⁰⁹ Khair, 11-15.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Kristeva, 5.

¹¹² Ibid, 15.

¹¹³ Massad, 39.

configured an epistemology whereby witches were “corresponding to the ‘natural’ opposite” of civility.¹¹⁴

The norms of every period in western history include strictures as to what could and could not be known, and these strictures were applied differently in terms of gender, class, and race. Any group that attempted to exceed the parameters of knowledge set for it was denounced in a variety of ways, but a paramount charge was invariably that of sexual deviancy.¹¹⁵

Otherness is a permanent state of alterity wherein monstrosity “becomes imagined in the flesh,” and situates otherness as a fixed identity almost impossible to be released from hegemonic confines.¹¹⁶

As modernity transitioned into the “Age of Reason,” meanings of magic and witchcraft took on a different civilizing forms: that of academic ‘enlightened’ standards. Enlightened paradigms associate/d magic with irrational, primitive, archaic, and uncivilized behaviors curtailing efforts progressing civility. Styers explains:

Magical thinking was viewed as a prime index of the nonmodern and non-Western, and theorists commonly attributed magic to marginal peoples, locations, and eras. Even scholars who acknowledged that magic was more widespread and pervasive than this narrow attribution regularly restricted their consideration of magic to its preliterate and non-Western manifestations (offering disclaimers to the effect that magic is particularly “well exemplified in rude communities”).¹¹⁷

The scientific vs. religious dualism established and institutionalized during the Enlightenment pervades through academic assessments of magic and witchcraft. Many an academic has fashioned themselves and their scholarship in likeness of the hyper-coloniz-

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 6

¹¹⁵ Coudert, “Probing Women,” 232.

¹¹⁶ Yancy, 6.

¹¹⁷ Styers, 9.

y Van Pelt from 1995's *Jumanji*, with scholarship on non-dominant religious practices being more castigations of the othered spiritualities, rarely trying to understand authentic enactments of practices from the standpoint of those who inherit rituals. This makes sense in the overall scheme of dominant discourses that deploy accusations of magic as a mechanism of control. Academic delineations of these practices recapitulate a civilizing process favoring Western meanings, ideologies, and norms painting othered rituals as primitive, not real/empirical, and therefore, less worthy of respect and academic acknowledgement of/for how those acts produce knowledges.

Surprisingly (or not), ideas of language as magic and spells as rhetoric are as old as the witch archetype and the rhetorical tradition. One of the earliest conceptualizations of our discipline orients language and magic with *psychagogia* or the “skillful leading of souls.”¹¹⁸ The Sophists and their penchant for exploring the fluidity of truths was appealing and captivated their audiences – leading them to be spellbound by words. The *psychagogia* of the Sophists, according to Plato, was a “magical power to direct the human soul at its will and to persuade” towards good and evil (almost always evil, because ugh, Plato).¹¹⁹ Within our discipline and the academy at large, academics have cast conjurations over how we approach research and knowledges outside of Western hegemonic frames. A spell that curses us with blindness to the wonders of a nuanced and idiosyncratic world and curses us with monotony bred from homogeneity. Such self-fulfilling hexing should not be surprising considering the replication of methodology and

¹¹⁸ Beaumont, "Pater as Psychagogue," 10.

¹¹⁹ Rostagni, "A New Chapter," 27.

frameworks should produce the same results.¹²⁰ With magical conceptions of rhetoric being as old as the tradition, discipline-specific scholarship (to rhetoric/communication) is not as plentiful or varied as one would think it could be. Though recent methodological practices like critical rhetoric (with its various methodological intersections) have become common place in our rejection of those former ideals, they are still pervasive and enacted despite what many of us tell ourselves.

Scholars like Joshua Gunn, William Covino, and Julie Schutten have produced the most notable work on the communicative characteristics of magic, witchcraft, and witches. Covino provides a base for understanding the *power* of language and argues that “every utterance is always dangerous, liable to invoke evil forces with the power to affect human bodies and souls.”⁵ All language has the potential to emanate forces and create material change. Covino extends this initial argument to elucidate on the connotations surrounding magic, sorcery, witches, and sorcerers to highlight that power dynamics decide what is defined as simple language or a transgressive spell. Gunn looks at the notable historical figures like Aleister Crowley and Helen Blavatsky to forward a framework for the generic characterizations of occult rhetoric. Analyzing the relationship between pop culture texts like *Practical Magic* and the polysemy of the witch, Schutten contends that messages that reinforce ‘appropriate’ messaging of ‘good’ vs ‘bad’ magic

¹²⁰ Theoretically, under the scientific method replicating an experiment with the same approaches should reproduce the same results. This also applies to social sciences and humanities. While replication is useful to make sure we do not have another Andrew Wakefield, it is commonly relied on out of laziness and the maintenance of power. Often, replication is completely antithetical to the goal of “furthering the discipline” by “producing knowledge.”

have the potential to frame hidden populations like Neo-Pagans in a more “acceptable” light to non-witches/Pagans.”¹²¹

Past scholarship, though detailed, is based in hegemonic Western frameworks and ideologies of magic, the occult, witches, and their relation to/roles in society. Each of the scholars above provide pieces to the larger puzzle but are insufficient to explain this contemporary reclamation in a few important ways: 1) Western frameworks of magic are centered on either domination and violence or appropriation and indigenous erasure; 2) figures who appropriate(d) subaltern spiritualities are privileged as authorities with the insights and actions of those with sociopolitical power being preferred when it was marginalized bodies and their epistemologies that were being burned as witches; 3) a notable feature of this contemporary resurgence of witches is the awareness of the power dynamics used to form mainstream connotations of magic and active resistance to those ideals. It is imperative to situate “utterances of magic within their appropriate context” in order to “see what information we can elicit which may help us towards the understanding of spells and the elucidation of words.”¹²² Contemporary witches are not just the “granddaughters of the witches who could not be burned” but they are also the witches not content in replicating hegemonic standards. This incarnation is working to decolonize practices coopted as New Age during the Boomer spiritualist trend or outright stolen by Victorian Era secret societies and fin de siècle occultists believing such rituals would imbue them with even more social power. As I hope to demonstrate throughout

¹²¹ Schutten, “Invoking Practical Magic,”331-354.

¹²² Rothenberg & Rothenberg, *Symposium of the Whole*, 109.

this project, the witches of focus are anti-hegemonic and resistive to traditions that perpetuate oppression from curses disseminated by the socially powerful.

Magic is a convoluted idea. This project seeks to attend to unpacking some of that mess in addition to analyzing the discourses and rhetoric of contemporary witches doing the same. A notable characteristic of this generation of witches is the acknowledgement, awareness, and active work to reclaim individual and cultural/community power by rejecting power structures, which include organized religion. Though many contemporary witches are aligned with broad Neo-Pagan organizations like Wicca, a significant amount of witches act in opposition to them, with the argument being they perpetuate harmful power through cultural appropriation and silencing the communities who historically have practiced those rituals. Similarly, that scholarship also highlights complicated notions of spirituality that are just as convoluted as ideas of magic. With this current incarnation of counter cultural witches are the discourses and actions with the ethics/goals of decolonizing witchcraft and rejecting power structures – this often means rejecting terms like ‘spirituality,’ ‘religion,’ ‘faith,’ etc. If “criticism should be responsive to the concerns and well-being of the communities in which it resides and to which it is addressed,”¹²³ then this project recognizes that past scholarship is often deeply imbued in those problematic Western frameworks and ill-fit to explain the resurgence, ideologies, and actions of contemporary witches. Sara Baugh-Harris and Darrel Wanzer-Serrano

¹²³ Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, *Critical Questions*, 3-14.

forwards that “challenging the institutionalization of white normativity requires more than a shift in content” and I hope to do just that – more than shift the content.¹²⁴

In line with William L. Nothstine, Carole Blair, and Gary Copeland, I too contend that “universal, abstract, methodological strictures and formulae for critics” are ill-suited to contemporary rhetorical criticism – especially ones like this project in which the topic demands attention to idiosyncrasies in order to gauge the discursive ‘bigger picture.’¹²⁵ This project rejects a singular universal theory of explanation and instead engages in a “meaning-centered” approach to criticism that attends to the nuances presented by the subjects of evaluation in each chapter. My methodological praxis engages in what McKerrow describes as the “new instrumentality” of critical rhetoric “that demands alternative approaches, especially in relation to reclaiming the utility of a meaning-centered orientation.”¹²⁶ A critical rhetorical methodology “examines the dimensions of domination and freedom as they are exercised in a relativized world,” and attending to the various symbolic/social devices at play broadens the understanding of how relationships of power/knowledge are integrated into society.¹²⁷ Though this project concerns itself with witchcraft and magic, the methods and theories deployed herein work to *demytify* dominant power structures “by demonstrating the silent and often non-deliberate ways in which rhetoric conceals as much as it reveals through its relationship

¹²⁴ Baugh-Harris and Wanzer-Serrano, “Against Canon,” 337.

¹²⁵ Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, 9.

¹²⁶ McKerrow, “Social Movement Scholarship,” 35.

¹²⁷ Mckerrow, “Critical Rhetoric,” 91.

with power/knowledge.”¹²⁸ Though my very much embodied imposter syndrome leaves me uncomfortable in making assessments of “what to do” this project is “future-oriented” in the likeness of Sara Ahmed, McKerrrow, and others who outline critical methodologies as being concerned with and identifying potential avenues for possibility, agency, and social change.

I align my methodological interests with intersectional pursuits that incorporate interdisciplinary, non-canon, and non-Western perspectives that I believe call attention to the various ways people live every day and publicly (in the neotraditional sense). The strict measures of Enlightenment rationality applied to witchcraft/magic have been diffused with time and permeated into academic disciplinary standards. Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland explain “if scientism has created rigid and narrow criteria for what counts as knowledge, disciplinarity tends and maintains those requirements. It grants status only to those whose work meets those rigid criteria. The reward system is inherently conservative, but it also is potentially disabling to criticism.”¹²⁹ Disciplinarity mechanisms reinforce the academic ideological status quo thereby stifling innovative, nontraditional, or simply new ways of thinking about the ways in which meaning works in contemporary society, the significance of our research or what our scholarship can do.¹³⁰ Speaking outside of disciplinarity is huge risk – especially for a doctoral candidate like myself – because disrupting a conservative, nearly static system can bring “deferrals

¹²⁸ Ibid, 92.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 47.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 49.

of one's own advancement, or even unemployment."¹³¹ To reiterate the power dynamics at play here it let us remember the root of *disciplinarity*.

As a critic, I understand that I am not only evaluating the socially political and rhetorical, but I am also performing my own political and rhetorical enactments. The phantom of objectivity has scholastic currency yet simply reproduces the same type of scholarship just spun in seemingly new ways. My experiences (as a queer, neurodivergent white woman from intergenerational poverty) un/knowingly inform my interpretations and analyses and I am dedicated to understanding how my own experiences manifest throughout my evaluations and judgements provided below. Because of mechanisms of disciplinarity, I must walk the walk and talk the talk of rhetorical paradigms and do so efficiently in order to prove my expertise in the subject and ability to research. As a doctoral candidate, I recognize that my scholastic aptitude must be measured and judged. However, I do also wish to challenge some of these mechanisms because not doing so has consequences that are most likely to affect other marginalized scholars and the way they present their knowledges.

Following Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland I also seek to displace/challenge disciplinary norms dictating both critic and subject's ways of speaking.¹³² I understand that I am implicated in the perpetuation of these discourses and am highly aware of the fact that they are inescapable (especially with my precarious academic status). However, I do challenge these norms while also trying to maintain an efficient level of conformity

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland, 49.

which is supposed to represent my fitness of professionalism. Writing in my voice, though at times transgressive of disciplinarity, gives readers an intimate understanding of my inventional processes, makes the influences of my critical judgements known, and provides less boring reading, at least...I think. I come from a primary/secondary education in a school district that consistently ranks among the worst five in the US and no matter how much I am able to conform, my experiences inevitably come through (as they do for everyone). The vulnerability I spill onto these pages is informative to the overall project in various ways. With the risk of disruption, I hope to follow in the paths of other transgressive scholars used throughout this dissertation who rip open disciplinary logics in the expansion of our scholastic horizons. Like Bernadette Calafell, “my scholarly and personal commitments lie squarely in the questions of identities: race, class, gender, body size, sexuality, nationality, and ability.”¹³³ With this ethic, I am also dedicated to and hope to following the likes of Haneen Ghabra and Calafell when they argue that such ideological methodological work can and should “create feminist alliances that are grounded in shared experiences of otherness.”¹³⁴

1.3 Memories of Magic

In researching the use of rhetorical spells as an expression and act of political resistance against hegemonic powers, rhetorical and cultural frameworks concerning memory, hauntology, abjection, biowpower, and carnivalesque performances are of interest in guiding my analyses. Below I have provided a review of how memory relates

¹³³ Calafell, *Monstrosity*, 5.

¹³⁴ Ghabra & Calafell, “From Failure and Allyship,” 39.

to the rhetorical dissemination of spells and have made a few tangential connections so far (aside from biopower, which I believe is implied in the historical context). The full capacity of human brain activity and its ability to store memory is still unknown but what can be established is that humans have a “unique cognitive advantage” in having active memories rather than passive emotions.¹³⁵ Instead of being governed by passive emotions, the activation of memory informs our *logos* and therefore, how we move about the world.¹³⁶ Memory refers to our “still present past” and how interpretations of that legacy guide our present actions and future consequences.¹³⁷

Our bodies not only house our memories but also the cultural memories passed down intergenerationally – they become an inheritance of identity. Jeff Pruchnic and Kim Lacey note that memory may have a key role in societal organization and scholars like Sara VanderHaagen and Kendall Phillips attest that is because the process of memory is an entirely rhetorical process. The activeness of our memories can be altered rhetorically with “artificial memories” that are constructed to appear familiar and therefore, natural.¹³⁸ “Artificial” insofar as these memories are 1) not necessarily a lived experience, and 2) not necessarily in line with various historical accountings of an event. How we remember is not universal (is anything, really)? Constructions of memory are specific “situated interpretation of the past, oriented toward the persuasion and construction of

¹³⁵ Pruchnic & Lacey, “The Future of Forgetting,” 476.

¹³⁶ Here I am referring to logos as being an individualized rationality that while influenced by collective meanings/norms, is also nuanced to how we as people move about in this world.

¹³⁷ Keeling, *The Witch’s Flight*, 140.

¹³⁸ Pruchnic & Lacey, 477.

particular, though not always definite audiences.”¹³⁹ Take the collective/public memory of the United States Civil War: discourses of the “great lost cause,” “forever rebels,” and “states’ rights” often circumvent the historical evidence of the reasons why the war was fought (slavery, obviously) and/or advantages the Confederacy had (like being economically supported by the British). Additionally, memories of ‘progress’ with linear time often convolute how hard achieving social change really is. Phillips argues that memory is ‘living’ in that it is:

In stark contrast to a sense of a fixed, singular history, suggesting that societies are both constituted by their memories and, in their daily interactions, rituals, and exchanges, constitute these memories. As well, this sense of memory highlights the extent to which these constituted and constituting memories are open to contest, revision, and rejection. Thus, in a very real sense, to speak of memory in this way is to speak of a highly rhetorical process.¹⁴⁰

Instead of static reality whereby history is immutable, memory accounts for various interpretations of our pasts and how those understandings inspire use to act politically. In line with Phillips, VanderHaagen contends:

Envisioning the past as rhetorical also emphasizes the significance of emotional entanglement with the past, the malleability of our shared stories about the past, the importance of accessibility, and the need for stories about the past that connects the individual and the collective. What invisibly unites all of these emphases is the human agent who feels that engagement, advocates for those changes, accesses the story, and uses history to situate themselves within a cultural narrative.¹⁴¹

¹³⁹VanderHaagen, *Children’s Biographies*, 11.

¹⁴⁰ Phillips, Introduction, 2.

¹⁴¹ VanderHaagen, 25

Because memory is not inert and absolute, how we remember is largely influenced by hegemonic epistemologies. Constructed memories (particularly in line with dominant/State ideologies) are designed to immerse someone in perceivably universal concepts that are actually unique to the hegemonic and deployed to order society. Memories carry meanings and those memories commonly define *who we are* as a group/culture and individual. When institutionalized and applied as a civilizing process, memories “become stabilized, indeed reified, into fixed forms that present themselves as necessary and ‘true.’”¹⁴²

Culturally authoritative memories do not necessarily line up with academically established historical evidence, nor do the memories alternative and counter to the dominant telling, necessarily. How people negotiate various memories and meanings direct us to ways in which we contest, subvert, maintain, and/or supplant dominant recollections of history; such negotiation is inherently rhetorical.¹⁴³ Historical actuality, hegemonic retellings, and counter-memories are heightened in conflict when interpreting our violent pasts with Andrea Bieler forwarding “the question of how stories of violent conflicts, genocide, and enduring structural violence are depicted and interpreted becomes an issue of political identity formation in the present.”¹⁴⁴ Power constrains the normative, ‘approved’ version to reflect more favorably on the dominant powers or merely justifies such horror with statements like *insert douchebaggery voice* “well,

¹⁴² Phillips, “The Failure of Memory,” 218.

¹⁴³ VanderHaagen, 25.

¹⁴⁴ Bieler, “Monuments of Historical Trauma,” 342

history is written by the victors.” Enacted institutionally, memories become an essential framework in which people identify themselves (in/out of accordance with prevailing judgements) and also how they “urge others to remember them, for the promise of the past presented to us.”¹⁴⁵

Because memories influence our individual and cultural identities, cultural narratives of *how we got here* become unifying symbols that silence alternative accountings of the *truths that occurred*. Under the frameworks of domination and control, counter/anti-hegemonic memories are often violently suppressed; “thus, we can say that the seemingly ubiquitous admonition to ‘Never Forget’ can be more accurately read as ‘Never Remember Differently.’”¹⁴⁶ The further a dominant memory is embedded within a culture, the more it determines a collective epistemology. What we think we know undeniably relies on our recollection of memory (in various forms). What we think we know consciously and unconsciously influence how we define ourselves and how we relate to people outside of our frames of reference.

With a “still present past” many of our memories are haunted. Ghosts of memory “trouble and disrupt—haunt—our best efforts to move forward.”¹⁴⁷ Ghosts indicate that there is no easy relationship with the past and unhealed/unrecognized trauma disturbs how we presently move which in turn, will have future implications. The past is not merely “the past.” Most scholars discussing haunted memories do so under Derrida’s

¹⁴⁵ Phillips, “The Failure of Memory,” 216

¹⁴⁶ Wale, Gobodo-Madikizela, & Prager, Introduction, 12.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 1.

framework of hauntology whereby “absent presences that haunt our being-in-the-world—from the past and from a future not yet brought into being.”¹⁴⁸ These “absent presences” (ghosts) usually take form in psychic trauma that is commonly passed down intergenerationally through individualistic retellings of memory in relation to the master-narrative of the memory. The master-narrative of memory is not simply discursive and psychic but also enacted through material social, economic, and political governance.¹⁴⁹ Collective haunted experiences are almost solely experienced (or at least researched) by marginalized people who experience mass, institutional violence. Power structures perpetuating the oppression of subaltern groups breeds a milieu where injustice flows through temporalities. Ghosts of memory are spirits of trauma and the specter of injustice – *seen* but *unseen*; collectively experienced, but unable to be verified empirically.¹⁵⁰ Despite not being able to be “proven empirically,” ghosts of memory do share significant similarities with the STEM sub-field of epigenetics.

Epigenetics refers to the ways in which DNA is altered. This change is not in the actual structuring of DNA but rather the “chemical tags” placed on our biological codes through lived experiences.¹⁵¹ In an article for the *BBC*, Martha Henriques details these social effects on our genetic makeup by explaining “tiny chemical tags are added to or

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 7

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 3-7.

¹⁵⁰ In reference to etymology, “empirically” is rooted in the collection of data for the *empire* – thus what we consider to be empirical evidence is determined by hegemonic ideologies. I learned this from Santhosh. Thanks, Santhosh!

¹⁵¹ I am explaining this to highlight the continued double bind placed on marginalized experience in reference to “actuality,” “truth,” and “efficacy.” But also, I think it is an interesting connection.

removed from our DNA in response to changes in the environment in which we are living. These tags turn genes on or off, offering a way of adapting to changing conditions without inflicting a more permanent shift in our genomes.”¹⁵² Basically, the chemical marking of our genes through experiences make our genes constantly adaptable without changing the actual biology of the gene. Trauma is the main external factor looked at in epigenetic studies. The time(s) in life in which epigenetic markers are created are still widely unknown and what is known is contested. Some scholars suggest that the age in which trauma occurs influences the intensity of the chemical tag(s) placed on genes. Stresses in neonatal, natal, and early life periods are commonly associated with higher levels of stress in adulthood.¹⁵³ One study of United States (US) veterans of the War on Terror had participants qualify for inclusion by having met a 19-item deployment experience checklist that gauged their combat trauma. After meeting the 19 items to qualify, blood samples were drawn and compared to samples pre-deployment. Comparing the samples allowed researchers to assess if/how many epigenetic changes were made during combat experiences while also accounting for soldiers who would already have nonnormative epigenetic markers due to early childhood trauma. This study concluded that the combat experiences of these soldiers directly increased their epigenetic aging in ways that were not present pre-deployment.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² Henriques, “Can the Legacy.”

¹⁵³ Heim & Binder, “Current Research Trends,” 102.

¹⁵⁴ Boks, Marco, P., et al. “Longitudinal Changes of Telomere,” 506-512.

Most epigenetic research is still in its early stages and often criticized for not having representational sample sizes (in human studies). Epigenetics in general is a fairly new field, but promising evidence has emerged indicating epigenetic markers can be passed intergenerationally. We inherit the biological sequences of our parents and their non-fixed epigenetic adaptations; we then accumulate our own epigenetic changes in addition to our ancestors which are then passed to the next generation to repeat the same process. We are biologically haunted by/with our ancestor's memories. Scholars have speculated about the echoes of trauma experienced by our ancestors, often after wars, genocides, and famines with epigenetics providing more proof of those claims. The focus on epigenetics & trauma indicates we inherit the fears of our ancestors that are enacted expressed intergenerationally through sensitivities to the environmental stimuli that inspired the fear.¹⁵⁵ Henriques' article mentions that all studies about transgenerational epigenetics focus on the passing from fathers to sons, but the passing from mothers to daughters or vice versa should not be excluded from potential conversation despite not being included in studies.¹⁵⁶

Pruchnic and Lacey's assessment of memory accounts for epigenetics and ghosts of memory by advancing Merlin Donald's framework of sociocultural forces and physiological changes on the body that essentially forwards institutional impacts on the body (in the form of healthcare, poverty, access to resources, etc.). While these institutional forces absolutely play a role in how our bodies hold memories, the

¹⁵⁵ Henriques.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

psychic/spectral forces of memory are also a major factor in how people move in the world. Wale, Gobodo-Madikizela, and Prager explain that those victimized by mass (institutional) violence carry “impossible histories” in their bodies. These ghosts of memory haunt and possess the traumatized – forcing their bodies to continually flashback to “the experience as if it was happening in real time.”¹⁵⁷ Grace Kagoyire, Marianne Vysma, and Annemiek Richters further explain:

Violence is inscribed on the bodies and in the psyches of the survivors, and anyone coming into intimate contact with those bodies and psyches can see the scars on the body and feel the emotional violence that still continues to radiate within them, as it were. It is precisely that which is felt but not seen that behaves like a ghost, some entity that haunts the house, and sometimes even the parent herself: it is real, but not acknowledged or explained. A ghost is also a temporal entity, one that belongs to the past but invades the present. So the emotion that is trapped between the parents and children belongs to the experiences during collective violence and not to the current parent-child relationship. In that sense, it is a foreign body.¹⁵⁸

Katherine McKittrick’s notion of bodymemory has similar characteristics in that marginalized bodies experience violence systemically and systematically and those memories are passed down intergenerationally.¹⁵⁹ McKittrick’s framework advances that these bodies memories are commonly disseminated intergenerationally through “generational remembrances, teachings, forewarnings, and advice.”¹⁶⁰ Divergently,

¹⁵⁷ Wale, Gobodo-Madikizela, & Prager, 11.

¹⁵⁸ Kagoyire, Vysma, & Annemiek Richters, “The Ghosts of Collective Violence,” 246-247.

¹⁵⁹ McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, 50. It should be noted that McKittrick’s framework is specific to the human geographies of black women and the dynamics specific to them. I do not wish to appropriate or universalize this concept as much as call attention to connections between various theoretical frameworks influencing how I am conceptualizing this project.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Kagoyire, Vysma, and Richters note that violence is inscribed onto bodies “in ways that reproduce suffering in the present and annihilate a sense of “future time”¹⁶¹ Such reproductions are can be enacted in how survivors relate to their families, friends, and society as a whole. Specific to their relationship with their children and other survivors of mass violence, Kagoyire, Vysma, and Richters’ study of haunted memories following the genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda argues that the repercussions of mass institutional violence influence interactions between survivors, their children, and the larger community, therefore creating a psychic crypt in which people are collectively haunted intergenerationally.¹⁶²

Haunted memories “alert us to the forms of injustice that continue to unsettle our attempts to move forward,” and challenge us to reconsider how we think about the linearity of progress.¹⁶³ Kim Wale, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, and Jeffrey Prager urge scholars to reconsider our epistemological understandings of power, violence, trauma, and traditional academic standards of proof in that those paradigms contribute more ghosts to our haunted landscapes through the erasure of experiences that cannot be empirically quantified/qualified and are not taken for what people are saying they are.¹⁶⁴ They push scholars to listen to the ghosts because they “ask us to search again for new

¹⁶¹Kagoyire, Vysma, and Richters, 248.

¹⁶²Ibid.

¹⁶³ Wale, Gobodo-Madikizela, & Prager, 4.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

pathways and imaginations to listen and tend to the ghosts of our painful past and the messages they may have for us in the present and for the future.”¹⁶⁵

1.4 Conclusion

As this introduction has illustrated, frameworks of memory, abjection, monstrosity, and transgression run throughout this project. Within the context of this project, all of the themes above are emblematic of existing through/in otherness and exile from the dominant symbolic/social order. In this introduction, I have highlighted how witches are imbued with (social) power throughout history, how that power became a threat to the hegemonic order on the onset of modernity, and how modern meanings of magic have *civilized* Western epistemologies towards an absolutist understanding of reality.

The second chapter of this project analyzes a contemporary depiction of witches as threats to established orders/realities in the popular Netflix television series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Starting this analysis off in the realm of popular culture offers an opportunity to explain the dynamics of the archetypal witch and the meanings assigned to her/them. Coalescing theories of abjection and monstrosity to memory and pop culture, this chapter seeks to explore how depictions of the witch reflect the historical tensions of competing meanings of witchcraft and how witch characters negotiate their agency.

This is followed by an investigation of the witch as feminist point of identification which in the US dates back to the suffrage movement and continues through the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

contemporary social justice movement. The third chapter of this project relies on the evaluation of witch as archetype outlined in the preceding chapter to understand how it becomes a point of identification for feminist action through an examination of the countercultural (late 1960s/early 1970s) social justice group Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH). Dissident ethics and tactics of the witch as heretical other are investigated through frameworks of transgression including the carnivalesque and Cynic rhetoric. These inarguably Western paradigms are analytically complicated (in a generative way) by infusing critical perspectives like abjection and monstrosity into a more nuanced understanding of dissident rhetoric.

This dissertation continues the explanation of witch as point of identification in the following chapter through an evaluation of contemporary enactments of political witchcraft and magic. The expansion of the digital sphere has influenced the ways in which subaltern bodies identify with the witch archetype, disseminate information, perform rituals as political action, create community, and recontextualize the witch's heretical history in the here and now. Interestingly, the digital sphere has also created a space for a new iteration of conservative sorcerers who contemporarily deploy magical memes through online imageboards in pursuit of renegotiating and reaffirming traditionalist power dynamics they feel are denied to them. In order to account for the huge web (pun intended) of complexities associated with digital influences of political magic this chapter engages in a communicative ecological approach to evaluation that does not divide the digital from the material sphere in maintain a meaning-centered approach to critical rhetoric.

Finally, this project concludes by situating the evolution of political witchcraft with its possibility for future action by discussing decolonial, intersectional, anti-capitalist, endeavors that are currently engaging in efforts to reify witchcraft as an emancipatory practice that honors generational subjugated knowledges, claims responsibility for breaking generational curses facilitating hegemonic violence, and reaffirms the revolutionary heresy as an essential characteristic of the witch. I end this project by providing my own framework for spells as rhetoric in order to 1) broaden our disciplinary (and larger academic) understanding of how hegemonic rationality limits how we evaluate and engage in the world outside of dominant boundaries and 2) to heighten the potential of future agentive witchcraft. If the witch is “our downfall” and “our deliverance” this actual new age of witches may bring the downfall of the old while providing us with transformative possibilities of the future and how to act within the present to make sure that those spells come to fruition.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ Grossman, 7.

Chapter 2 A Little Wicked: Subjugation and Emancipation in Netflix's *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*

“Relax, it’s only magic.” 1996’s *The Craft* has certainly become a cult classic over the last twenty-five years, beloved by many a millennial who found power in recognizing “we are the weirdos, mister.” It is admittedly a messy movie but the irony of “relax, it’s only magic” oozed outside of the narrative and manifested right before my young eyes. As a child of the 90’s I was born in the midst of Satanic Panic in the United States - with my religious family believing they were in a fight or flight (individually and culturally) against damnation. My (nuclear) family was not unique in their fears of witchcraft and Satanism. I remember seeing news stories of a 2001 Harry Potter book burning based not on J.K. Rowling’s TERF-iness but because it spread ideas of witchcraft, magic, and ‘Satanism’ to young readers.¹⁶⁷ I remember the anxiety-inducing hype regarding the theatrical release of *The Omen* on June 6, 2006 – an event I dutifully skipped school for as there was no way in Hell I would have been given permission. Similarly, I can now admit that my family was right in their assertions that Marilyn Manson is an amoral person, however, they believed it was because he was the “antichrist

¹⁶⁷ "'Satanic' Harry Potter Books Burnt," BBC World Edition, December 31, 2001, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/1735623.stm>. For reference, TERF is the acronym for trans-exclusive-radical-feminist.

superstar” who had ribs removed to perform fellatio on himself - not the recently unsurfaced allegations of serial abuse.¹⁶⁸

The supposed threat of Satan’s influence has loomed over the entirety of my life in some surprising ways – which really should not be surprising considering how Satan has been tied to and mobilized against feminine power for centuries. As established in the previous chapter, there is a forced connection between feminine agency and notions of the Satanic/evil. If “rebellion is the sin of witchcraft” (1st Samuel 15:23) then witches can be understood to represent a “religion of revolution.”¹⁶⁹ That which is considered evil/Satanic/witchcraft is ultimately considered “a rejection of that which forms the basis of Western knowledge, beliefs, morality, and culture.”¹⁷⁰ A loose Hebrew translation of “adversary,” Satan represents that which defies institutionalization, with connotations of evil manifested in/through social delineations of otherness. Ironically, despite Western hegemony claiming to be emissaries of an all-knowing and omnipotent God/god, Christianity based Western society has largely been guided by the (false) assumption that the mere existence of difference somehow negates their existence.¹⁷¹ This assumption still underlies Western systems and ideologies. Lucifer’s first appearance in the Judeo-Christian Bible is in the role of tempter to transgression. The continued presence of Satanic/witch-centered panics, (like the contemporary Q-Anon conspiracies and hysteria following Lil Nas X giving the Devil a lap dance in a music video) illustrates that

¹⁶⁸ I am using this footnote to stress the designation of “allegedly,” because lawsuits.

¹⁶⁹ Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism*, 206.

¹⁷⁰ Fitch, *Paranormal Nation*, 259.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 260.

hegemonic powers continuously (re)signify Satan, witches, and resistance in specific here-and-nows. In doing so, those delineated under Satanic categorization are connected to the cosmic-and-infinite threat of defiance poses to the social order.

Isaac Ariail Reed contends that the symbol of the witch “came to stand for evil itself, and the most important battle of all,” with the “fundamental duty of those who are not with Satan to root out the witches.”¹⁷² With Satan and (‘his’) witches being framed as the preeminent adversaries to Western society we can understand moral panics surrounding their supposed evil as “struggles for cultural power.”¹⁷³ Social justice initiatives are commonly framed as “evil” with the status quo being godly, righteous, and civilized. Women have been and continue to be at the forefront of social justice initiatives, and the gender of leaders/members/transgressors undoubtedly compounds nefarious meanings assigned to endeavors of social change. It is during these times of significant socio-cultural change/upheaval that the witch reemerges to allegorically create Hell on Earth but her/their specter can be seen weaving in and out of the shadows outside of the fixed time of mortals and their squabbles.

Haunted memories bring forth our collective ideas of a specific past “to unsettle the living present, but also shape our attempts to understand it.”¹⁷⁴ Feminist scholars like Red Chidgey dislike the ghost metaphor as they believe that it centers too much on grief, the immaterial, and that it presumably assumes a post-feminist lens in that a haunting of

¹⁷² Ibid, 83.

¹⁷³ Reed, “Deep Culture in Action,” 65.

¹⁷⁴ Munford & Waters, *Feminism and Popular Culture*, 20.

feminism assumes that it is past us.¹⁷⁵ However, I contend that the specter is an apt symbol to tie to the witch and contemporary intersectional feminism. Rosalind Gill asks if we are currently in a post-postfeminist world. No longer vilified like it was in previous generations/decades, feminism – more specifically intersectional feminism – is a title/identity no longer considered shameful among many young people today.¹⁷⁶ Gill elucidates that we are experiencing a complex social moment “characterized by a multiplicity of (new and old) feminisms which co-exist with revitalized forms of anti-feminism and popular misogyny.”¹⁷⁷ Since specters call forth the old and multiply it with the new it is only fitting that we can (somewhat) assume that we are living in a haunted present and younger generations are ready and willing to reckon with the oppressive entities our ancestors created, our forebearers ignore(d), and we directly benefit from.

Ghosts and witches often accompany each other in popular narratives and heighten each other’s abjection of the social order. Both disturb identity by collapsing meaning. Both pervert classic social demarcations of what seemingly is and is not. Both ghosts and witches continue to haunt contemporary reality. Built on haunted memories of women and other subaltern identities being abject and monstrous Netflix’s series *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (CAoS) disseminates a narrative wherein the ghosts, specters, and demons of the past are not ignored or exorcised but rather are negotiated and reconciled with in order to create a future that does come to fruition. Brydie Kosmina

¹⁷⁵Chidgey, *Feminist Afterlives Assemblage*, 23-28. Munford and Waters note similar concerns but are not as explicit or detailed as Chidgey.

¹⁷⁶ Gill, "Post-Postfeminism?", 611.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 612.

argues that responsibly reconciling with our ghosts requires that we “respond to it, and to take future action as a result of this response.”¹⁷⁸ Communicating and ameliorating these ghosts provides characters with the ability to “reconceptualize and reinterpret” how oppression collapses linear time, “develop a sense of dignity and self-worth” through their connection to the past and determine the best course of socio-political action for the future.¹⁷⁹

The ways in which witches are represented on screen demonstrates cultural changes as they are occurring.¹⁸⁰ For Kosmina, “texts can be read as clues to important historical changes in the structures of cultural memory,” and witch texts offer us insight to how the witch has been used throughout contemporary history as a symbol of radical feminine potential.¹⁸¹ This chapter explores the witch’s relationship to Western (hetero)patriarchy in the binary forms of God/Satan authoritarianism. From Satanic witches of cinematic history to Sabrina Spellman’s enchanting narrative we can see that rebellion being the sin of witchcraft extends beyond Western Christianity’s demarcations of propriety in the social order. Issues of subjugation and emancipation challenge notions of Satanic feminism while the ghosts of witches past urge us to reconsider where the marginalized find their true power.

¹⁷⁸ Kosmina, “Re-Remembering the Past,” 52.

¹⁷⁹ Munford & Waters, 24.

¹⁸⁰ Ho, “Introduction,” 3.

¹⁸¹ Kosmina, “Re-Remembering the Past,” 45.

This chapter explores the hauntings of abject witches in CAoS's four season narrative and how those ghosts therein allude/speak to power stolen/repressed by oppressive hegemonic structures and offer visions of how that power can be reclaimed. A review of Satanic feminism is necessary to understand the intersections of power in seemingly emancipatory frameworks, like the witches in *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina*. Therefore, this chapter starts by providing a history of the Satanic witch and her role in subverting the status quo...but only so far. This is followed by an analysis of the show's four seasons. Paying close attention to the demons of Western (hetero)patriarchy, this criticism details how white male domination proliferates in ideologies usually considered to be transgressive and supposedly liberatory. In turn, the remaining criticism highlights how spirits of the past can guide subaltern identities towards a new future of reclamation, preventing/altering/mediating the prophecy of continued subjugation.

2.1 Literature Review: Cinematic Conjuring

Just as the history of the witch is long, so, too, is her/their pop culture representation(s). To detail that full history would be a book of its own. In fact, Heather Greene has detailed that history in *Bell, Book, and Camera: A Critical History of Witches in American Film and Television*. Instead of recapitulating Greene's analysis this chapter locates the Satanic/diabolical witch trope as the central archetype utilized in popular narratives throughout time. Similarly, the symbol of the Satanic witch is continued in CAoS but also re(signified).

Just as in the early days of the European Witch Hunts, narratives continue to be a significant way in which meanings of witches and women are disseminated and

proliferated. Prior to the Hollywood film/television industry that now controls our consuming habits, witch narratives were present in folklore, mythology, and literature for centuries. With the pricking of thumbs and centuries' worth of meanings being developed, several sub-archetypes emerged under the larger symbol. Greene notes that "the witch is, at her most basic, a woman who lives in the space society has chosen to abandon."¹⁸² Considering the otherness that have marked the bodies labeled witches, that space is vast and ever shifting.

In the 1939 classic *Wizard of Oz* Glinda asks the bewildered Dorothy if she is "a good witch or a bad witch;" in doing so, Glinda sets up a dichotomy between "good witches" like herself in comparison to Margaret Hamilton's iconic Wicked Witch of the West (who is given no actual name in the novel or film narratives). Glinda speaks softly, wears a fabulous pink ball gown, and is adorned in glitter accessories. The Wicked Witch has green skin, a hooked nose¹⁸³, is draped in all black, and manically cackles as her army of flying monkeys menace Dorothy and her Yellow Brick Road crew. With a splash of water and a shriek of "I'M MELTING!," all that is good and righteous, in the form of Dorothy, vanquishes the principles of evil made flesh in the Wicked Witch.

For most of modern cinematic history audiences would not really have to ask if the witches they saw on screen were 'good' or 'bad'. Notwithstanding the endless rant I could go on about how subjective those terms are, cinematic witches have predominantly been framed in ways that reinforce and (re)signify Euro-heteropatriarchal means and

¹⁸² Greene, *Bell, Book and Camera*, 10.

¹⁸³ The witch's hooked nose imagery originated with to anti-Semitic imagery established in medieval Europe that linked European Jews with witches and Satan. I thought this was an important little tid bit to reinforce the witch as a monstrous analogy of otherness.

violence. Glinda is pretty much accompanied by *Bewitched*'s Samantha for 'good' Hollywood witches (we all know that Samantha's mother Agatha's mischievous ways would have her relegated to the 'bad' categorization). Later iterations (mostly in the 90s and 00s) of the witch have been complicated and arguably 'good', yet they still provide various underlying threats to the narratives they exist in. Even in plots where they are a protagonist, they are also one mere thumb prick away from becoming something wicked.¹⁸⁴

Writing about witches in the horror genre, Barbara Creed contends that the witch serves the main role of nefarious adversary: "[the witch] is usually depicted as a monstrous figure with supernatural powers and a desire for evil. Her/their other social functions as healer and seer have largely been omitted from contemporary portrayals."¹⁸⁵ Though Creed pinpoints her analysis in the horror genre, the monstrously abject witch transcends genre just as she/they transcends time. Hollywood's "golden age" coincided with increased socio-cultural conservatism, nationalism, and Western traditionalism. These early Hollywood witches are not surprising considering that most Hollywood films were industry censored by the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America's (MPPDA) Production Code Administration (PCA), run by Joseph Breen. Written by editor Martin Quigley and Jesuit Priest Father Daniel Lord, the Production Code "was based on very specific theological morality" that strictly adhered and reinforced

¹⁸⁴ An example would be Willow in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Though the precedent for her becoming "Dark Willow" is absolutely more than a mere "thumb prick" (the death of her girlfriend Tara), Willow always maintained a strict ethos of using magic in service of Buffy and maintaining the status quo up until this point. When Willow breaks from that role she becomes a formidable "big bad" who Buffy has to stop from starting the apocalypse.

¹⁸⁵ Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine*, 75.

traditional Western values.¹⁸⁶ Similarly, Breen was known to be devoutly religious and a rigid enforcer of the Hayes Code. Film historian Thomas Doherty records that Breen was an “activist editor” who: “[Brought] a missionary zeal to his custodial trust, he felt a sacred duty to protect the spiritual well-being of the innocent souls who fluttered too close to the unholy attractions of the motion picture screen.”¹⁸⁷ Though not explicitly banned by the Code, restrictions placed on “religious expression” essentially relegated the witch into animated fairytales that aligned with a “kids-version” of meanings outlined during the Burning Times. Once the PCA was all but abolished with the *Burstyn v. Wilson* in 1952 witch narratives experienced a “period of experimentation, diversification, and change.”¹⁸⁸ While experiments included the “negotiation of female agency” narratives almost always met that empowerment with a reinforcement of patriarchy. Maleficent in Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty* is a prime example of the monstrous feminine whose failure to live within her designated social boundaries makes her monstrous...and really cool. In Charles Perrault’s narrative, Maleficent is a fairy and does not have a name yet is distilled “into a singular form of feminine evil” – a witch who can shapeshift between human and actual monster.¹⁸⁹ Maleficent “haunts the narrative” with her striking physical features (both horrifying and beautiful) and her unrelenting pursuit to achieve what she feels is justice. “Maleficent is horrifying because

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 47.

¹⁸⁷ Doherty, *Hollywood’s Censor*, 9.

¹⁸⁸ Greene, 100.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 102.

she is both treacherously beautiful in her humanity, but also deeply repulsive in her inhumanity. This is what evokes the horror.”¹⁹⁰

Various sub-archetypes of the witch are idiosyncratic (like vamp, teen, folk, and fairytale witches) but typically share the characteristic of being a women with independence, “knowledge beyond the knowable,” and power.¹⁹¹ The most common depiction represented in both pre-contemporary and contemporary pop culture narratives is the trope of the “diabolical witch.” Associated with the criminal, abject, immoral, and outright evil the diabolical witch is defined by her monstrous femininity “caused” by Satanic influence and/or collaboration. The connection between Satanic and female rebellion was an easy one to make for medieval church leaders since Lucifer, the “Morning Star” fell from Heaven for his sins of pride, independence, and agency. Under authoritarian rule, independence from the norm of obedience is the ultimate heresy. When that theology is then used to civilize and control women to be “submissive” and “obedient” in the likeness of angels any deviation is representative of the penultimate, evil fallen angel. Per Faxneld explains:

The notion of women as especially receptive to Satan’s guiles is very old and quite prominent throughout much of Christianity’s history. This idea has often derived its authority from Genesis 3, which shows Eve to be the first one to succumb to the serpent’s temptation. Outside the realm of religion, it frequently appeared in fiction, art, and anti-feminist polemics.¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 103.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 65.

¹⁹² Faxneld, 2.

Satan transgresses and tempts *others* to transgress. This role serves as a powerful force for those invested in the status quo to justify the persecution and violence against seemingly ‘Satanic’ others. Anton LaVey’s controversial Church of Satan (CoS) inspired much of the symbology now associated with pop culture Satanic witches. The red/black color palette. The inverted crosses and black robes. The blood orgies. You know, the usual. LaVey was a notable if not oddly contradictory misogynist. Despite arguing for the liberation of women and for women to use their magic against weak men, LaVey’s *The Satanic Witch* is laughably not emancipatory – especially with hindsight. In addition to being trans-exclusive and deeply imbedded in (surprisingly) conservative countercultural ideologies like being anti-cannabis and quasi-fascist, *The Satanic Witch* is notably anti-women. One small shining, petty example of LaVey’s misogyny is outlined when he says, “virtue is its own punishment – ‘nice girls’ lose – and one of the surest signs of potential proficiency in witchcraft is an inability to get along with other women.”¹⁹³ With LaVey we can begin to see the tensions between outcasts (particularly women) being the Devil’s “chosen ones”¹⁹⁴ for liberation while simultaneously being subjected to patriarchal dominance.¹⁹⁵

Roman Polanski’s (ew) *Rosemary’s Baby* is undoubtedly what comes to mind for many after hearing “Satanic witches,” With the tensions between Satanic liberation and domination being rife in the narrative. The central Rosemary is impregnated with the

¹⁹³ LaVey, *The Satanic Witch*, 185.

¹⁹⁴ Faxneld, , 204.

¹⁹⁵ It is necessary to outline that while the dominant depiction of the Devil is a male embodiment there are many representations of Satan having feminine, nonbinary, and agender characteristics. Similarly, there are philosophies that align a genderqueer Lucifer with emancipation. This chapter is paying particular attention to patriarchal Satanic paradigms and how those align with the patriarchal Christian status quo.

anti-Christ following a rape orchestrated by her husband Guy and their neighbors The Castavets, leaders of a Satanic witch cult. Rosemary is tormented throughout the film with concerns over the abnormalities of her baby being gaslit as pregnant hysterics. When it is revealed that Guy quite literally sold his wife to the Devil for acting success, we learn that Rosemary's fears were wholly justified (but already justified to begin with because pregnancy is usually incredibly terrifying). After the birth and Rosemary's shock she is offered everything she could ever want: financial security and a life with a child she desperately wanted - but it came at the expense of her being raped, tormented, gaslit, and bordering on the edge of sanity. What happens to Rosemary is undeniably evil but unlike previous cinematic Satanic witches The Castavets's coven are not killed at the end, good does not triumph. This ending declared that "evil lurks just below the surface of American normalcy."¹⁹⁶

Satanic witches continue to evolve cinematically throughout the end of the 20th century and into the twentieth-first. Even children's films like Disney's now-beloved film *Hocus Pocus* (1993) notes the Sanderson Sisters' pact with the Devil. When told to go to Hell, head witch Winifred Sanderson responds with "Oh! I've been there, thank you. I found it quite lovely." In another scene the sisters find themselves in a neighborhood overrun by trick-or-treaters. When a middle-aged man emerges from his house in a devil costume and bowl of candy the sisters excitedly scream "Master!" and go running towards him. Robert Eggers's 2015 film *The Witch* is another contemporary release focusing on the Satanic witch. This critically acclaimed film follows a Puritan family in

¹⁹⁶ Greene, 134.

colonial New England who have separated themselves/were banished (it was kind of a mutual thing) from their community over concerns other Puritans have been corrupted by Satan. With themes of religious zealotry, the curse of lineage/family, patriarchal violence, and feminine rebellion *The Witch* illustrates how Satan was/is used to justify the persecution of women/femmes as others and witches. Similarly, the release of the film in 2015 just before #MeToo aided in the narrative's ability to collapse space/time and be identifiable to a generation of women/femmes experiencing a new iteration of witch hunts.

Notwithstanding *The Witch*'s acclaim, it can also be viewed as a complicated narrative. While the film's protagonist Thomasin is framed as liberated at the end, like Rosemary, that freedom has come at a huge cost and while free from the patriarchal status quo she is still under the male domination of Satan. Religious Studies scholar Laurel Zwissler argues that the Satanic witch is "a story that patriarchy tells about itself."¹⁹⁷ Recalling the *fe femina minus* argument outlined in the *Malleus* discussed in the previous chapter women were faithless because women were godless. If women are weak, they need the guidance of righteous, 'godly' men but if they fall, it is because they are weak and subjected to Satanic influence. In either case women are othered and "in need" of civilization and control. "Thomasin is caught in a power struggle between two patriarchal power structures: the Christian family (as represented by her father) and

¹⁹⁷ Zwissler, "I am That Very Witch," 1.

Satanism.”¹⁹⁸ In line with hauntological thinking, past film iterations of the witch directly impact present depictions and offer potentials for new representations in the future.

2.2 Analysis: Not Today, Satan

Dating back to Archie Comics, the character of Sabrina Spellman has a long and ever-changing history. Greene notes that “since her creation, Sabrina the Teenage Witch has become one of the most successful teen witch franchises in American culture, surviving from the early 1960s well into the millennium through multiple media formats.” Up until her most recent appearance in pop culture Sabrina would most likely be categorized as a ‘good witch’ as she does not engage in *malefica* (bad magic). Her status as ‘good’ makes her acceptable (a la Samantha from *Bewitched*) but her backstory makes her approachable and identifiable. Blonde and blue-eyes Sabrina fits within Western standards of beauty while her humor and burgeoning sexuality keeps audiences aware of her potential danger. However, her story is commonly a tragic one. After the death of her warlock father and mortal mother as an infant, she is sent to live with her aunts, Zelda and Hilda in the fictional town of Greendale (somewhere in the Northeastern United States). Zelda and Hilda raise Sabrina in the liminal space between her parents’ worlds. She attends a mortal school, has mortal friends, and a mortal boyfriend – none of whom *should* know she can actively change reality. Early depictions see Sabrina wrestle with fully becoming a witch at 16 years old, keeping her family’s magical secrets, and getting the perfect dress for the prom. Traditionally taking on a light-hearted tone suitable for a teenage audience, the Spellman family can be considered a funny one. Aunts Zelda

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 7.

and Hilda are very much an odd couple like duo despite being sisters with much in common. Sabrina is classically identified by her notable wit, and the 90s television series graced us with the magnificence of Salem – a “familiar” in the form of a black cat who gave us such wonderful one-liners like “don’t ask me. I was an English major.”

Netflix’s 2018 smash hit *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is based on the Archies Comics character who first appeared in 1962.¹⁹⁹ While this version of Sabrina Spellman shares the same blonde hair, half-witch half-mortal lineage, aunts, hometown, and friends as her predecessors she is distinctly different. Usually described as ‘darker’ than those that have appeared in comic books past and the 90s television series, this narrative centers on the trials, tribulations, joys, and (mis)adventures of a teenager faced with having enormous power at the cost of her freedom. In addition to being more literal Hell fire and brimstone than prior narratives, Netflix’s Sabrina is also more intersectional. Queerness is largely assumed among Sabrina’s coven, the Church of Night (CoN). The church’s school, the Academy of Unseen Arts, is what can best be described as “sex-positive,” sometimes bordering on manipulation. Mortal friend Theo is an openly trans character who comes out and transitions publicly in the narrative. Unlike many cinematic witch covens that are whitewashed in magical ‘darkness,’ people of color play major roles in the series included Sabrina’s cousin Ambrose (a cousin from the “old country” sent to live with the Aunts after being placed on infernal house arrest for trying and failing to murder the Pope), Prudence (an orphan/ later revealed bastard child of Father Blackwood – the misogynist High Priest of the CoN), and Roz (Sabrina’s ‘mortal’ best

¹⁹⁹ This chapter contains spoilers, obviously.

friend raised by a Christian pastor yet inheritor of “cunning” passed down by women in her patrilineal line). Issues of class, education, and colonization (though not as explicitly) arise throughout the four seasons in ways illustrated in the analysis (hopefully). Unlike her earlier counterparts, Satan (in all his names) is a central figure throughout the four-season run.

Megan Henesy argues that the series depicts “a politically aware teenage witch in an uncanny America that is at once present day and eerily ‘out-of-time’”.²⁰⁰ Elements like references, technology, fashion, slang, music, etc., are noticeably hard to pinpoint to a specific time/era. We never see characters use a cell phone, yet Aunt Hilda makes reference to one when unable to get in contact with Zelda through a “witch board.” The soundtrack moves throughout eras seamlessly and evoke particular moods to correspond to a scene. Fashion choices can be simultaneously classic and dated. It is not wholly uncommon for witch narratives to collapse time, making both the past and future alive in the present. In her analysis of Satanic witch film, *Lords of Salem*, Bernadette Calafell notes that small aesthetic elements “contribute to a cloudy sense of time [that ask] us to consider why the repetitive nature of conservative cycles and their ghosts continue to haunt us.”²⁰¹

At the beginning of the series Sabrina is stuck in a liminal space between mortal and witch worlds. Her family, being from a long lineage of Satanic witches and her father being the former High Priest of the CoN, determines the path Sabrina must take (it is

²⁰⁰ Henesy, "Leaving My Girlhood Behind," 4.

²⁰¹ Calafell, *Monstrosity*, 89.

framed she has no real choice in the matter). She must sign her name in the Book of the Beast on her 16th birthday (Halloween, of course) and exchange her soul for power. Signing her name away would require Sabrina to relinquish her ties to the mortal world – most specifically her friends (Roz, Theo, and Harvey) and desire to have a somewhat mortal existence (like attending Vassar for college). She rejects this as her lineage; her existence is not purely Satanic and never will be. This liminal space becomes a key element that both disempowers and liberates Sabrina. Additionally, this liminality provides an overarching framework for assembling haunted memories of the witch. Granted the ability to attend mortal high school and the Academy of Unseen Arts,²⁰² Sabrina’s liminal positionality is abject and monstrous yet offers her the ability to take advantage of both Christian and Satanic social orders to “better deny them.”²⁰³ The Satanic influence offers a unique narrative device for Sabrina, her family, her coven, and her friends (called “The Fright Club”) to explore the dynamics of emancipation, subjugation, agency, identity, community, and lineage. The tensions between these themes are even more exacerbated after the season two reveal of her true parentage. Seeking to create a perversion of the Christian Holy Trinity, Satan essentially manipulates Sabrina’s parents (Edward and Diana) when they ask for infernal assistance in conceiving Sabrina. Some interpretations have Lucifer as the sole biological father and others interpret a dual biological patrilineage (as Satan has to inhabit a living ‘host,’ – yes, it is weird and complicated). Basically, Lucifer asserts the role of ‘traditional’ father

²⁰² For brevity, I will just refer to the Academy of Unseen Arts as “the Academy” from here on out.

²⁰³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 15.

in Sabrina's life and claims the biological right to do so. Satanic patriarchy and misogyny in the narrative forces audiences to consider if merely flipping a hegemonic binary (Satanic vs Christian authority) is as radical and revolutionary as it is often framed as.

Sabrina and her fellow coven members are undoubtedly haunted more by the phantoms of Western heteropatriarchy than any other spectral form. Sabrina's mortal institution, Baxter High School, is overrun with white male privilege run rampant - like any high school in the Western world. A reoccurring plot line throughout the first two seasons is popular, athletic, privileged boys bullying and harassing Theo before and after he comes out as trans/publicly transitions.²⁰⁴ In various episodes Sabrina enlists coven members like the Weird Sisters (orphans taken in by the CoN comprised of Prudence, Agatha, and Dorkus) to respond to the boys' hegemonic violence with magical 'justice.' In other episodes, Sabrina aids Theo in enacting his own form of magical retribution that works to provide some sense of restorative justice. Notwithstanding subversive witchcraft working against the boys of Baxter High, Sabrina and her mortal friends continued to be othered throughout the narrative, albeit significantly less after the first witch/demoness Lilith (possessing the body of English teacher Mary Wardwell) eats the principle who abets the boys in their behavior.

The othering present in Sabrina's mortal life is not absent from her magical existence. The clear gender distinction and its implications are made apparent in the

²⁰⁴ With no clear writing conventions established for describing trans characters I have decided to maintain principles established by/in the trans community of not misgendering and/or deadnaming a trans character. For this reason, I will bracket Theo's name and omit his deadname when it is brought up in dialogue between characters.

second episode (“Dark Baptism”) when Sabrina expresses her reluctance in signing the Book of the Beast:

SABRINA: Knowing that, on some level, I... I'm giving up my freedom.

PRUDENCE: You are. In exchange for power. An even exchange.

SABRINA: But I want both. I want freedom and power.

PRUDENCE: [laughs] He'll never give you that - the Dark Lord - The thought of you, of any of us, having both terrifies him.

SABRINA: Why is that?

PRUDENCE: He's a man, isn't he?

It is contradictory that witches are one of the few (if not the only) long standing femme monsters to have agency and power yet are only ‘given’ that power through subjugating themselves to the domination of men. Even under a supposed emancipatory ideology like Satanism, women are still othered. Witches as women still “embody the ultimate male fear: uncontrollable females who, endowed with unholy powers, threaten to break free of the margins to which they must be confined.”²⁰⁵ Outside of the CAoS narrative, we see this enacted in magical orders like the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and occultists like Julius Evola and Aleister Crowley. Both Christian and Satanic/occultic authority “lay shockingly bare the social constraints that limit women’s choices until they acquiesce to male domination.”²⁰⁶ Luciferian liberation is merely emancipation of Christian domination, not domination in general.

Though the misogyny presented in CAoS’s narrative is formed around the character of Lucifer and his personal misogyny understanding how it is enacted culturally (in and outside of the narrative) can best be understood through evaluating the actions of

²⁰⁵ Madden, “We Found the Witch,” 15.

²⁰⁶ Zwissler, 5.

High Priest Faustus Blackwood and the Churches of Darkness in general. Within the narrative, all covens in the Satanic spirituality employ designations/titles that are gendered, with male magic users being called “warlocks” and women being called “witch,” – there are no trans and/or nonbinary coven members presented in the series. Additionally, women are very much treated as less than in the larger framework of Satanic spirituality. Blackwood contends that a woman has never been High Priestess and he never intends to see such act come to fruition. Members of the larger governing organization, the Witches Council, are all men who actively refuse to stop abuses going on in the CoN.²⁰⁷ Here, with this overarching androcentric organizing body supporting Satanic spirituality we see how patriarchy “not only sets the codes of conduct but also the politics of language. Words become involuntarily gendered and derogatory.”²⁰⁸

Vitriolic misogyny is certainly the key characterization of High Priest Faustus Blackwood who petulantly and violently enacts Satanic authority. When his first wife dies giving birth to twins, Zelda and Prudence (acting as her midwives) hide the birth of the first-born twin – a daughter – because they fear her fate. When Ambrose points out Zelda’s well-intentioned kidnapping she fires back with “need I remind you of the High Priest’s rather Herod-like tendencies when it comes to baby girls?” After it is revealed that he is Prudence’s biological father, Blackwood only bestows her with his name so that she will develop a closer relationship with his ‘legitimate’ children, be their caretaker after the death of their mother, and work to instill his ethical paradigms in the church. We

²⁰⁷ For brevity, I will refer to the Witches Council as the Council moving forward.

²⁰⁸ Chakraborty, “The Angel, the Witch,” 88.

do eventually see that Blackwood is willing to kill all of his children if it benefits him, although he undoubtedly favors the second-born twin – a son named Judas. Aside from the abusive relationship he has with his children he manipulates Zelda into marrying him with the goal of subduing and ultimately killing her and the rest of the Spellman family. In one of the series' more somewhat disturbing episodes audiences see Blackwood put a spell on Zelda that basically turns her into a Stepford Wife – wholly uncharacteristic of Zelda. Hilda describes the enchantment as something “warlocks used to use on their wives when they got a bit uppity.” Zelda provides a much more sinister evaluation once the spell is broken in explaining that she was entirely conscious but non-agential; Blackwood completely controlled her every movement.

Blackwood's Satanic androcentric authority is both interpersonal and professional/spiritual. The Satanic Churches of Darkness employ a strict hierarchy based on the symbolic/social order developed in Hell – solely male, and Blackwood operates a similar order along strict gender divisions in the CoN/ the Academy. He designates women students at the Academy undertake ‘feminine’ fields like potions while warlocks are placed into disciplines like conjuring. He initiates a warlock only group in the coven called the “Judas Boys” which can only rightfully be described as a Satanic version of the Proud Boys. In the second season Blackwood attempts to instill what he calls the “Five Tenants of Judas” that dictates warlock supremacy over witches and mortals. The Five Tenants of Judas will seemingly “guide [the coven] back to the past” and bring glory once again. Unrelenting and unforgiving dominating rule will see Blackwood and his Judas Boys “represent a Satanic spirit, an urge to conquer, discover and extend . . . a

zestful, life-enhancing character, a dynamism and charisma.”²⁰⁹ Within contemporary Western culture, Blackwood’s Satanic fascism would not be wholly unfamiliar to occult practitioners but not entirely known either. While some groups like CoS and the Satanic Temple (TST) position the biblical Devil as a subversive figure head instead of an actual deity, other groups like the Temple of Set (ToS), Order of the Nine Angles (ONA), and the Black Order do believe in a divine Lucifer and seek to instill a dominion of Satanic authority.²¹⁰ Like Julius Evola (discussed in the first and fourth chapters), these sorcerers see “the erosion of all gender, racial, national and cultural differences as a grave threat to human evolution, which, it is claimed, can only progress through struggle and war.”²¹¹ Satanic enactment of these principles must be total in scope. Framing his pedagogy and theology on both hedonism and Satanic tradition allows Blackwood to project his teachings as “a form of self-actualization [that] embrace[s] bodily pleasures,” but for the audience, “eventually the lines between good and evil literally blur into one another in a powerful indictment of religion and patriarchy.”²¹²

Like any sorcerer, Blackwood demands obedience and maintains power “through an insistence on essential sameness and on the irrelevance of entertaining the different, the strange, the threatening.”²¹³ Despite blasphemy acting as a conduit of power in

²⁰⁹ David Myatt, founder of neo-Nazi Satanic group Order of the Nine Angles. Found in Goodwin-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 214.

²¹⁰ Goodwin-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 214-228.

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 216.

²¹² Calafell, *Monstrosity*, 90-91.

²¹³ Covino, “Walt Disney Meets Mary,” 162.

Satanic magic, authoritative/quasi-fascist practitioners vehemently reject nonconformity to their idealized state/(of being). The witch acts as the heretical counterpart to the sorcerer who must be abjected and othered from in maintaining the existing system.²¹⁴ Though there are many witches who act against Blackwood's sorcery, he sees Sabrina as his main antagonist. Blackwood's hatred of Sabrina (and the rest of the Spellman's) is evident throughout the series (especially considering he tries to kill anyone who opposes him on multiple occasions). The precedent for his hatred is also evident: Sabrina, her family, and her friends threaten his power (implicitly and explicitly). For the first two seasons of the series Sabrina's active refusal to conform to any preassigned boundaries marks her as a threat and sparks Blackwood's ire. Constantly undermining Sabrina because of her parentage and femininity, Blackwood weighs his authoritarianism as High Priest and holder of collective memories to justify his spiritual subjugation of those under him. Sabrina is constantly critical of those collective memories and acts on her gut instincts – usually proving him wrong. Sabrina's identities as teenager and witch are both liminal, compounded by her status as mortal/witch/literal spawn of Satan. Even within the context of Satanic 'evilness' Sabrina is monstrously abject.

A sorcerer is only as powerful as their ability to maintain the illusion of their order and we can expect them to violently maintain, contain, and guard “against the sin of *curiositas*.”²¹⁵ Sabrina disrupts the infernal status quo when she challenges to compete for the title of “Top Boy” which as the name suggests, is only designed for warlocks and

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

whose role works much like a mortal Student Body President. When scoffing at her assertions does not move Sabrina's will, Blackwood serves a paper mâché recreation of her head to her Top Boy competitor and love interest, Nick Scratch. He outright refuses her, or any witch's, ascension to the position of High Priestess, threatens to and actually commits violence against Sabrina's loved ones as a means to control her actions, and even urges the Council to execute her after she starts demonstrating unimaginable powers. When a young witch, Elspeth, attempts to escape his tyranny and find refuge with Sabrina he orders his Judas Boys to kill her, and she is ultimately saved by Zelda and Prudence. Sabrina's liminality imbues her with "threatening otherness" which "transgress[es] the boundaries of bodies, social mores, and even the threshold between life and death."²¹⁶ Astral projections, teleportation, ambition, rejection of tradition, resurrection, and traveling between the realms of Earth, Purgatory, and Hell are just some of the ways Sabrina's liminal abjection violates Satanic patriarchal dominance. Sabrina as a witch spurns complex negotiation with Blackwood "because she is certain about what is wrong. Her response is not irony but wicked heretical intelligence and the refusal to compromise."²¹⁷

Because "exile from the sorcerer's kingdom is a permanent state of mind" for the witch, Sabrina's transgressions extend to the Dark Lord. Before Sabrina's relationship with Lucifer's can be evaluated in all its complexities it is necessary to explain the misogynistic base of this iteration of Satanic witchcraft – Satan. The Morningstar's

²¹⁶ Stratton, "Magic, Abjection, and Gender," 153.

²¹⁷ Covino, "Walt Disney Meets Mary," 163.

relationship with Lilith poignantly illustrates his distaste for women. Within the context of mythology, the demoness Lilith has a long, complicated, and convoluted history. Nonetheless, Faxneld contends that myths regarding Lilith commonly assign her as a companion to Satan and/or a significant member in the Court of Hell.²¹⁸ Both of these mythological features are present in CAoS's narrative, but this Lucifer/Lilith relationship can be categorized as abusive, not romantic. Lilith even presents a hallmark characterization of abusive intimate partner relationship when she explains that "he was kind at first. Gentle. [...] The more time passed since the Fall, the more he turned into this..." In the same episode Satan assure that Lilith "knows her place," and that place is not in a position of high power. The nobility in Hell constantly and derogatorily refer to Lilith as Lucifer's 'concubine,' and their efforts to remove her from any semblance of power sees them create a 'prince' from infernal mud they name Caliban who they hope will take the throne of Hell and do their bidding.²¹⁹ In both the original myth and CAoS narrative, Lilith is cast out from the Garden of Eden for refusing submission to Adam thus inspiring the creation of Eve from Adam's rib (inferring an inferiority not present in Lilith as she was also made of the Earth). The abusive relationship presented in the series in the larger context of her expulsion from Eden sees Lilith "caught in a power struggle between two patriarchal power structures:" Judeo-Christian vs. Satanic hegemony and

²¹⁸ Faxneld, *Satanic Feminism*, 61.

²¹⁹ Naming this character Caliban is consistent with many of the names given to characters in CAoS in that they pay homage to witch history and literature. However, Shakespeare's Caliban has become an important anticolonial and (broadly) indigenous figure therefore, I feel it is important to point out that the character in the Netflix series is written without any consideration of this fact. Resisting systematic oppression is completely absent from this contemporary iteration and this character even tries to enact his own form of Satanic hegemonic patriarchy. Additionally, the character is played by an attractive white male actor thus compounding this ill naming.

authority.²²⁰ Additionally, Satan's relationship with witches in the CoN is deeply violent. For example, Lucifer declares a right to 'claim' witches the night before their weddings. Zelda's terrified facial expression when the Dark Lord opens her bedroom door underscores the act as rape disguised as tradition. Satan's proclivity for sexual violence is also present in Sabrina's conception as her mother undoubtedly experienced rape by deception (exposed along with the weird biological patrilineage thing).

With Sabrina's conception, Lucifer intends to create an inversion of the Holy Trinity and bring forth the apocalypse, with Sabrina acting as his Herald of Hell/ co-ruler. Before this revelation comes out, Sabrina initially refuses to sign her name in the Book of the Beast and only agrees to do so in order to acquire the mystical powers needed to save the town of Greendale. Until she signs her name and freedom away, the Dark Lord stalks, threatens, pressures her, and ultimately commands Lilith to manipulate Sabrina into signing. This is the first instance we see Sabrina "locked in a battle of wills and nerves," as Lilith contends but it will not be the last. Like most abusers, there are several instances throughout the series when Lucifer's actions read like the tantrums of a petulant child. There are, of course, the aforementioned acts but there are also instances when he openly tortures those he is abusing or when he declares that there "is no choice, only my desire." Later in the series he bemoans his (temporary) submission and recoils from abandonment by attacking the coven with mind-altering beetles that make them turn on each other.

Once Sabrina is granted heightened infernal powers, she exhibits extraordinary abilities that threaten to destabilize Blackwood's organizational power. It is a threat

²²⁰ Zwissler, 7.

manifested with the Herald of Hell prophecy is unveiled which in turn reveals Sabrina is meant to usurp all existing power systems except for Lucifer's. Sabrina is an anti-Christ but a complicated, arguably good one – antithetical to Satanic evilness and her (biological) father's predestiny for her. There are numerous instances of Sabrina acting for the benefit of others even when it puts her at risk. When the Blackwood-less students of the Academy are attacked by witch hunting angels and held hostage Sabrina rushes to their aid.²²¹ Viewers witness the murders of Elspeth and another student (Melvin), then as Sabrina enters the desecrated church the students are being held hostage in, we see the Weird Sisters tied to stakes, expected to be put to the flame. The angels place a crown of thorns on Sabrina's head in order to subdue her powers and shoot her with arrows, seemingly killing her. Her body falls to the ground with arms extended, an inverted crucifixion without the cross – foreshadowing her true lineage. But the teen witch lives; magically resurrected with hellfire and the power to incinerate the angels on command, saving the coven and resurrecting Elspeth and Melvin from the dead. This Unholy Trinity embodied in the liminal existence of a teenage girl is wholly abject and transgressive as it refuses to be contained into any prescribed boundaries. "Abjection is tied to the sacred," and with male control being a hallowed principle, this young woman certainly demonstrates she is willing to "wreck the infinite."²²² This includes dismantling Lucifer's power over her, his actual dominion in Hell (kind of, it is complicated), and his control over the coven.

²²¹ At this time in the narrative Blackwood was away on his honeymoon with Zelda.

²²² Kristeva, 17 & 159.

Violating the demarcated lines of social boundaries, Satanic or otherwise, points to the fragility of the social order and therefore reminds us of disorder and chaos.

Violating the demarcated lines of social boundaries, Satanic or otherwise, points to the fragility of the social order and therefore reminds us of disorder and chaos. When Blackwood argues for Sabrina's execution to the Council we witness his drive to violently repel the wretchedness that disturbs the symbolic/social order of Satanism:

BLACKWOOD: If she is truly manifesting the abilities described, Sabrina is a threat to our control of the Church. Indeed, to the established hierarchy of all the Churches of Darkness. Imagine what might happen if our younger members started to believe that Sabrina Spellman was more powerful than their High Priest, the Anti-Pope, or worse, the very Council itself.

In his interactions with the Council Blackwood's message is clear: "the natural order must be preserved, in which men through their association with culture are dominant over women and nature."²²³ The patriarchy (Satanic or otherwise) has set the codes of natural law and the politics of that language. Kristeva associates hegemonic symbolic systems with patriarchal dominance that mark otherness as abject and exile it from the established order lest it reveal the fragility of authority.²²⁴ Sabrina's "powers thus break all the boundaries of natural law: the boundaries between sacred and profane, mortal and immortal and even between the living and the dead. It is this frightening power that threatens to bring primordial Chaos back to the world."²²⁵ When Lucifer tells Blackwood that he must exalt Sabrina as Herald of Hell, Blackwood poisons the entire coven and

²²³ Spaeth, "From Goddess to Hag," 58.

²²⁴ Kristeva, 13-18.

²²⁵ Spaeth, 50.

absconds from Satanic magic rather than support what he considers chaotic blasphemy. Notwithstanding the consuming patriarchal violence deployed by both Satan and Blackwood, the narrative illustrates various sources of power away from traditional androcentric framework, but the witches of Greendale do not find emancipation until they disregard the curses of patriarchy and seek to reconcile with the ghosts of the past and find faith in ancient nurturing goddesses.

The various pursuits of power that dominate the third season's plot bring generational tensions to the surface in how they reconcile the past, act in the present, and change the future. Conflict among age groups is nothing new in feminist thought and activism. Generation is a complicated notion in feminist thought and activism. In both popular media and feminist scholarship tensions exist in whether traditional ideas of age groups/generations are productive, destructive, and post-feminist. Younger age groups are commonly charged with engaging in post-feminist discourses structured through generational conflict, and an "amnesia" of disremembering and even forgetting feminist history.²²⁶ Younger generations (Millennials and Gen Z) are uniquely positioned within an ever evolving mediated landscapes while also being entrenched in a contradictory political world where things are said to be one, absolute way but the realities being lived are completely different.²²⁷ Sarah J. Jackson argues that 21st century activists "have responded to political contradictions with discourse and tactics both familiar and

²²⁶ Munford & Waters, 26-29. Chidgey, 30.

²²⁷ Jackson, "(Re)Imagining Intersectional Democracy," 376.

unfamiliar to members of the old guard,” and the old guard has not always responded favorably to the unfamiliar.²²⁸

In the CAoS narrative audiences witness the strains placed on solidarity intergenerationally and how those are often reflected through conflicts over tradition and action. Specifically, we see stresses placed on the limits of action by the old guard while the new guard argues that “new visions and models are required, as are new ways of being, and more importantly, new ways of doing.”²²⁹ Sabrina, like most teenagers, is wholly rebellious and often disregards the advice of her elders, with various consequences. In turn, Sabrina’s elders also use their age and accumulated experiences to cast off Sabrina’s ideas and motivations. This duality is also seen among other younger witches and warlocks in the CoN and their older counterparts. Lilith and Zelda are the main figures embodying the practices of the old guard that lean more towards tradition and maintenance of the symbolic/social order. At the beginning of the series narrative, these two maternal leaders embody the ways in which patriarchal controls uses women to police the boundaries of other women. Both Lilith and Zelda represent how “patriarchal regimes have implemented in the minds of women [as] an idealized vision of themselves.”²³⁰

Early on, Zelda is depicted as a staunch traditionalist who chastises Sabrina, Ambrose, and Hilda when they flaunt Satanic decorum. Even when a Satanic tradition is

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Hine, *Condensed Chaos*, 13.

²³⁰ Chakraborty, “The Angel, the Witch,” 88.

harmful, early season Zelda would usually defer to whatever being a “sacred tradition.” Things outside of the Satanic norm are usually met with at best sarcastic condemnation and outright revulsion at worst in the early seasons. In addition to her hell-bent dedication to Satanic tradition, Zelda uses age as a justification for acting authoritative. With Sabrina, early seasons Zelda often disregards her concerns and or plans of action - including Zelda’s dangerous decision to marry Blackwood. Sabrina’s relationship with Lilith is another rife with generational tensions. Acting as a Satanic fairy godmother/not-entirely-wicked Stepmother we see a range of actions and corresponding emotions in their relationship: from guidance, love, and pride to manipulation, anger, and disgust. Lilith (disguised as English teacher Mary Wardwell) teaches Sabrina magical practices not accessible to her through Blackwood’s tutelage, she helps her realize the magnitude of her power, and even declares that she should never forsake freedom for power. However, she also tries to kill Sabrina in addition to deceiving the teen witch into committing the unholy miracles that fulfilled the Herald of Hell prophecy and well, lying for self-gain in countless instances. Though grateful for the knowledge passed down generationally, Sabrina is not content with letting Lilith’s slights slide. In just once instance Sabrina questions Lilith’s devotion to Lucifer:

SABRINA: And why do you still serve Him? Even now?

LILITH: It's all I've ever known.

SABRINA: What a terrible, weak reason.

Notwithstanding this specific condemnation, Lilith further mentors Sabrina as she takes the throne of Hell, becoming Regent. But Lilith is first and foremost a survivor and her actions are often framed as the culmination of asserting power after millennia of subjugation.

The ghosts of power stolen from witches throughout time haunts the relationships between Sabrina and older witches but also challenges the popular framework of generational contempt present in many evaluations of the feminist generational gap. Despite experiencing significant challenges in how they approach various narrative disasters, Sabrina's relationships with Zelda, Lilith, and Hilda also demonstrate moments of mentorship, empathy, trust, and respect. Despite conflict, the older and younger generations of witches find and cultivate affection for one another based on bonds of shared abjection through time/space. Their abjection in both mortal and magical realms is hauntological in that it is "a way of being that is shaped by anxieties about the past, concern for the future and an overarching uncertainty about [their] own status and ability to effect change in a world."²³¹ In one of her more supportive moments, Lilith pinpoints the shared abjection of their otherness despite the pair having thousands of years age difference:

LILITH: I know you're scared, Sabrina. Because all women are taught to fear power. Own it."

The symbolic/social order only knows abject others not on their own terms but by the responses of subjects to the abject.²³² This makes the experiences of the abject almost entirely ineffable: "the difference, no matter how tangible, goes unseen because it itself is fallacious and hollow and cannot be grasped or made concrete. Thus, the privileged remain ignorant of, and yet benefit from, the pain and suffering of the abject."²³³ Their

²³¹ Munford & Waters, 20.

²³² Davis, "The Politics of Racial Abjection," 5.

²³³ Ibid.

shared abjection collapses space and time yet, it also has the possibility to collapse meanings and create new ones. While abject meanings are used to maintain social control they can in turn, be used to disrupt it – which is why the othered are always considered a threat to the ‘good’ working order of the status quo.²³⁴ Jeong suggests that abject individuals have the potential, even a likelihood, of forming solidarities across marks of subjectivity.²³⁵ The manufactured difference marking abject individuals hegemonically categorizes them as apolitical but that does not mean that their actions are absent of political consequences.²³⁶ As exiles permanently expelled from the symbolic/social order, creating solidarities provides abject others with a community of resistance fighting off further degradation and oppression, without the promise of a future utopia.²³⁷ A community based in the commonality of abjection is “itself immediately political in effecting the transformation of the world through practicing another life in accordance with truth.”²³⁸

Following Blackwood’s absconding and their abandonment of Satanic principles, the CoN goes through an identity crisis, several different names, and a diminishment of their powers all while being attacked by a rival group of pagan magical adherents. Through this crisis, the coven stresses the importance of their unity against those who seek to annihilate their existence and even call upon othered abject witches to be joined

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Jeong, “Biopolitical Abjection and Sexuation,” 245.

²³⁶ Davis, 5.

²³⁷ Jeong, 248.

²³⁸ Prozorov, “Foucault’s Affirmative Biopolitics,” 807.

in solidarity. Prudence, in a newly elevated position of authority, believes that survival depends on the group opening themselves to unfamiliar sources of magic and adapt to the changing circumstances. In turn, Prudence invites a solitary voodoo/vodou practitioner she met in New Orleans to the Academy in the hopes she (Mambo Marie) will both find a community and help the coven access/develop an alternative power source to Satanic magic. At first, Zelda is not welcoming to Mambo Marie despite inviting solitary hedge witches to do the same, leading Prudence to call Zelda out on her othering:

PRUDENCE: Oh, I see, so you invite the hedge witches because they can't challenge your status. But I invite one occultist with the skill and authority to help us out of this mess, and you're worried she threatens your position in the Church?

ZELDA: Prudence, she is a Catholic, for Satan's sake.

MAMBO MARIE: I am sorry you are frightened by my ceremony. I can see you are wary of the unknown. Mais calmez-vous, the only spirits I invite in are the ones I know and trust. As for myself, perhaps if you knew me better, I would not be quite so fearsome. I am Mambo Marie LeFleur, Vodouisant of the Fourth Ward. I can see your mèt-tèt. He is beautiful. Powerful. I can see you and I are more alike than you know. It is true, Prudence invited me, but I have been waiting for her invitation all my life. You see, my mèt-tèt told me, long ago, that something was coming. Something very old and very evil, and that if I could summon my courage, I might play a role in helping to beat it back. But of course, I will not stay where I am not wanted.

ZELDA: Wait! Mambo Marie, I admit that I'm a bit wary of newcomers, but I can see you mean to help, and I'm in no position to refuse you. So please, stay, as our honored guest.

Prudence, as a young black witch in a New England (formerly traditionally Satanic) coven grew up orphaned and was only bestowed her rightful family name to act in service to her father. Her experiences are drastically different to Zelda's, a white, seemingly middle-aged witch from a well-established family in the Satanic community. Zelda grasps onto tradition because tradition has overwhelmingly benefitted her. Her ties to Satanic tradition have to be continuously challenged even when she is supposedly

liberated from patriarchy. How she responds to those moments is what ultimately determines Zelda's potential emancipation and the liberation of the coven. Mambo Marie becomes a leader in the coven while still holding on to her ancestral practices – calling back to what she told Prudence when they first met:

MAMBO MARIE: This is a Haitian house... Do you understand? And the vodou practice in this house, mon chéri...is a way of life.

Mambo Marie commonly calls attention to the cross-cultural similarities in various traditions throughout time while also highlighting how divergent histories lead to important recognizable distinctions in applications. Marie possesses unique knowledges that allows her to see beyond the gazes of the New England coven.

Zelda's scoffing at Marie's supposed Catholicism demonstrates an ignorance of Voodoo/Vodou and fear of difference; Zelda imbues Marie with state of hyper-otherness that is in direct reference to Marie's blackness. Chireau assesses that forced conversion to Christianity during enslavement augmented indigenous African belief systems which in turn kept those connections alive while adapting them to their current contexts and different metaphysical and institutional frameworks.²³⁹ The practices to emerge from slavery relies heavily on "spirits, ghosts, and angelic personalities" that intervene in human affairs and can be "summoned to assist human beings in their endeavors."²⁴⁰ Invoking spirits collapses linearity: "part legacy, part prophecy, the specter is an emissary of pasts and possible futures that the present cannot exorcize."²⁴¹ Mambo Marie does not

²³⁹ Chireau, *Black Magic*, 53.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 29.

²⁴¹ Munford & Water., 19.

seek to exorcise the specters that inhabit her reality – she is comfortable living with her ghosts and believes doing so is a matter of justice and responsibility.²⁴² Marie is not unsettled by what haunts her yet the spirits still shape her understanding and actions in the living present.²⁴³

When the coven builds solidarities with various solitary witches they are able to unify against the power structures that seek to control, contain, and violate them. Despite quasi-fascists (magical or otherwise) commonly evoking the construction of a fictional ‘great past,’ the witches of Greendale find power and emancipation by reconciling with forgotten specters denied their due through abjection and responding to their own present otherness with future action.²⁴⁴ Zelda collapses time, space, and assigned abjection when she evokes the Greek goddess Hecate for strength, power, and magical fortitude against a plethora of attacks:

ZELDA: It is said that whenever you call on the Triple Goddess, she comes to you. As much as I ignored her, put my faith in lesser gods, signed my name in other books, she still came to me when I needed her most. When I wandered, lost in the Nether Realm, it was she who led me back to the material world. We call you, Hecate. We call on you now, Maiden, in your unbounded potential. We call on you, Mother, in all your divine power. We call on you, Crone, in your arcane wisdom. We are descended of all maidens, mothers, and crones. And so, when we call on the three-in-one, we call on all witches stretching back from the beginning of time to the end of days. We call on... ourselves, the powers that have been denied us. Imbue us with them, Hecate, and we shall pray to you morning, noon, and night. And we shall live to honor thy three faces, thy three forms. Dark Mother, keeper of the key to the door between worlds, we... summon thee.

²⁴² Kosmina, 51.

²⁴³ Munford & Water, 20.

²⁴⁴ Kosmina, 52.

Witch as a marker of identity for the coven connects them to witches throughout history and powers denied to them based on intersections that other them within both Christian and Satanic circles. A significant way the coven and older witches like Zelda and Lilith find emancipation is by embracing change to the status quo, incorporating intersectionality, and casting of Satanic (dis)respectability politics. In this way, CAoS narrative orients itself in 21st century feminist ideals that are intersectionally focused, social justice oriented, and devoted to community.²⁴⁵

Intersectionality is made explicitly present in the narrative within the first episodes. Following the aforementioned attacks by the mortal boys at Baxter High, Sabrina, Roz, and Theo begin a student organization called WICCA (Women's Intersectional Cultural and Creative Association). This name alludes to not only the religious organization of the same name (without the acronym) but also the second-wave US based feminist group WITCH (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell - a n organization discussed at length in the next chapter). Through WICCA, Sabrina and the "Fright Club" (as Roz, Theo, and Harvey would later call themselves) organized to ensure the safety of fellow classmates of marginalized identities and end the harassment enacted by the privileged boys of Baxter High and protected by Principal Hawthorn. Though many of the narratives inclusion of intersectional ideals can be/are read as a superficial endeavor, there are two significant ways CAoS represents intersectional identities. The first is regarding trans identities.

²⁴⁵Jackson, 375. Tully, "Constructing a Feminist Icon," 195.

As noted above, Sabrina’s friend Theo identifies as trans and the second season in particular highlights the process of coming out, being harassed, community affirmation, and self-acceptance. Though Theo is harassed and bullied by the athletic (mostly white) popular boys before he comes out, it is amplified once he qualifies for the boys’ basketball team and tries to use the boys’ locker room:

THEO: Yeah. I gave the boys' locker room a try, and it's like they were just standing around, waiting for me to take my shirt off to make fun of me. 'Brina... isn't there some witchy way we could take care of Billy?

In addition to this intimidation, the boys also stuff his gym locker with menstrual products and throws them at him. As mentioned above, Sabrina aids Theo in using magic to find protection and retribution – which he enacts following the locker incident, causing Billy (the head popular boy) to severely break his leg. In one following scene, Billy seems to innately recognize that his injury is the result of his treatment of Theo:

THEO: Uh... How's your leg?

BILLY: Ah, well, I won't be playing basketball this year. Or dancing tonight.

THEO: I'm sorry, Billy.

BILLY: It's not your fault. And I'm sorry, Theo. For being such a dick to you.

THEO: Why are you apologizing to me?

BILLY: The doctor said I was lucky it wasn't my neck that I broke on those stairs. And I'm tired of bad things happening to me.

It is highly debatable whether Billy learned anything substantial from his injury other than “what goes around comes around,” but the magic used against scared him is enough to stop the reign in harassment against Theo in general. Aside from the privileged boys at school, Theo overwhelmingly experiences community affirmation of his gender identity.

Roz provides a basic explanation of transness to Harvey after Theo comes out:

HARVEY: So, we just call her Theo now?

ROZ: No. No, we call him Theo. Theo might look like a girl, but he's not. He's a boy. And that's how he's always been. He's just... ready now. To live as himself. As Theo.

HARVEY: Okay. [Deadname] no more. Now, Theo!

Similarly, Theo's father also responds with a simple "okay" before taking his son out for the shorter haircut he desires. While these responses might seem understated and small, the simplicity of "okay" provides viewers with a brief but important example of how to affirm someone's gender identity.

CAoS's inclusion of trans identities into witch narratives is an often talked about distinction but another intersectional inclusion often ignored is how the later seasons specifically incorporate African American magical traditions and heritages into the narrative. This actually begins in season one when Roz's grandmother reveals their status as "cunning women." The inclusion of Mambo Marie into the coven provides a Black American magical perspective based in Haitian Voodoo/Vodou connects the coven to nonhegemonic perspectives and traditions in addition to elucidating Roz's magical lineage. Marie's connection to the ancestral plain grants her access to information unknown to anyone else, namely Roz's lineage not as a "cunning woman" but as a witch. Calling forth Roz's grandmother from the ancestral plain to explain the true history of the Walker women:

NANA WALKER: What the voodoo queen says is true. We Walker women were witches, but we couldn't use that word. We were, after all, God-fearing Christian women, and witches...witches danced with the Devil and were burned at the stake. So, to protect ourselves from that same fate, we called ourselves cunning women.

Nana Walker's ghost makes visible that which "has been forcibly expunged" from the social order as that which "threatened to disrupt the emergent hegemony."²⁴⁶ The past never really dies, even when *damnation memoriae* is attempted. Ghosts are dis/embodyed politics of memory that place contemporary conditions under historical precedence. Calling themselves "cunning women" over witches calls back to the widespread application of the witch hunts and how those civilizing measures were deployed against European, enslaved, and colonized women and communities. Federici explains "the global expansion of capitalism through colonization and Christianization ensured that this persecution would be planted in the body of colonized societies."²⁴⁷ Chireau elaborates that while distinctions of magic, the supernatural, and religion are commonly blurred in African diasporic practices, European witch fears still embedded themselves in both African and indigenous communities. Reconfiguring their gifts/powers/abilities aided in the Walker women's survival. It is particularly noteworthy to acknowledge that rather than expunge their magical history they reinterpreted it under their current contexts and different metaphysical framework. Being "cunning women" kept them connected to a magical history even if they were not explicitly aware of it. The inclusion of Mambo Marie into the coven and Roz's revelation through a revenant calls forth the past in ways that reference the unique experiences of colonized and enslaved Africans and their descendants. The various spectral forms present in CAoS's narrative "form a connection

²⁴⁶ Munford & Water, 21.

²⁴⁷ Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 237.

between the living and the dead, the past and the present.”²⁴⁸ Connecting and communicating with spirits allows witches in the narrative the ability to manifest divine/magical/spectral power and agency.

For the witches in CAoS’s narrative, they channel the most power and find avenues for liberation in moments when they embrace and reclaim their status as abject, heretical others. When Sabrina takes the throne of Hell and is challenged by the Infernal Nobility who wish to rule themselves, she rebukes their prejudiced assertions on why she should not act as sovereign and proclaims “Hell's under new management now. Mine!” With the nobility still not swayed, Sabrina issues a decree of her intentions and character:

BEELZEBUB: [...] The child cannot rule!

SABRINA: I'm not here to get your blessing. I accepted my birthright to keep Hell where it belongs, away from the mortal realm. But that's not enough. The old ways, my father's ways, are broken. Hell needs a makeover, fellas.

BEELZEBUB: How dare you speak to us this way?

SABRINA: I'll speak however I please. You forget yourself, Beelzebub. I'm your sovereign. And the reformation of Hell starts now.

Chaos is merely a matter of perspective and subverting established systems that assert superiority and absolutism can be a liberatory force. The abject perverts the system and can “turn [it] aside, misleads, corrupts; uses [it], takes advantage of [it], the better to deny [it].”²⁴⁹ Urging reform and refusing to be deterred by established powers works as a spell of subversion that “challenges the very core of social identity based in corporal ideology; [...] the power to subordinate a social superior.”²⁵⁰ Because we become who we are

²⁴⁸ Fitch, 291.

²⁴⁹ Kristeva, 15.

²⁵⁰ Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 168.

based on signifying practices, Sabrina defying the seemingly sacrosanct threatens established meanings and by default, our sense of self through chaos and a breakdown of the symbolic order.²⁵¹ As a heretical other, the witch threatens to deconstruct what has been established as true and absolute. The witch is dangerous because she/they “create an alternative in an opposing form of invention and imagination.”²⁵² Reclaiming their abjection is an alternative and opposing form of being and living. Here, magic works “as a political tool, and as a framework which enables new configurations” of actions towards liberation from dominance.²⁵³

Sabrina extends this magical subversion into the mortal realm when her and Roz run for Co-Presidents of the Student Council in the fourth season on the platform of “Witches United:”

SABRINA: Roz and I are running as witches. It means we are powerful, disruptive women, champions of the oppressed, supporters of the othered, unapologetic feminists, allies to all those who live in the shadow of the patriarchy... reminders that the shadow has its own power. We will speak the truth, and we will fight injustice. So in other words...we are Sabrina Spellman...

ROZ: And Rosalind Walker.

SABRINA: We are teenage witches, and we will be your next...

IN UNISON: ...student council co-presidents.

Recalling *malefica* in the *Malleus* “women’s otherness concretized the Otherness of magic, and vice versa.”²⁵⁴ Invoking the abject alternative of the heretical witch (in all forms throughout space/time) opens ourselves up to a larger “cosmology of possibilities

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Covino, “Walt Disney Meets Mary,” 154.

²⁵³ Brick, “When Witches Don’t Fight,” 87.

²⁵⁴ Stratton, 171.

for re-ordering discourse and reality.”²⁵⁵ Breaking down the hegemonic symbolic order shatters the illusion of an absolute reality and offers a chance to build something different in its wake. Here, magic can be seen as “a political tool that offers a process of demarcation in which to confront and destroy” existing modes of power.²⁵⁶

In the changing realities of CAoS’s narrative, witchcraft, magic, and feminism are well...complicated. Enactments of various types of power drive repressive, mundane, and emancipatory actions. The show employs explicitly feminist interventions and under this framing, witchcraft and magic create a space where witches can confront, contain, and defeat oppressive hegemonic forces.²⁵⁷ Witches are haunted, but they also haunt reality. Throughout space/time, cultural memories, pop culture narratives, and lived experiences “the witch is a shifting signifier, incorporating discourses on monstrosity, abjection, and fear, as well as sisterhood, empowerment, and liberation.”²⁵⁸ Witches and ghosts so often accompany each other because both collapse demarcations of time, propriety, and dominant social meanings; both rewrite “official” accounts of historical events/myths and in doing so, rewrite a future of potential.²⁵⁹ The uncertainty, indeterminacy, unknowingness...chaos that exists alongside of specters and witches is frightening to many (including some of the cited authors), but it does not have to be. In fact, such fear is indicative of a lack of imagination of what could be.

²⁵⁵ Covino, “Magic and/as Rhetoric,” 356.

²⁵⁶ Brick, 87.

²⁵⁷ Ibid, 97.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 87.

²⁵⁹ Kosmina, 52.

2.3 Conclusion

Even with Hell under new management, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is not without its failings. Think pieces critical of CAoS's feminism proliferate the internet and range from angry incels ranting to media analysts' criticism of the narrative's privileging of white feminism and finally, offering a myopic view of feminism in general. *BitchMedia* writer Kathryn Vandervalk forwards that "*Sabrina* borrows the most prominent rhetoric of pop feminism to make its points," that are routinely over simplified.²⁶⁰ The show's use of intersectionality is a representation of that myopic feminism. For a show that takes place in a fictional US town, colonization is not addressed nor are the magical forms of indigenous tribes. With the common and constant cultural appropriation of American indigenous spiritualities in Western esotericism, CAoS's "woke" narrative should have at least considered how to ethically employ indigenous perspectives into the plot lines.

Whiteness is a main focus of criticism lodged at the show and rightfully so. Sabrina's constant saving of her friends, family, coven, and the world makes it very easy to view her as the white savior who is infernally 'chosen,' to bring salvation/emancipation. Similarly, the show's first two seasons (mostly the first) takes a colorblind approach to the dynamics of prejudice within a group where magic is defined as a cultural lineage.²⁶¹ Race is never referenced in regards to any black characters on the show and therefore, how race influences how they move in the world is also ignored in

²⁶⁰ Vandervalk, "Casual Righteousness."

²⁶¹ Bastián, "In Defense of Prudence."

explicit narrative points. Lastly, the ending sucked and it impacts the narrative in some important ways. However, the rant required to delve into this point of contention would exceed the scope of an already lengthy analysis (and the patience of readers, I'm sure).

Notwithstanding its flaws, *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is a fruitful source for evaluating contemporary feminist discourses and how they intersect with witchy specters. I mean, the reason this chapter is so long is because new scopes for analysis repeatedly presented themselves throughout the writing process. Matters of sexuality, motherhood, trauma, and a deeper exploration of generational responsibility were all planned to appear in this manuscript but were ultimately excluded in order to not turn this entire project into a criticism of the show. These topics and others can drive future directions of study and potentially, further illustrated with the passing of linear time. *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* and the characters therein are not a perfect intersectional narrative, but it is notable. For better or worse, CAoS reflects a contemporary feminism that is messy but trying, whatever that is worth. In Sabrina's refusal to "blame herself for gendered insults and injustices," viewers are given a framework for how to explore their own autonomy.²⁶² This is particularly important when we consider CAoS's placement in the "Archieverse" which usually relegates it to 'teen show' categorizations. Under this framework, the show's explicitly feminist interventions "affirm that teens should pay attention to the power structures that impact their lives."²⁶³ Even when it fails, the show's constant urging for feminist investigation challenges audiences to examine the toll

²⁶² Vandervalk.

²⁶³ Ibid.

hegemonic systems/forces take on “other modes of intellectual, spiritual, physical, and political selfhood.”²⁶⁴ As a tale of both empowerment and caution, magic works as a “poetic imagination [that] produces new lexicons of thought, new associations which eventually resonate in the political reorganization of society.”²⁶⁵

Engaging with the contradictions in narratives, myths, memories, and lived experiences provides us with an understanding of liminality and its abjectness in the social order. *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* presents us with “something ambiguous and haunting: a portrait of humanity and the many contradictions that define who we are collectively and as individuals.”²⁶⁶ Perhaps this is a factor as to why the witch has haunted public memory. Perhaps not. Like Sabrina, one (almost timeless) contradiction we can be steadfast in mitigating is Satanic feminism. To that, I say “not today, Satan.” Not today.

²⁶⁴ Potts, “Witch Please.”

²⁶⁵ Covino, “Magic and/as Rhetoric,” 354.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

Chapter 3 Can't Raise Hell With a Saint: WITCH, Incivility, and Summoning Change

In my 30 years of life, I have become quite accustomed to gender-specific insults. Bitch. Slut. Whore. Usually, the contempt for my actions preceding such language is pungent in the air as diatribes spill from sour mouths. I have developed a thick skin and those close to me often laugh at those deploying one-word weapons to discipline me...because I almost always run with it. Honestly, I even enjoy some of the insults people, mostly cishetero white men, have launched my way. Banshee. Devil Woman. Witch. I have personally found it more offensive to be considered a delicate and wilting flower than any of the aforementioned characteristics. I too cannot help but laugh at the poor, unfortunate souls who expose so much with one word.²⁶⁷ Mostly out of survival I have developed the ability to let poison drip from my tongue with the goal of keeping predators and authoritarians at bay. Throughout my 30 years of monstrous acts and utterances I have wondered about and sought to understand the stories other monsters have to tell. What do those who enjoy being dangerous and grotesque say to the monster hunters that try to capture and contain us?

²⁶⁷ (*que Ursula music*)

In being assigned abject and monstrous meanings, witches are a priori read as impolite anytime they are visible in the public sphere. “Monsters exist in opposition to normality;” their existence is an affront to how things *should be*.²⁶⁸ Hegemony is constructed in symbolic/social orders that define, delineate, and demarcate the boundaries of propriety, civilization, and the conditions of modernity. The subject and exile of social order emerge from symbolic arrangements. Jess Zimmerman argues that monstrosity is “born in the gulf between the expectation and the reality,” with the liminality providing mechanisms for both subjugation and agency.²⁶⁹ If proper speech built ‘order’ what kind of chaos can be disseminated in/with improper speech? Within the context of social resistance, the dangerous speech of heresy takes many forms. Blasphemy and monstrosity coalesced in the countercultural organization Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH). WITCH covens hexed the patriarchy and cast spells to lift the veil between societal expectations and lived realities. Largely considered to be a splinter of New Left activism, WITCH performed acts of guerilla theater they called “zaps” between 1968-1970. WITCH covens popped up across the US and protested everything from Wall Street to the United Fruit Company dressed as archetypal witches who spat curses at representations of oppressive systems.

Ultimately this chapter advances witchcraft as a mechanism for subaltern agency in a symbolic/social order othered bodies are exiled from. The existence and visibility of

²⁶⁸ Zimmerman, *Women and Other Monsters*, 7.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 8.

monsters inside the boundaries of the status quo is a rejection of proper standards outlining a seemingly civilized society. Witches publicly performing spells is considered improper and indecorous by the ‘natural’ law dictating the boundaries of order. I argue that WITCHes violated established norms in performances of monstrous ungovernability that disrupted sensibilities instead of initiating institutional change. WITCH drew on the deep legacy of the archetypal witch as a point of shared abjection and used that identification to unsettle the gendered, racist, colonial, and neoliberal frames of reference existing in US politics/social order. If oppressive actions were justified as holy and righteous WITCHES would rather be blasphemous and heretical. There is a fairly large gap in rhetorical evaluations concerning the performative politics of magic and for this reason I turn to a surprising source to contextualize WITCH dissidence: Cynical rhetoric. Cynical subversion and dissidence, though part of the rhetorical tradition, has largely been excluded from disciplinary conversations with Kristen Kennedy arguing such ignorance is derived from the impoliteness of Cynical politics.²⁷⁰ The Cynical exigence to disrupt civic discourse through the radical truth telling of *parrhesia* left them exiled from the Ancient Greek social body and “rhetorical history because it refused to obey community rules of discursive decorum.”²⁷¹ Cynical rhetoric has the ability to call attention to how monsters like the witch publicly resist hegemony and articulate monstrous, abject dissidence. The literal and figurative *outside* experienced by both witches and Cynics motivates and justifies rhetorically acting outside of established

²⁷⁰ Kennedy, “Cynic Rhetoric,” 26.

²⁷¹ Kennedy, “Hipparchia the Cynic,” 58.

norms of decorum. The flamboyant spectacle underlying (most of) WITCH's zaps lead to an easy categorization of carnivalesque, but such classification would be an oversimplification of their subversive acts.

Through WITCH, this chapter explores how the witch archetype is utilized in explicitly politically subversive ways to combat the 'witch-hunts' of contemporary hegemonic violence. The archetypal witch represents abject and monstrous femme agency that is unruly and cannot be contained by the symbolic/social order. For subaltern bodies, the heretical other as witch is a recognizable and meaning-heavy symbol in which they can consubstantiate and organize under. Abjection and monstrosity form the foundation of magical political tactics which informed how WITCHes deployed their dissidence and how they were received by the public sphere at large. Furthermore, WITCH tactics were influenced by the physical expatriation and individual embodiments of unruly femmes as others exiled from the status quo. Calafell and McIntosh forward embodied rhetorics as being derived "from the materiality of the body and its negotiations in relation to hegemonic rhetorical discourses."²⁷² Variations of embodied rhetorics speak to the ways marginal bodies are subjugated intersectionally and in turn, negotiated intersectionally. Public performances of marginalized embodied rhetorics "enact survival, resistance, and empowering tactics that fluidly work as counterpublic enactments."²⁷³

²⁷² Calafell and McIntosh, "Latina/o Vernacular Discourse," 203.

²⁷³ Ibid, 201.

By explaining the dynamics of Cynical carnivalesque, I hope to call attention to how dissident tactics emerge as acts of survival and resistance. Following this explanation, I elucidate on the history and resistive of actions of WITCH to highlight how the impetuous to disruptively speak and be heard challenges the notion of ‘effective’ protest that assumes a neutral public sphere. These disruptions create echoes that reverberate through space/time, catching the voices of more heretical others along the way.

3.1 Shadows in the Public Sphere

Julie K. Shutten’s “Invoking Practical Magic: New Social Movements, Hidden Populations, and the Public Screen,” is the most comprehensive analysis of witches (under the Neo-Pagan umbrella) and movements. Though I do not wish to discount Shutten’s work, it is an insufficient guiding frame to understand WITCH for several reasons. The first is the conflation between social movements/resistance and new religious movements. There are undoubted similarities between the two types of “movement” but the idiosyncrasies of each are important to attend to as they demand different things/ways of being from participants/adherents. WITCH exists outside of religious setting and cannot be adequately explained with those concepts. Secondly, Shutten’s analysis is specific to relationships between mediated messages and the acceptance of groups into the bourgeoisie public sphere. This chapter does draw on some (very few) media reports of WITCH protests to provide context but focuses mainly on the dissident tactics deployed by covens. I contend WITCH was never concerned with bourgeoisie decorum nor sought to gain acceptance within the symbolic/social order.

Third, Shutten's evaluation looks at Neo-Pagan organizations under that singular umbrella term without acknowledging (some of) the various groups under that term. Sects like Odinism, Asatru, and Wotanism are unapologetically white supremacist and Neo-Pagan. I lose no sleep by arguing white supremacist Neo-Pagans warrant social ostracism and delegitimization. While this might seem like an oversight, conglomerating all Neo-Pagan groups under the same counterpublic oddly fails the "hidden populations" Shutten is trying to serve by not discussing how power is diffused in groups deemed "marginal."²⁷⁴

The traditional Habermasian public sphere outlines parameters of political participation through the discussion of/ by citizens solving problems in logical, reasonable ways. However, as Nancy Fraser advances, Habermas's framework is that of the *bourgeoise* public sphere – a space that is exclusionary based on the intersections of identity that relegate inclusion therein based on established hierarchies of the symbolic/social order.²⁷⁵ "The symbolic order—the arbitrary collective set of symbols that a society agrees to use," operates individually and socially, constructing our personal and social frameworks of identity.²⁷⁶ The social subject emerges from the symbolic and 'proper' order is hegemonically enacted through "rationally controlled" and "well-bounded" subjectivities.²⁷⁷ Unspoken norms and explicit rules "maintain a particular order" and violating those mores threatens "the community's imperative toward

²⁷⁴ Shutten, "Invoking Practical Magic," 331–354.

²⁷⁵ Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 56-80.

²⁷⁶ Stratton, "Magic, Abjection, and Gender," 154.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

conformity,” thus evoking a fear of disorderliness.²⁷⁸ Stratton further explains that “nonsense, chaos, any breakdown of the symbolic order threaten our sense of meaning and threaten our very [sense of] self.”²⁷⁹

The inclusion of all ‘citizens’ within the public sphere presupposes a neutral standard in which all are welcome to participate in informed political discourses with the goal of collectively solving problems. The public sphere is predicated on normalizing/reifying the political efficacy of the status quo. This includes the very notion of who is and is not considered a citizen able to participate. Karma Chávez outlines the problem with the rhetorical citizen narrative by explaining its favoring of the experiences of white cis hetero male participation in and evaluations of the public sphere.²⁸⁰ When attempting to understand the nuances of how subaltern, essentially socially powerless people, engage politically it is necessary to not simply include them in the narrative of change but also consider radically alternative visions of public participation.²⁸¹ Sloop and Ono remind us that there are no absolutes in the human condition and there can be no universal, singular framework for how bodies act politically in relation to one another. Catherine Squires further illustrates that “different public spheres, composed of members of marginalized groups, respond to various political, social, and material constraints,” in distinct and idiosyncratic ways.²⁸²

²⁷⁸ Foust, *Transgression as a Mode of Resistance*, 3-4.

²⁷⁹ Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender,” 169.

²⁸⁰ Chávez, “Beyond Inclusion,” 162-172

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, 169.

²⁸² Squires, “Rethinking the Black Public,” 447.

Regarding social movement rhetoric, WITCH demonstrates that enacting persistent polymorphism through time and space is idiosyncratic to the essence being a woman and becoming a witch, to something that just is. The relationship of being woman and becoming witch could lead social movement scholars to designating WITCH as “movement-as-verb” in that it cannot be discussed without highlighting the relationality and meanings associated and between women, witchery, and hegemony. Analyzing a social movement group like WITCH would be incomplete without situating the meanings of women with witchery in the ways and reasons that association was institutionalized. Notwithstanding the focus on relationality between the dominant and variously subaltern witches, WITCH as an organization demanding social change as aspects of their rhetoric fall within the territories of movement as noun and movement as fiction. One could argue that the inception of WITCH relegates the group into the movement as noun category because they sought to provide an alternative vision of what women and feminists looked like and did. However, WITCH challenges not only movements as nouns but subverts rhetorical codes specifying organizations have “clear goals” in which we can measure their ‘efficiency’. How does a rhetorician analyze a coven hexing the patriarchy? On what scale can we assess their impact? Can we assume a causal relationship between WITCH hexing Wall Street and the stock market falling the next day? How can we make sense of WITCHes (and witches) raising Hell? Lastly, I find it necessary to pose a problem to the classification of social change as a ‘movement.’ The act of *moving* implies that such trajectory has clearly defined linear boundaries marking beginning and end. When we evaluate social justice issues like racism, colonization, gender divisions, and capitalist exploitation there are no clear lines of when political transgression begins or

end. For example, slave revolts are not usually considered within the larger context of civil rights movement studies even though they were precursors to black people fighting against institutionalized racism during the late-20th century countercultural era through today. Social justice initiatives did not begin with standards forms of protest and there appears to be no end in sight for continued efforts seen in contemporary US politics. Similar ideas can and should be applied to the transgressions of witches within the context of gendered epistemic violence. Perhaps it is time for us to move past the idea of movements being the force(s) initiating change.

3.2 From Counterpublics to a Cynical Carnavalesque Framework for WITCH

Rhetoric

WITCH existed not solely counter to the state but also counter to the bourgeoisie public sphere and dominant counterpublic of women's liberation. In line with arguments and paradigms forwarded by scholars like Fraser, Catherine Squires, and others I maintain fluid definitions/delineations of counterpublics in order to attend to varying representations and performances of dissidence. Specifically, I wish to call attention to the tactics utilized by subaltern groups and how those strategies are informed by their unique positionalities in the symbolic/social order. Emblematic of Bakhtin's carnival, WITCHes zaps exhibited playfulness, humor, and spontaneity, with performances highlighting the excessive body in its grotesque reality.²⁸³ Mikhail Bakhtin initially conceptualized his theory around accounts of medieval carnival festivals when and where transgression was ritualized in a temporary upending of social orderings. Commonly

²⁸³ Foust, *Transgression*, 9; Halnon, "Heavy Metal Carnival," 36.

masked and highlighting the grotesque, body carnival participants “would lose their previous markers of social class and status. Forms of expression were turned over and opposites explored through parody.”²⁸⁴ Bakhtin explains:

Civil and social ceremonies and rituals took on a comic aspect as clowns and fools, constant participants in these festivals, mimicked 'Serious rituals such as the tribute rendered to the victors at tournaments, the transfer of feudal rights, or the initiation of a knight. Minor occasions were also marked by comic protocol, as for instance the election of a king and queen to preside at a banquet "for laughter's sake" (*roi pour rire*).²⁸⁵

The *roi pour rire* underlying the carnival ritual stands in stark contrast to the seriousness of hegemonic orderings. Like any civilizing mechanism, seriousness as a standard of decorum acts as a “spokesman of power” that terrorizes, demands, and forbids certain ways/modes of existence.²⁸⁶ Bakhtin contends that too often, we “ignore or underestimate the laughing people” and fail to recognize the alternative worlds/realities that can be presented through carnivalesque subversion.²⁸⁷ The carnival inverts the status quo. Disrupting high-low dualisms, “carnival licenses” transgression and thus openly defies or mocks the values of the hegemony.”²⁸⁸ While markers of indecorum are characteristics of the carnivalesque and its inspiration of resistance, Bakhtin’s conceptualization of carnival is not necessarily revolutionary on several fronts. The first is that Bakhtin’s carnival paints a broad brush on how hegemonic powers are enacted and resisted: “Bakhtin, like

²⁸⁴Hess, “Purifying Laughter,” 100.

²⁸⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 5.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 94.

²⁸⁷ Halnon, 6.

²⁸⁸ Presdee, *Cultural Criminology*, 39.

many other social theorists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, fails to acknowledge or incorporate the social relations of ” intersectionality into his conceptualization of the social body and the public sphere.²⁸⁹ Under classic frameworks of the public sphere, carnivalesque as a counterpublic is more aligned with hegemonic interests (in that it is by default, exclusionary in representation and relies on state sanction to approve participation; it does not account for the nuances of performance attached to bodies marked as other - representing what Mary Russo calls a “displaced abjection.”²⁹⁰ Secondly, being sanctioned by the ruling order/system requires us to question if/how/to what magnitude carnival reinforces hegemony. Dominant powers essentially giving permission for momentary transgression paves the road towards staticness and potential co-option by the existing order.²⁹¹ Finally, carnival poses the challenge of not being long-lasting, significant, and stable enough to urge on-going socio-cultural and policy changes.²⁹² Essentially proving Bakhtin’s point that seriousness is the language of the “officialdom” of state action. Carnival’s association with joy and revelry coalesces with a brief moment in ways that allow spectators/participants to “get lost,” altering the impact from the intent. The *roi pour rire* underpinning carnival transgression leads many studying social movements to assert it as all but pointless by arguing: “offending those in power does not replace rational political debate.”²⁹³ The public

²⁸⁹Russo, *The Female Grotesque*, 63.

²⁹⁰ Ibid, 65.

²⁹¹ Foust, 12-13.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Graeber, Kilby, & Bore, “Unruly Women and Carnavalesque Countercontrol,” 172.

sphere and rhetorical situation in which “rational political debate” occurs assumes a neutrality that just does not exist. It has been well established that the hegemonic public sphere is exclusionary; the regulation of society within the public sphere ultimately works to “merely replicate existing power structures rather than upset or transform them.”²⁹⁴

Considering that those in power dictate the terms of politeness politics, those in opposition to and/or/both outside the accepted norms of the “classic body” (read: white, heteronormative, Eurocentric beauty standards, etc.) can and will always be relegated outside of the boundaries of propriety and civility. If the sovereign momentarily *allows* the inversion of hierarchies with the crowing of a carnival king, is it really an inversion or more of a slight tilt? Though disrespectful and improper, is there radical potential in the speaker who declares themselves the true sovereign by virtue of being ungovernable? Being cast outside what is considered good, pure, and worthy, in the status quo informs the actions of those who invoke the witch: they speak from a position of exile. Magic and witchcraft are characterized as extraordinarily transgressive of the hegemonic. Because witches disturb our sense of what supposedly *is* they must be expatriated from the symbolic/social order. Their banishment will automatically relegate them to being viewed unfavorably by those maintaining power.

Being amputated from the social body creates “an entirely different politics of life.”²⁹⁵ Exile is physical, social, spiritual, and embodied. Kennedy explains that “the literal and figurative space of exile assumes ‘an outside,’ a sense of (dis)placement that

²⁹⁴ Kennedy, “Cynic Rhetoric,” 38.

²⁹⁵ Prozorov, “Foucault’s Affirmative Biopolitics,” 804.

situates the exile in relation to a perceived ‘inside.’”²⁹⁶ The exiled body sees the world differently and must weigh the pros and cons of trying to fit in when they a priori egregiously stand out. Within the rhetorical tradition, we can see how othered bodies disrupt and interrupt the public sphere with spectacular inversion and rejection of social convention in the dissident ethics of the Greek Cynics. WITCH used the carnivalesque as a form of *parrhesia* that told the truth of *being* and *living as* a heretical other “regardless of how disruptive this process may be.”²⁹⁷ WITCHes’ improper speech interrupted the “pretense of a just and virtuous polis,”²⁹⁸ and in doing transvalued women’s traditional space which was then transmuted into the counter-power of being a fear-inducing heretical woman – a celebration of being ungovernable.

A hegemonic order dictates a universal and authoritative authoring of reality, and those who call bullshit must be made abject, monstrous, and expelled from the social body. The body and experiences of the exile are counternarratives that point out the plot holes in the master narrative. Describing the rhetorical positionality of Ancient Cynics, Sergei Prozorov explains:

The Cynic problematization of the relation between truth and life and their transvaluation of conventional truths by relocating them to the domain of bare life not only seeks to transform one’s life in accordance with the truth but also, through the confrontation with the existing conventions and norms, to transform the world as such.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Kennedy, “Hipparchia the Cynic:” 50.

²⁹⁷ Kennedy, “Cynic Rhetoric,” 36.

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 42.

²⁹⁹ Prozorov, 801.

For the Cynic, being the outcast – the other, “afford[ed] a certain distance and a different perspective” to traditional participation in the polis.³⁰⁰ Inviting a departure from all established mores, Cynics advanced that their social and political exclusion meant that they were also excluded from the rules that dictated a proper and civilized society.³⁰¹

Responding to their banishment, Cynics simply decided they would not be banished; openly flaunting abject, unruly, and excessive bodies that refuse discipline. The most important thing to understand about the Cynics is they did not give a fuck about decorum or civility.³⁰² “Mocker of Platonic universals,” Cynics were “dog-like,” – a definition that highlights their abjection.³⁰³ “The rules of decorum constitute[ed] the ancient rhetors’ theory of communication” and civility.³⁰⁴ In turn, Cynics found it necessary to embody and perform the disorder, discord, and chaos that were to be excised and purged from Plato’s framework of hegemony.³⁰⁵ Largely accompanying descriptors of “coarseness” and “frankness,” Bakhtin’s assessment of Rabelais largely excludes cynical philosophy despite appearing heavily in the latter’s work. Antónia Szabari argues that the liberatory atmosphere in which mores and hierarchies are inverted and transvalued in carnival are licenses of Rabelais’s Cynical persona in his narrative(s).³⁰⁶ If

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

³⁰¹ Kennedy, “Cynic Rhetoric,” 26.

³⁰² It is in this spirit that I maintain the use of “fuck” as necessary to add emphasis.

³⁰³ McLuhan, *Cynic*, 13.

³⁰⁴ Ibid, 61.

³⁰⁵ Prozorov, 809.

³⁰⁶ Szabari, “Rabelais Parrhesiastes,” S118.

we understand carnivalesque performances under the framework of Cynicism we 1) have different and more nuanced ways of understanding the transgressive potential of carnival as a performance of dissident ethics and; 2) account for some of the deficiencies in Bakhtin's conceptualization.

The literal and figurative space in which the Cynics launched their critiques “had no established canon,” yet consistently emphasized a moral argument that questioned the values of established laws/norms and those hypocritically enforcing them.³⁰⁷ As a “rejection of the official culture,”³⁰⁸ Cynical castigation of the status quo took many forms including shamelessly disregarding laws/norms, subversive/scandalous performances, and improper speech acts – all steeped in irony and satire, inviting parody and mockery of the powerful.³⁰⁹ Inherently anti-hegemonic, Cynical laughter predominantly targeted those in/with power.³¹⁰ Laughing at individuals not in power was, in the best light snobbery but in all reality was/is really just cruel. Emphasizing play and laughter demonstrate(s/d) that “the ruling ideology is not to be taken seriously or literally.”³¹¹ Rules of decorum and civility create a “a closed circuit of power and knowledge.”³¹² In order to transvalue and transmute the beliefs that ground norms in

³⁰⁷ McLuhan, 89.

³⁰⁸ Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 71.

³⁰⁹ All the sources I use regarding Cynical paradigms illustrate laughter and play as main characteristics of Cynical rhetoric.

³¹⁰ Even though they mostly launched their discursive attacks against those in power most sources contend anyone not practicing what they preached was fair game to Cynical criticism – including themselves.

³¹¹ Žižek, 24.

³¹² Fuggle, “On the Persistence of Cynic Motifs,” 162.

favor of existing powers that boundary has to be broken. The jolt crashing the circuit is confronting the status quo with what Žižek calls “the situation of its enunciation.”³¹³ Cynicism exposed the falsities presented as universal Truth and the consequences of a false consciousness derived from that reality. The morality underlying Cynical arguments calls attention to the hypocrisies, abuses, and deleterious implications of the elite’s supposedly virtuous actions. “Uncompromising in their antagonism,”³¹⁴ Cynical confrontation relie(s/d) on the dissident ethic of *parrhesia* which entailed practitioners “live within the truth” and “give account” to that truth.³¹⁵

The truth-telling of *parrhesia* represented “the relationship between the individual, speech, power, and the truth,” Cynics were incredibly emblematic of “practice what you preach.”³¹⁶ Szabari explains that Cynicism was ascetic “but also as a performance in which the moral qualities required for the *parrhesiastes* are constantly proclaimed and reclaimed.”³¹⁷ The Cynic is always the underdog on the lower end of the symbolic/social hierarchy. The Cynic is always anti-hegemonic and anti-hierarchical. *Parrhesia* is a risky and dangerous undertaking vis-à-vis an opponent(s) with more social power and that risk has widespread consequences. Essentially, Cynics called the powerful out on their bullshit.³¹⁸ The unrepentant reprobate standing as an affront to all that is seemingly

³¹³ Žižek, 26.

³¹⁴ McLuhan, 12.

³¹⁵ Prozorov, 802; Szabari, S86.

³¹⁶ Szabari, S86.

³¹⁷ Ibid, S100.

³¹⁸ I MAINTAIN THIS IS NECESSARY.

proper, civil, and right speaks to the omitted contents detailing the conditions of life in a universal and authoritarian authoring of reality. The truth-telling of parrhesia “is only possible as an act of disobedience in the face of all social norms and conventions” and operate(s/d) at all times.³¹⁹ Action is not separated from asceticism. Being an exiled political body from the body politic (and acting against it) was/is considered scandalous and obscene. Constant performance(s) of/ by Cynic confronted and “attack[ed] the artificiality and falsity of official codes of civilized life” and in doing so, exposed “the exclusions of the polis and the rewards given the corrupt.”³²⁰

The high-low dialogic characteristic of Bakhtin’s carnival is representative of Cynical rhetorical style that emphasize(s/d) confrontation through public performance that rely on play and satire. Though transgressive, the inversion of binaries is not particularly radical in that it still relies on a restricted two-dimensional way of understanding multifaceted existence. Cynicism interrupted this dichotomy by transvaluing hierarchical meanings and transmuting collective morality to the virtue of living and being. Ultimately, the Cynical message always boiled down to radical potential in letting people just *exist*. Play and laughter work(ed) to emphasize the ambiguities and contradictions of life the Cynics contended comprised existence which when brought to consciousness offer new alternatives and possibilities of/for being.

³¹⁹ Kennedy, “Hipparchia the Cynic,” 53.

³²⁰ Ibid.

3.3 The Alchemy of Activism

When we look at the witch as feminist archetype it is certainly transgressive, but not necessarily surprising. Cultural memories of feminism's "first wave" in the US may largely omit the connection with magic and spiritualism but it was "a key part of several larger social movements in the nineteenth century, most importantly the abolitionist and early women's rights movements."³²¹ Gunn assesses famed spiritualist Helena Blavatsky's rhetoric and echoes her sentiments that discourses of magic while oppressive when used by Church and state, could be a source of social power and agency for women.³²² Sollée reports suffragists like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony to be adherents of spiritualism while Nell Irvine Painter's evaluation of Sojourner Truth advances that she practiced an amalgamation of religious practices that could be categorized as magic and witchcraft.³²³ 19th century spiritualism may have been an agreeable choice for early feminists because of its fluidity in, out, and between seemingly incompatible spheres like gender and politics or class and politics.³²⁴ Nonetheless, there may be a simpler reason for why the witch as a symbol is appealing: "the idea that, by gathering together and hatching plots, women might obtain heretofore unthinkable power."³²⁵

In an interview with *Quartz* journalist Sofia Quaglia, *Sabat Magazine* editor Elisabeth Krohn notes that reclamations of the witch as a transgressive symbol "line up

³²¹ Urban, *New Age, Neopagan*, 68.

³²² Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric*, 75 & 225.

³²³ Sollée, 50.

³²⁴ Urban, *New Age, Neopagan*, 77.

³²⁵ Doyle, "Monsters, Men, and Magic."

with periods in which women feel politically disenfranchised.”³²⁶ Such sentiments inspired the reclamations of the witch not as a symbol of demonic femininity but “female power, knowledge, independence, and martyrdom.”³²⁷ Before performing their zaps across the country, many of the founding members of WITCH were part of the larger countercultural New Left movement of the 60s and 70s. Like many now infamous activists associated with mid-20th century civil rights, anti-war, socialist, and burgeoning women’s rights movements, most founding WITCHES point to Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) as their origin of activism. In the summer of 1968, the House on Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) called prominent New Left activists Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman (co-founders of the Youth International Party, or Yippies) before the committee. Sources vary but most documented accounts of WITCH place their unofficial inception at this hearing. Former members like Alice Echols and Robin Morgan affirm that seeing a witch hunt and trials (ironically, mostly against men) take place among movement members was oddly inspiring: “a witch hunt needed witches.”³²⁸ So that is what they did, appeared as witches supporting Rubin and Hoffman. Covering the event for the *Boston Globe*, journalist James Doyle describes it as a “burlesque mock-in” and records that the entire hearing was a chaotic spectacle of

³²⁶ Quaglia, “Women are Invoking.”

³²⁷ Hartmond, “A Tribe Called W.I.T.C.H.”

³²⁸ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 96; Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, 538; Gloria Steinem, “After Black Power.”

interruptions.³²⁹ Here we can see members' fondness for carnivalesque transgression, but such penchant is in line with the larger context of Yippies and guerilla theater.

Despite the HUAC panel being the catalyst of WITCH covens, the infamous bra-burning, Miss America protest of September 1968 is also credited with being a major precedent to their organization. The Miss America protest was largely organized by New York Radical Women (NYRW) despite 1000 radical women activists from across the country meeting in Atlantic City to organize the pageant. Many of the would-be WITCHes were NYRW activists. Notwithstanding the fact many of their contemporaries (and even those contemporarily) consider(ed) the "freedom trashcan" in which they burned their bras (and invited men to burn their draft cards), to be nonsensical, it got media attention and resulted in increased interest in radical organizations.³³⁰

3.4 Cynical Sorcery: Carnavalesque Hexings

The witch was not an overt political symbol of resistance for most 19th/early-20th century suffragists/women activists. Major suffrage organizations like National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) instituted policies that largely adhered to politeness politics and conformed to the Cult of True Womanhood. Within this context, reclaiming and/or performing characteristics associated with the wicked witch would be an affront to the larger society, something NAWSA would not stand for. NAWSA's proclivity for maintaining the status quo did little to advance women's suffrage on a national level (arguably, the more 'radical' and Cynical efforts by groups like the

³²⁹ Doyle, "Un-American Activities Panel."

³³⁰ *She's Beautiful When She's Angry*.

National Women's Party (NWP) did more to progress the 19th amendment). A lineage of witchcraft and Cynicism appear from the near onset of feminist activism in the US but still not overtly reclaimed until mid-20th century leftist activism.

The first WITCH coven started in New York city and comprised of thirteen women including notable second wave figures like Naomi Jaffe, Bernadette Dohrn, Robin Morgan, Laura X, Jo Freeman, Alice Echols, and Florika. As noted above, the first (New York) coven's acronym stood for Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, but other covens changed the moniker to fit their particular coven and its goals.³³¹ Other coven's acronyms included "Women Interested in Toppling Commercial Holidays", "Women Infuriated at Taking Care of Hoodlums," "Women Internationally Terrorizing Corrupt Humans," "Women Inspired to Commit Herstory," and "Women Incensed at Telephone Company Harassment."³³² The fluidity of the acronym gave covens the power of being connected to a broader symbol while also maintaining the anonymity of activists. The shifting acronym also aided in developing their ever-shifting repertoire of tactics, with Voyce arguing "the permutation of its acronym expand[ed] the sphere of possible actions it undertook."³³³ In reclaiming the witch and using associated meanings to transgress the status quo, WITCHEs ridiculed the failure of those in/with power to transform, govern, and discipline othered bodies/coven members.³³⁴ Clothed in

³³¹ Morgan, *Going Too Far*, 115.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Voyce, *Poetic Community*), 197.

³³⁴ Prozorov, 818.

black and draped in audacity WITCHes across the country cursed everything from bars, gentleman's clubs, fraternities, Nixon's Inauguration, to even the United Fruit Company.

The fluidity acronym(s) and witchy fashion aesthetic was a literal and figurative mask that called attention to "a peculiar interrelation of reality and image."³³⁵ The abject monstrosity associated with witches forced WITCH covens to maintain anonymity in order to protect the other organizations they were associated with lest they too become guilty (of witchcraft) by association. Notwithstanding the anonymity, WITCHes "appearance in the public sphere challenged the spaces her[/their] body could occupy."³³⁶ Their visibility in the public sphere paired with covens confronting and condemning those who maintained adherence to social hierarchies, capitalistic standards of (re)production, and a false consciousness/distortion of social reality. The WITCH Manifesto released by the New York coven illustrates that the anonymity derived from their costumes did not mean the mask was absent of identity:

Witches have always been women who dared to be: groovy, courageous, aggressive, intelligent, nonconformist, explorative, curious, independent, sexually liberated, revolutionary. (This possibly explains why nine million of them have been burned.) [...] They bowed to no man, being the living remnants of the oldest culture of all—one in which men and women were equal sharers in a truly cooperative society, before the death-dealing, sexual, economic, and spiritual repression of the Imperialist Phallic Society took over and began to destroy nature and human society. WITCH lives and laughs in every woman. She is the free part of each of us, beneath the shy smiles, the acquiescence to absurd male domination, the make-up or flesh suffocating clothing our sick society demands. There is no "joining" WITCH. If you are a woman and dare to look within yourself, you are a Witch.³³⁷

³³⁵ Bakhtin, 39-40.

³³⁶ Kennedy, "Hipparchia the Cynic," 57.

³³⁷ Barker, "The WITCH Manifesto," 131.

Despite their enchanting fashion choices, their manifesto makes clear that their self-styled identity is that of the witch. Like the Cynics before them WITCH had “no other truer or more authentic identity than this theatrical, public one.”³³⁸ When the carnival mask is taken out of its momentary temporality it does not disguise markers of difference or hide that state of being; instead, the mask reveals and reclaims the meanings inscribed onto othered bodies.³³⁹

For many (if not most) Western sovereigns, the social body is part of a larger, carefully crafted hierarchical cosmos ordained by nature and/or the divine.³⁴⁰ Difference threatens the universality of rule and order. Othered bodies are framed as grotesque and made monstrous – long before they ever enter a seemingly carnivalesque space. As women along various intersections of identity, WITCHes were already “immersed in an abjection that constitutes their grotesqueness.”³⁴¹ WITCH predicated their philosophy on the idea there was no neutrality and no real separation between everyday existence and public performances because “the most prosaic and banal communications often express the subtly internalized ideologies.”³⁴²

In performing their embodiment of wickedness, WITCHes were “putting on a feminine” mask that did not match with dominant ideologies – a “refusal to accept other

³³⁸ Szabari, S86.

³³⁹ Žižek, 25.

³⁴⁰ Dorrian, “On the Monstrous,” 311.

³⁴¹ Hungerford, “FEMEN's Grotesque,” 362.

³⁴² Voyce, 179.

people's evaluations" of their bodies.³⁴³ The symbolic/social order assigns meanings of civility and boundaries of suitable conduct necessary for inclusion therein. The catch-22 of all this is that benchmarks of decorum are continuously recontextualized and dictated by power – standards subaltern identities will be forced to conform to but never able to fully meet. Being an exile already indirectly draws attention – masking yourself as the antithesis of social conventions creates a spectacle that makes the most out of the situation – if you are already going to have people's attention by being/existing than why not act spectacularly? WITCHes brought this condition of existence to public attention with their zaps – acts of spontaneous guerrilla theater that relied on hyperbole, parody, and flamboyant/bombastic expression to convey their argument.³⁴⁴ This dissident rhetorical style is similarly present in Cynic rhetoric whereby rhetors engaged in "shock/insurgent" tactics of performance that jolted audiences to adjust their perceptions.³⁴⁵ Cynics would "swipe any technique [and] resort to any extreme," with McLuhan contending performances were "polymorphic, topsy-turvy, and perverse; they [would] use any form."³⁴⁶ The WITCH manifesto venerates the use of theater and absurdity, proclaiming it to be an essential tool of WITCH/witches:

Your weapons are theater, satire, explosions, magic, herbs, music, costumes, cameras, masks, chants, stickers, stencils and paint, films, tambourines, bricks, brooms, guns, voodoo dolls, cats, candles, bells, chalk, nail clippings, hand grenades, poison rings, fuses, tape recorders, incense—your own boundless imagination. Your power comes from your own self as a woman, and it is activated by working in concert with your

³⁴³ Rowe, *The Unruly Woman*, 217.

³⁴⁴ Barker, 131.

³⁴⁵ McLuhan, 10 & 68.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*, xvi.

sisters. The power of the Coven is more than the sum of its individual members, because it is together.³⁴⁷

“Make good trouble, make mischief, and have fun doing it,” is a good way to understand their mystical methodology.³⁴⁸ While many will scoff at the impropriety of cynical tactics it is necessary to recognize that disruption and interruption are often necessary tactics to deploy for those who have been left out of the conversation.³⁴⁹

Celebrating taboo objects associated with witches, appealing to sisterhood, and locating power in grotesquely feminine bodies inverts proper places in the supposed cosmologically ordained symbolic/social hierarchy. Here we can see that a goal of WITCH is to transmute notions of feminine decorum into talismans for agential disruption. Their bodies are centered as the stage of carnivalesque theater and in doing so, WITCHes claim their bodies “back from those who wish appropriate that which it produces, to civilize it, or even imprison it.”³⁵⁰ Undertaken in public and without fear of witnesses, WITCH zaps “challenged the spaces [their] bod[ies] could occupy,” as others.³⁵¹ Evoking a sense of “benevolent anarchy,”³⁵² WITCH covens took “delight in transgressive performances that undermine cultural norms governing women’s voices and

³⁴⁷ Barker, 132,

³⁴⁸ Bennett, “Spooking the Patriarchy.”

³⁴⁹ Kennedy, “Hipparchia the Cynic,” 58.

³⁵⁰ Presdee, 40.

³⁵¹ Kennedy, “Hipparchia the Cynic,” 57.

³⁵² Kennedy, “Cynic Rhetoric,” 31.

bodies in public.”³⁵³ Through performing their abject monstrosity and reveling in it, WITCHes become disruptive, uncontrollable, and ungovernable.³⁵⁴

On Halloween 1968, the New York coven climbed up the stairs outside the Chase Manhattan Bank as on lookers stared at thirteen women clad in black capes, pointy hats, and face paint. This would be WITCH’s first protest. The actions actually began at 4 a.m. that morning when WITCHes clandestinely superglued the locks on the doors to the Stock Exchange.³⁵⁵ For WITCHes, Wall Street was a symbol of the “Imperialist Phallic Society,” and as an enemy to outsiders had to be cursed.³⁵⁶ In front of the Financial District and George Washington’s statue, one member held up a papier-mache pigs head on a gold platter while the other twelve members of the coven circled around her “bearing verges, wands, and bezants.”³⁵⁷ The coven then made their way to the Stock Exchange where sister WITCHes locked hands, and chanted (to the tune of “Tisket-a-Tasket”) “Wall Street, Wall Street, Crookedest Street of All Street / Foreign Exchange / Student Exchange / Wife Exchange / Stock Exchange / Trick or Treat/Up Against the Wall Street!”³⁵⁸

³⁵³ Hungerford, 365.

³⁵⁴ Ibid,

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ Morgan, *Going Too Far*, 121.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid, 122; Freeman, “WITCH.”

Some might say magic does not exist, but the stock market did fall between five and thirteen points the next day, depending on the source.³⁵⁹ Early Wall Street bros along with other onlookers had no other option than to watch their hex, spellbound in their words and actions. I mean, what else is one going to do when a group of women dressed as the principles of evil made flesh appear and curse a venerated institution? Angry women unsettle ideologies, and the laughter of these angry women further complicates a clear, universal interpretation of their zap.³⁶⁰ They brought forth an uneasiness and un-comfortability that force witnesses to question the venerated established order, however insignificant (at the very least, one has to ask themselves why exactly witches are cursing Wall Street and dancing with a paper maché pigs head). Nearly every source recording the Hex on Wall Street in later years note that the spectacle of sorcery created a ripple effect across the country whereby covens popped up across the country in cities like San Francisco, Chicago, Boston, Washington D.C., and even Milwaukee. The incivility and confrontation of the status quo performed through their hexing of Wall Street was powerful enough to not only catch the attention of those in the social body but also other abject witches. For those already considered uncivilized, such impropriety spoke to a shared abjection between othered bodies disciplined in accordance with civility. Even if covens never met in person they consubstantiated under the symbol of the witch and used her/their subversive potentially rhetorically.

³⁵⁹ Bennett; Freeman; Morgan, *Going Too Far*, 122; Steinem.

³⁶⁰ Rowe, 217.

Focusing on the control of women's bodies, Washington DC WITCHes protested a senate hearing on population control. Activist Alice Wolfson explains that DC WITCHes showed up to the hearing in February 1970 dressed in their normal clothes before taking their seats.³⁶¹ As the senators spoke, WITCHes spontaneously revealed themselves with a bit of guerrilla theater. WITCHes defrocked to reveal their witchery to shocked onlookers. They jumped on the platform reserved for senators and chanted "we are witches/ We have to come to yell/ You population experts/ Can go to hell/ You think you can cure all the world's ills/ By making poor women take your unhealthy pills" while throwing handfuls of pills with every stanza.³⁶² The maternal/pregnant body is abject and monstrous in the contradictory meanings assigned to them: that which brings forth life also signals death. The pregnant body is necessary for survival while also othered; it breeches the boundaries of the established order by bringing to life a new one.³⁶³ Regulating and confining maternal bodies was/is necessary to maintain existing power structures and the (re)production of labor. Refusing restrictions on the maternal body and confronting actual heads of state (in the "land of the free," no less) puts the onus on those who commit this violence yet project it as protection.

WITCH continued to perform the power of the abject, monstrous, and grotesque body as resistance hegemonic propriety. In their protest at the University of Chicago, WITCHes connected the physical impediments placed on women's bodies to the erasure

³⁶¹ Bradley, *Mass Media*, 64-65.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ Burton, "Abject Appeal," 64.

of generational knowledges largely obliterated in the Burning Times following the firing of a radical feminist professor. As if they were forces of nature, WITCHes stormed the university enchanting onlookers with a spell bringing the past into clear visualization: “knowledge is power through which you control our mind, our spirit, our bodies, and our souls. Hex!”³⁶⁴ It was/is through the suppression of knowledge that the woman – every part of her, is oppressed. Drawing on urban legends and folk tales noting a witch’s excess could be identified by still-growing disregarded body parts, WITCHes mailed nail and hair clippings to the university before the event.³⁶⁵ WITCHes coalesced their exuberant bodies with the perceptions cultural memory created of those bodies.

As women, WITCHes’ bodies were/are rendered othered and grotesque in specific and idiosyncratic ways. Bakhtin’s description of the “pregnant, senile, and laughing hag” illustrates this feminine nuance to the grotesque (that was not his intent). If a classic, “true” woman is supposed to be Eurocentrically beautiful, pure, pious, etc., then the feminine grotesque is its antithesis. The feminine grotesque fails and/or refuses “to conform to the dominant” standards of womanhood which places their personhood in a liminal, abject, and monstrous state of being.³⁶⁶ Laini Burton explains that “the cyclical mutability of the female body is conflated with the grotesque and the monstrous; concepts which possess an enduring relationship to the present day.”³⁶⁷ The grotesque is a debasement of social conventions and therefore evokes terror. Fingernail, hair clippings,

³⁶⁴ Morgan, “Historical Documents,” 539.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Brown, “Class and Feminine Excess,” 81.

³⁶⁷ Burton, “Abject Appeal,” 63.

and other cast-off body parts/products represent and abject “breaching the boundary between the (seemingly self-contained) body and the external world. Disrupting confines creates terror among the hegemonic and social body; embracing the “defil[ed], unclean, improper body” amplifies the perceived threat of the excessive and transgressive grotesque body.³⁶⁸ These protests of the flesh (and other body parts) threaten to destabilize the established order through confronting spectators with the subjectivity of the body. Bodies are re/constituted in relation to othered bodies, classical bodies, and the social body “in a social context of power, desire, and knowledge.”³⁶⁹ Subjectivity fragments the supposed unity of the classic body (representing the social body). The spectacle of a Cynical carnival, celebrating and reveling in the monstrous body’s abjection, urges disidentification through fascination – we cannot look away from the site/act where meaning collapses and exposes the falsities in our consciousness.³⁷⁰ Humans are drawn to the fire and spellbound by those who eat, dance with, and walk through the flames because they tell us something different about ourselves; “they serve to awaken a passion for otherness” of being “and for vertiginous disidentification that is already latent within our own selves” that seeks to know the conflagration lest we get burned.

As exiles, WITCH’s grotesque performances also revealed “what is spurned, spoiled, stained, and hidden in the body politic.”³⁷¹ The targets of their zaps on Wall

³⁶⁸ Hungerford, 364.

³⁶⁹ Kennedy, “Hipparchia the Cynic,” 53.

³⁷⁰ Shaviro, 96.

³⁷¹ Halnon, 39.

Street, the Senate, and University of Chicago point to who their parrhesia is critiquing: those in power and those with substantial social power. Though carnivalesque, WITCH engaged in a strategic confrontation that utilized grotesque meanings placed on their bodies call attention to the contradictions and hypocrisies of a democracy enshrining equality lead by people (mostly white, heterosexual, wealthy men) invested in maintaining the existing order. WITCHes disassociated the shame attached to their abject/monstrous/grotesque body but unlike Bakhtin's carnival, it was not merely inverted to pride. Instead, they created a type of ambivalence resembling the Cynical ethic of just being and living outside of state confines on the body. WITCH's unruliness to abide by any formula is a "demonic power" that threatens to "destabilize old frameworks and create new ones."³⁷²

The 1969 Bridal Fair protests are usually considered to be their most contemptuous. Though often discussed as a simultaneous events taking place in New York City and San Francisco, records only specify the NYC fair and the San Francisco event took place the following day. In the days preceding the event, the New York coven released flyers explicitly stating that their intention was to cynically "confront the whoremakers" and urged others do the same:

Marriage is a dehumanizing institution – legal whoremaking for women. *Confront* the perpetrators of our exploitation. *Confront* the institutions which make us pawns of a male-dominated culture. *Confront* the structure which forces men into the dehumanizing roles of our oppressors. *Confront* the Bridal Fair, which encourages vulnerable young girls to be dutiful, uncomplaining, self-sacrificing, "loving" commodities on the marriage market, and well-packaged, fully automated, brand-conscious consumers. *Confront* the exhibitors of this commercial extravaganza: "Big Boys" of the world of business and finance who are at the same time enslaving and

³⁷² Rowe, 41.

murdering our sisters and brothers in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. *Come* witches, [...] feminists, students, our black and Puerto Rican sisters, professional women, housewives, welfare women – come all oppressed women of every age and marital status. Come to New York’s first *and last* “Bridal Un-Fair.”³⁷³

The flyer was a way of organizing their protest, but it was also a means to proliferate their intent. The “Bridal Un-Fair” at Madison Square Garden featured spells (slogans) like “Confront the Whoremakers.” WITCHes and attendees arrived early. As women and their mothers waited to be admitted, WITCHes chanted “here come the slaves – off to their graves” while others held signs reading “Always a Bride, Never a Person”, “Ask Not for Whom the Wedding Bell Tolls”, and “Here Comes the Bribe.”³⁷⁴ Leaflets were dispersed in tote bags labeled “shoplifting bags.”³⁷⁵ Witches have historically subverted paradigms of (re)production and therefore, hegemonic ideas of marriage. Such transgression was present in the “Un-Wedding Ceremony” performed outside the bridal fair in which participants made a pledge of dis allegiance:

We are gathered together here in the spirit of our passion to affirm love and initiate our freedom from the unholy state of American patriarchal oppression. [...] We promise not to obey. We promise this through highs and bummers, in recognition that riches and objects are totally available through socialism or theft (but also that possessing is irrelevant to love).³⁷⁶

Too add extra flair (because, why not?) hundreds of white mice were released into Madison Square Garden.³⁷⁷ The Un-Wedding Ceremony was a carnivalesque

³⁷³ Morgan, “Historical Documents,” 543-544.

³⁷⁴ Freeman; Morgan, *Going Too Far*, 131.

³⁷⁵ Bennet. Also, WHAT A GREAT IDEA!

³⁷⁶ Morgan, *Going Too Far*, 129.

³⁷⁷ Literally everyone reporting on WITCH talks about this.

inversion of the traditional Western wedding ceremony, but this act also signified the threat of the unruly woman. In refusing to obey and vowing to rebel, WITCHes (and participants) were “unsettle[ing] on of the most fundamental of social distinctions – that between male and female.”³⁷⁸ This act, like their other zaps, represent a carnivalesque performance of fearing the feminine. Based in cynical philosophy that rejects heteropatriarchal capitalist dominance and confronts that system by embodying meanings we have been told to fear. The twitching tongues of WITCHes enacted the most “dangerous emanations” of the feminine: laughter and speech.³⁷⁹

Ultimately, the Bridal Un-Fair, along with their other zaps, are/were considered unsuccessful in creating institutional change (though, I would argue that explicit institutional change was not their intent/goal). The Bridal Un-Fair also had missteps in calculating the immediate effect(s) of their zap. Releasing the mice was intended to cause havoc inside the building (which was a gross oversight of safety) but instead, “a number of women at the fair instead tried to save the mice by catching and releasing them.”³⁸⁰ Similarly, the act of heckling fair-goers and gluing bumper stickers to their cars made those in attendance and other feminists believe WITCH was contemptuous towards non-movement women.³⁸¹ Obviously, the dissemination of the flyers pre-fair did little to send

³⁷⁸ Rowe, 43.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Jones, "Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy."

³⁸¹ Echols, 97.

their authorial intent. Founding member Robin Morgan points to this zap as the peak of their “clownish proto-anarchism” and dismisses WITCH’s significance in contending that they never “raised our own consciousness very far out of our own combat boots.”³⁸² Criticisms of WITCH have ranged from their perceived inability to take matters of oppression seriously to being anti-women/femininity and anti-family.³⁸³ WITCHes as unruly women do undermine traditional family values by questioning what those traditions really mean in practice. Debasing is not necessarily indicative of being anti-anything.

Despite the condemnation of the Bridal Un-Fair, other WITCHy actions demonstrated that the various covens were not anti-family but against “the commercial exploitation of the mother-child relationship.”³⁸⁴ In addition to their typical zap performances, various WITCH covens/members also wrote and disseminated their spells/poems through different self-published pamphlets we would now consider proto-zines. In one poem titled “Pass the Word, Sister,” WITCH ties the reproductive capabilities of the feminine body with the measures that confine that body.

Erika Huggins. Frances Carter. Rose Smith. Loretta Luckes. Margaret Hudgins. Maud Frances. 6 sisters in prison. 3 sisters pregnant. 2 sisters almost in labor. All have been falsely accused of conspiracy and murder. *None have been tried or found guilty.* All 6 are black. All 6 are Panthers.

³⁸² Morgan, *Going Too Far*, 103.

³⁸³ In addition to the Bridal Un-Fair, WITCH faced significant criticism for their Mother’s Day when they performed a spell to renounce the martyrdom of traditional motherhood and transform into the liberated mother who is a woman and *just* a mom. This was conducted by the Women Interested in Toppling Consumption Holidays coven. Voyce details some of the main criticism of WITCH on pages 175-191. The full Mother’s Day Incantation can be found in *Sisterhood if Powerful* on page 550.

³⁸⁴ Voyce, 177.

All 6 are sisters. *Confinement*: 1. The act of shutting within an enclosure; the act of imprisoning. 2. The state of being restrained or obliged to stay indoors. 3. A woman's lying in; childbirth. [...] How does Niantic State Woman's Farm prepare woman for their confinement? They are: denied their choice of doctors; denied information about childbirth; denied their choice of method of childbirth; deprived of proper diet, exercise, medication, & clothing. [...] Guards will be there when the babies are born. Guards will be there to take them away. The State will decide who's "fit" and who's "not fit" to be guard and be guardian of mother and child. [...] WITCH curses the State and declares it unfit. WITCH knows our suppressed history: that women who rebel are not only jailed, napalmed, & beaten, but also raped, branded, & burned at the stake. [...] We are going to stop all confinement of women. WITCH calls down destruction on Babylon. Oppressors: The curse of women is on you. DEATH TO MALE CHAUVINISM.³⁸⁵

This poem links an industrialized criminal justice system to the exploitation of the mother-child bond that is only compounded with intersections of race and political activism. Even outside of their zaps, WITCH was invested in confronting and upsetting “the ideological-discursive containments that slowly erode the public spaces, cultural resources, and means of assembly that facilitate democratic action.”³⁸⁶ This linking of oppression was particularly unique in a time and place when intersectional concerns were largely omitted from the larger public of women’s liberation. Acknowledging that intersectionality was not a main concern of WITCH covens, differences in bodies were reference points to detail how knowledge and power were located and constrained in particular bodies. “WITCH characterized patriarchy as a multifaceted system of sexism, racism, and

³⁸⁵ Morgan, “Historical Documents,” 551-554.

³⁸⁶ Voyce, 183.

economic disenfranchisement,” and called to a shared abjection among othered bodies (particularly women) to dismantle the system.³⁸⁷

Double, bubble, war and rubble,
When you mess with women, you'll be in trouble.
We're convicted of murder if abortion is planned.
Convicted of conspiracy if we fight for our rights.
And burned at the stake when we stand up to fight
Double, bubble, war and rubble,
When you mess with women, you'll be in trouble
We'll curse your empire to make it fall -
When you take on one of us, you take on us all.³⁸⁸

We are told to pay no mind to the rabble because rabble absolutely gets attention.³⁸⁹ As a foreboding political prophecy this WITCH's chant and other zaps call upon haunted memories of the Burning Times to consubstantiate under an unofficial knowledge of the monstrous, witch body and break from the enclosures of power by offering the alternative of “what if.”

Notwithstanding the criticism that their carnivalesque performances lacked the seriousness issues of women's liberation required it is vital to consider laughter as a vital strategy for coping with and subverting hegemonic oppression. “Humor is not antithetical to tackling painful issues,” and can act as an alternative style of parrhesia that signals “a refusal to subscribe to one metaphysical conception of the world over another.”³⁹⁰ “To

³⁸⁷ Ibid, 178.

³⁸⁸ Freeman; Morgan, “Historical Documents,” 551; Sollée, 55.

³⁸⁹ I want to call special attention to the definitions of “rabble” being both a “disorderly crowd” and “the common people.” This is illustrative of the discursive constraints that situate and maintain power through language that has been discussed throughout this chapter. So, just a FYI.

³⁹⁰ Brock, 291 & 293.

refuse to live a lie is then to suspend one's participation in this system."³⁹¹ Ultimately, WITCH's cynical carnival was illustrative of a dissident imperative to speak and be heard.³⁹² Engaging in a tactic originating in Cynical disobedience, WITCH's zaps and other performances deployed a "critical ideological procedure" whereby covens attempted to "lead the naive ideological consciousness to a point at which it can recognize its own effective conditions."³⁹³ The hegemonic cannot maintain and replicate itself without the ideological mystification in a distorted reality.³⁹⁴ WITCHes sought to demystify dominant illusions with counter-spells that rejected linguistic norms and mores of propriety that ultimately transvalued their supposed absolutism and thus shatters the illusion of a unified reality based on/in the symbolic/social order.

3.5 Conclusion

Platonic paradigms of disorder and discord underly the ideological constructions of the modern Western symbolic/social order.³⁹⁵ With strict governance and tight containment the symbolic/social order can be perfected by purifying itself of deviance. But it might be reasonable to assume that Plato failed to recognize the persistence of those steadfast in proving a point. And, if those unrelenting point provers already exist outside of the established order why should they stay in the confinements of propriety?

³⁹¹ Prozorov, 815.

³⁹² Kennedy, "Cynic Rhetoric," 41.

³⁹³ Žižek, 25.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Prozorov, 809.

Dissidence provides an alternative perspective for engaging politically. For monsters, Cynics, WITCHes and other ‘improper’ bodies, their existence within the symbolic/social order while working against its control is a priori impolite. They are by their very nature as othered beings uncivilized and unassimilable in hegemonic order.

We cannot gauge the perceived ‘effectiveness’ of subaltern political groups changing institutional issues when they were never intended to be included in those systems. By refusing exile and resisting marginalization they are exposing the fragility of absolute order; they lift the veil and break the state’s illusion of a proper social structure. Knowing that their presence within the public sphere is automatically considered indecorous the unruly rhetor is able to ascertain the stylistic strategies most conducive to disseminating their message.³⁹⁶ Regardless of whether or not anyone finds carnivalesque protest ‘effective’ in creating change it cannot be denied that spectacle absolutely gets attention. WITCH’s playful invocation of irony is a form of confrontation that teaches and exposes logics of enclosure/containment, how they operate discursively, and how they are enacted within the symbolic/social order.³⁹⁷ In doing so, covens projected a cosmology of possibilities that appeal to innate mystification with the unknown. The attempts to open a new space separate from oppressive hegemony could only be achieved through dismantling the mechanism of control that situates language and propriety with enclosures of knowledge and power. In accounts of the ancient Cynics, Diogenes would move around the polis and ‘beat’ the elite with his walking stick as proof that their power

³⁹⁶ Szabari, S103.

³⁹⁷ Voyce, 182.

was not absolute. The social order did not provide Diogenes license to discipline yet there he was, chastising the elite for their failings. If the symbolic/social order was really absolute, the elite would not fail, nor would Diogenes be able to castigate them. Diogenes's walking stick situated blame and so too does a curse. In casting blame and hexing those responsible for the failings of an absolute order WITCHes spells were an "instrument of a political and moral transformation."³⁹⁸

WITCH used the archetype of the witch as heretical other as a point of identification that informed their tactics of dissidence. These countercultural WITCHES saw themselves in their feminist ancestors. Despite living centuries apart their generations were connected by shared abjection and victimization by church and state.³⁹⁹ According to Catherine Spooner, witches "foreshadow an alternative tradition of countercultural dissidence, in which embracing the occult becomes a form of protest, a means of reclaiming power for the politically powerless."⁴⁰⁰ There is a subversive and glamorous appeal in performances of the unhinged woman. For subaltern identities who have had to fear violent discipline and containment by the state, it can be both cathartic and politically poignant to invert that fear by becoming the monster they said one was.

There is unsettling power in performing and reveling in one's perceived abjectness. Afterall, the most dangerous monster is the one who demonstrates just how ungovernable they really are. Magic is abject because it is a means for the powerless to

³⁹⁸ Szabari, S99.

³⁹⁹ Spooner, "Lucifer of Lancashire," 17.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid.

obtain some measure of power and agency; it is transgressive for the simple reason that creates opportunity for the subversion of social superiority.⁴⁰¹ Stratton contends that “this [type of] spell challenges the very core of social identity based in corporal ideology.”⁴⁰² WITCH’s zaps presented a “world destroyed so that it may be regenerated and renewed.” Even though many lodge their disagreements with WITCH’s tactics or advance arguments about their institutional efficiency this chapter has a different assessment. What has not really been considered in WITCH literature and what I contend is that covens were not motivated by institutional efforts of change as much as they were disrupting ideological patterns. Covens were never intended to be included in symbolic/social order and they knew their zaps would have little if any effect on policy – which is *why* they wielded hexes. Just as we saw in the previous chapter, magic enabled power for the powerless and witchcraft was a means to combat against hegemonic violence. What we do need to consider about WITCH zaps is the imprint they left on US culture. As a loosely organized social justice group they existed for only two years. WITCHes moved back into the shadows just as quickly as they interrupted and disrupted the purified light of modernity. Yet, we can see clear signs of their legacy in the ways contemporary witches in the US engage with politics. The gaps existing within the larger US feminist movement includes contentions regarding tactics. This conversation in US contexts is as old as the NAWSA vs. NWP. For contemporary feminists frustrated with dominant politeness politics and who identify as a heretical other, WITCH acts as a frame of

⁴⁰¹ Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender,” 168.

⁴⁰² Ibid, 167.

reference and equipment for living. Sollée explains that “although the original WITCH covens may have been short lived, their tradition survives in the 21st century, both in new activist covens around the country” and in witchcraft rituals performed as political protest.⁴⁰³ Though zaps as guerilla theater has eluded exact replication we can still see similar enactments of the Cynical carnivalesque in protests discussed in the next chapter or other magic-adjacent campaigns like activist Jex Blackmore’s 2016 “Cumrags for Congress” action. So long as subaltern bodies are demonized and made monstrous, witches (and WITCHes) will be there to remind those in the symbolic/social order that Hell hath no fury...

⁴⁰³ Sollée, 54.

Chapter 4 Twitching Tongues and Digital Divinations: Witchcraft and Sorcery as Politics in Contemporary U.S. Society

Like many people my chest tightened upon reading a headline outlining that a majority opinion draft of *Dobbs vs. Jackson* authored by Samuel Alito was leaked and *Roe* was to be overturned. Family horror stories of botched abortions ran through my head in tandem with memories of my own, safe, abortion. Despite being many years ago, my procedure still felt very much in the here and now yet I was faced with the reality that my loved ones' terrorizing experiences were similarly very much in that same space/time. Even though what was leaked was a 'draft' it felt so absolute and certain in the way the decision vacuumed air out the room. It was hegemonic prophecy manifested before our eyes over decades. The decision was very real before it was ever 'officially' real. Upon reading Alito's leaked draft I came across a familiar name...Matthew Hale. Hale was a British nobleman who became Lord Chief Justice in 1671 and infamously presided over witch trials. Like a sorcerer (albeit a Catholic one who would probably hate being characterized as such) Alito *invokes* "eminent common law authorities" like Hale and his treatise *The History of the Pleas to the Crown* which outlines abortion as a crime, specifically homicide, and describes witches' potions as an abortifacient. It is important to remember Hale's remarks within the relationship of magic and the politics of imperial modernity. Hale's judicial judgements came at time when 1) the bubonic plague was still

effecting the (re)production of labor; 2) Western powers were ramping up colonization efforts and 3) controlling sexuality and reproduction through violence was/is an ‘effective’ way to control a population in accordance with a specific design of ‘order.’ A later footnote in the *Dobbs* decision cites a 2008 CDC study describing the lack in a “domestic supply of infants” available for adoption in the US.⁴⁰⁴ The context of adoption does not quiet my personal, intuitive alarm bells considering we are arguably still experiencing the COVID 19 pandemic, US authorities were citing significantly low birth rates as cause for concern long before 2020, and the past decade has seen an increasing number of white supremacist and misogynistic organizations try to reify their social power and self-affirmed places in hierarchies they see as divinely ordained. Conversations of and about witches, magic, and politics have existed in this discursive milieu outside of Alito’s draft and Trump’s trite deflections of being subjected to a “witch hunt.”

Notwithstanding existing within the larger US public/population for decades, magic practitioners as political agents did not manifest before collective eyes until (around) 2015 with an increasing awareness of systematic and systemic power dynamics and the near simultaneous Republican nomination of Donald Trump in the 2016 US Presidential Election. Sabina Magliocco contends “one of the most surprising cultural phenomena to emerge from the election of Donald J. Trump [...] has been the open, public use of magic in the service of politics by small but significant contingents of the

⁴⁰⁴ *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, No. 19-1392, 597 (U.S. 2022).

American population.”⁴⁰⁵ Spiritual speech in US political contexts is commonly recognized and researched along various, but mostly Christian-centric forms of prayer; it is mainstream and acceptable. Julia C. Fine explains that witchcraft and magic have been “excluded from mainstream conceptualizations of religion yet [are] uncomfortably imbricated in Western [...] culture; American witchcraft has been rendered invisible both within and outside of” meaning-centered scholarship.⁴⁰⁶ Political Ritual speech usually focuses on non-Western contexts that commonly perpetuate notions of magic associated with the primitive other.⁴⁰⁷ Similarly, Magliocco echoes Fine in arguing that the continues reluctance of researchers to thoughtfully examine magic in the US (and other Western countries) “stems from ethnocentric assumptions: magic is generally viewed as irrational, ineffective, and characteristic of underdeveloped societies.”⁴⁰⁸ In the contemporary US political landscape magic, witchcraft, and sorcery are more open and publicly visible than it has been over the last many centuries and includes “the entire political spectrum, from the far right to the hard left.”⁴⁰⁹ Magic as a political resource for and against hegemonic powers is not a recent development – it is merely the most contemporary performance in/of the rhizomatic relationship between magic and the

⁴⁰⁵ Magliocco, “Magic and Politics,” 5

⁴⁰⁶ Fine, “#MagicResistance,” 70.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Magliocco, 7.

⁴⁰⁹ Magliocco, 6. For clarity, I am going to frame this conversation under Covino’s framework of witch v. sorcerer in which the term “sorcerer” refers to magic used by conservative/dominant powers to reinforce the status quo whereas witches/witchcraft is characterized by anti-hegemonic pursuits and discourses that represent the experiences of heretical others.

politics of imperial modernity.⁴¹⁰ If you recall the history of Western occultism illustrated in the first chapter, charges of witchcraft/magic have been used as a civilizing mechanism and disciplinary action against marginalized bodies made monstrous while simultaneously being utilized by sovereigns, nobles, and aristocrats in pursuit of reifying and accumulating more social power. In the ways explained below we can see the current manifestation of political magic as “a continuing tradition [...] in the West in which the occult is harnessed in performative acts designed to influence viewers’ and participants’ understandings, and to protest,” the numerous precarities of modernity and late capitalism.⁴¹¹ This chapter asserts that political magic arises in times of significant socio-political tensions and can be understood as responses to whatever constitutes as modernity in any situated here-and-now under Western hegemony. The reactions are varied but ultimately illustrative of socio-historical power dynamics and exemplary of how people across intersections of identity seek to enact agency and actively participate in the construction of reality. The contemporary public exposure to political magic offers audiences a scrying mirror in which we can see and witness the fallible boundaries positioned between rational/irrational, sacred/secular/profane, good/bad, primitive/civilized, saint/sinner, space/time.⁴¹²

Unlike prior incarnations of political magic, current manifestations are using new digital technologies in their craft. Specifically, “the internet and social media [are]

⁴¹⁰ Goto-Jones, *Conjuring Asia*, 9.

⁴¹¹ Magliocco, 9.

⁴¹² Styers, *Making Magic*, 19.

vectors for both diffusion and performance of political magic.”⁴¹³ Attending to the new tactics of political magic emerging in contemporary US politics this chapter utilizes a “meaning centered” approach through communicative ecologies.⁴¹⁴ Communicative ecologies emerge “as a milieu of agents who are connected in various ways by various exchanges of mediated and unmediated forms of communication.”⁴¹⁵ In forwarding a meaning centered approach to magical discourses I hope to highlight how deeply imbedded prestidigitation is in Western collective consciousness and how it manifests politically in the here-and-now. In what follows this chapter highlights the significant use of emerging digital/communicative technologies among magical/occult circles in recent history in order to better contextualize the importance of the internet and social media in building communities, circulating information, de-esoterisizing practice, and performing political magic rituals. These communicative ecologies do not exist in a digital vacuum and permeate into the material; “something created on the internet bleeds into the ‘real world’, [interacts with it, and potentially] changes it.”⁴¹⁶ I first highlight the enclave of 4chan and 8chan/kun sorcerers and their sortilege pursuits in Trump’s election, which includes the apotheosis of Pepe the Frog in what has become known as “The Cult of Kek.” These alt-right imageboard sorcerers stand in stark contrast to the liberal/leftist witches who collectively became known as the “Magical Resistance” who perceivably outnumbered and outlasted their counterparts in public visibility. This chapter ends by

⁴¹³ Magliocco, 9.

⁴¹⁴ McKerrow, “Social Movement Scholarship,” 38.

⁴¹⁵ Treré & Mattoni, “Media Ecologies,” 294.

⁴¹⁶Lachman, *Dark Star Rising*, 14.

coalescing analysis with a perspective commentary on the complexities entailed in understanding messy topics like this and considerations those undertaking this task might want to consider in their contributions offering a ‘bigger picture.’ I would like to apologize in advance for the length of this chapter. I hope it provides readers with an understanding of magic in the here-and-now that adequately covers the breadth and depth of this complicated milieu. Afterall, “understanding magic has seemed key to understanding human society.”⁴¹⁷

4.1 Methods

“Technopagans” were some of the very first adopters of internet-circulated religious discourses.⁴¹⁸ While not every witch identifies as a pagan and vice versa, the proliferation of magic and witchcraft-centered discourses and information has increased exponentially with digital dissemination.⁴¹⁹ Technical jargon is reminiscent of esoteric and occultic languages in that “many argue that programmers are, like magicians, involved in ‘arcane knowledge’ inaccessible to laymen and they demonstrate extreme control and power over the world.”⁴²⁰ Technology and magic are not just connected conceptually but some magical practitioners see “technology and magic as interchangeable.”⁴²¹ Aupers argues there is a clear “affinity between magic and digital

⁴¹⁷ Styers, 6.

⁴¹⁸ Drury, *Stealing Fire from Heaven*, 293.

⁴¹⁹ In consideration of the religious, political, and social dynamic of associating all magic users as pagans I have decided to use the term “technomagi” to be inclusive of all magic based digital practices.

⁴²⁰ Aupers, “The Force is Great,” 164.

⁴²¹ Drury, 263.

technology” with practitioners commonly blurring distinctions between the natural, technological, and magical.⁴²²

Like the digital itself, rhetorical explorations of the technosphere have left methodological waters a tad muddy, to say the least. Similarly, there is a near utter lack in assessments of the politics of technomagi. “The computer screen has long served as a way to understand the demarcation between digital and non-digital,” but those lines no longer exist (if they even inherently existed to begin with).⁴²³ Scholars like DeLuca, Boyle, Eyman, and others have noted the increasing lack of distinction between the digital and non-digital in the contemporary media matrixes, “consisting of technologies embedded in economic, political, and cultural practices [that] constructs the social worlds in which we live.”⁴²⁴ Neither a verb or a noun, the digital has become a multimodal body that is always moving, influx, and therefore, multisensory and all encompassing.⁴²⁵ Extending and evolving his concept of the public screen DeLuca argues that we (scholars and non-scholars alike) have to understand that media and technology should no longer be considered neutral tools to disseminate information and instead realize that these all-encompassing mechanisms are “centrally world-building.”⁴²⁶ For better, worse, and everything in between, the digital works to articulate, rearticulate, reshape, recreate,

⁴²² Aupers, 158.

⁴²³ Boyle, Brown, & Ceraso, “The Digital,” 252.

⁴²⁴ DeLuca, Lawson, & Sun, “Occupy Wall Street,” 487.

⁴²⁵ Boyle et al., 254; Barnett & DeLuca, “The Conditions That Form,” 100. Similarly, Sheridan, Ridolfo, & Michel’s “The Available Means of Persuasion: Mapping a Theory and Pedagogy of Multimodal Public Rhetoric,” hints at this becoming the norm but since it was written in 2005 their piece does not explicitly detail this contemporary state of being.

⁴²⁶ DeLuca, “Extinction Rebellion,” 217.

reconstruct, and fragment the world we live in; “the digital, in other words, is also an apt metaphor for the postmodern, representing both simulacra and fissure.”⁴²⁷

Overwhelmingly, scholarship on the digital permutation of/in the public sphere has pinpointed three main concerns: 1) techno-utopia vs. techno-skepticism; 2) digital potential vs. analog structural biases and 3) resistive actions vs. neoliberal co-opting. Early analysis of internet discourses commonly posited the internet as incredibly radical and revolutionary – a means for the marginalized to demand power with Khiara Bridges contending that those “starry-eyed” scholars “believed that the internet would revitalize the public sphere and save democracy.”⁴²⁸ Those assessments have become less and less prevalent, which is not a surprise for anyone who has been on the internet/ social media anytime in the last ten years. Notwithstanding those idealistic formations, it has become evident that contemporary US society has become less of a techno-utopia and has verged more towards an episode of *Black Mirror*.⁴²⁹ The coalescence of the digital with the material changed how people all over the world communicate. Text-speak, memes, political public discourses, and the proliferation of information are just a few of the ways communication has changed since the onset of what has been called a “digital age.” This shift in socio-communicative paradigms has “alter[ed] the trajectory of our thinking about politics and society.”⁴³⁰ As far back as 2002, DeLuca and Peebles illustrated that

⁴²⁷ Eyman, *Digital Rhetoric*, 20.

⁴²⁸ Bridges, “Language on the Move,” 770.

⁴²⁹ It should be stated for the sake of argument that *Black Mirror* is not a techno-dystopia as much as it is a narrative of techno-messiness.

⁴³⁰ DeLuca & Peebles, “From Public Sphere,” 129.

traditional frameworks of the public sphere were insufficient to detail the significant changes occurring in socio-political organizing and shifts in perceptions/epistemologies/ontologies occurring through the digital which led them to conceptualize the “public screen.”⁴³¹ Because most discourses are disseminated and circulated by screens (television, computers, print texts, cell phones, etc.) understanding socio-political changes through the *lens* of a screen “highlights dissemination, images, hypermediacy, publicity, distraction, and dissent.”⁴³² Mass dissemination and instant transmission of messages/information has created spaces, inside and outside of the technosphere, wherein marginalized voices that are excluded from the public sphere can engage in “vernacular insurrections” “that questions, challenges and conflicts with dominant notions and ideas.”⁴³³ As highlighted in the previous chapter, the public sphere is supposedly based on generalizable “truths” of participation and reason that are actually assumptions derived from privilege. The public sphere is exclusionary and designed that way. Embodied voice can only travel as far as the societal boundaries that constrain those voices, but the digital medium offers a means to transgress those limits (though not always fully); it is a disembodied space of embodied voices. Similarly, in the pre-digital age limited access of content production meant information and messaging could only be disseminated by those with the means to produce ‘professional’ content. The rapid increase in communicative technologies and the technification of Western society has

⁴³¹ Writing that sentence made me feel weird because 2002 feels like forever ago and not that long simultaneously. Time is not real.

⁴³² Ibid, 125.; I will walk myself out.

⁴³³ Duthely, “Black Feminist Hip-Hop,” 205.

collapsed that content gap in smartphones, computers, and social media have made content production as accessible and easy as ever. Thus, with means to disseminate voices that would otherwise be silenced in the traditional public sphere have the potential to be amplified. However, not all voices are welcome in the digital and cacophony can erupt at the drop of a hat.

Sarah J. Jackson advances that: “scholars face the challenge of not reproducing limited constructions of democracy and democratic engagement that have legitimized our less than representative—and certainly not radically inclusive—academic institutions and national politics.”⁴³⁴ Jackson urges that we must understand that (many, if not most) discourses circulated online are situated knowledges that move and are moved by other embodied voiced in a disembodied space.⁴³⁵ Foust and Hoyt further Jackson’s challenge in asserting that “the positivist drive toward generalizable truths, prediction, and control over social change flattens vibrant, contextually grounded expressions of protest [and] the pairing of functional theory with a techno-utopian view threatens to overwrite the unique cultural contexts of resistance.”⁴³⁶ Notwithstanding concerns of neoliberal co-option, it has to be acknowledged that this is the current condition in which we live in this globalized world and “a neoliberal, mediated world demands new tactics.”⁴³⁷

In order to account for this “new instrumentality” and attend to the new tactics that emerge within this setting, it is necessary to examine the rhizome of political magic

⁴³⁴ Ibid, 378.

⁴³⁵ Ibid.

⁴³⁶ Foust & Hoyt, “Social Movements 2.0,” 39.

⁴³⁷ Foust, “Social Movement Rhetoric,” 58.

within a communicative/discursive ecology. The technological, the social, and the content of messages comprise the aspects of a communicative ecology with the goal of understanding the ‘bigger picture’ of meanings being disseminated.⁴³⁸ In analyzing mediated discourses with a ‘cast a wide net approach, scholars should be able to investigate the “dynamic, fluid, unpredictable process” of communicative acts through evaluations of the socio-political contexts in which they emerge, recognizing and focusing “on a multiplicity of media forms and practices,” that should lead scholars to see past dominant binaries and in doing so, provide a more nuanced analysis.⁴³⁹ Focusing this chapter on an ecology of contemporary magical discourses considered the complexity between and among “the conditions that enable and constrain agency and action,” the exigencies for action, and the interactivity/intertextuality of various forms of expression and dissemination.⁴⁴⁰

4.2 “Left-Hand Path” and Alt-Right Sentiments

Covino’s framework of the sorcerer has not been relegated to the pages of history and instead has stayed alive and visible throughout time and Western colonized spaces. There have been many to take up the sorcerer’s mantle throughout history, some more explicit with their magic than others. The contemporary occultic politics in the US was, as Lachman argues, not invited by the left but instead thrust on the political landscape

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Treré & Mattoni, "Media Ecologies," 300-301.

⁴⁴⁰ Barnett & DeLuca, 100; Foust & Hoyt, 45-46.

by far-right occultism.⁴⁴¹ These “new age charlatans flourish by selling creeds of absolutism and purification, as trust in democracy” plummets amid significant social change.⁴⁴² For the occultic right, modernity has established threats adherents believe demeans the traditionalism of ‘natural law’. These sorcerers conclude that industry, globalization, and multiculturalism have disrupted the established cosmological hierarchies. As various Western societies implement incredibly small progressions of civil rights, sorcerers contend they can use their esoteric (read: exclusionary/elite) knowledges to reinforce and strengthen their power in the status quo. In other words, “occultism [is] merely the path to ethnonationalist superiority, cosmic violence to earthly tradition.”⁴⁴³

Recalling the discussion of Julius Evola’s metaphysical frameworks outlined in Chapter One, metaphysical traditionalism is a fascist occultism - a fictional tradition of existence created to justify a synarchy wherein the aristocratic, learned, priestly elite ruled by cosmologically divined authorship and prophecy. The “UR” in which Evola named his metaphysical organization for was a reference to this authoritative ‘primordial’ and everlasting authority. For Eco, Evola’s “UR” is not the original as much as it is the ever-present “beehive of contradictions” composed of assorted ideologies and philosophical ideas to support traditional and archetypal ways of being that *speak to* privileged/already powerful people fearful of difference and “lower social groups”

⁴⁴¹ Lachman, 10.

⁴⁴² Jones, “Acid Fascism.”

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

overtaking them/their status.⁴⁴⁴ “The fascism of tomorrow”- hell, the fascism of today – does and will certainly continue drawing in audiences in ways that appear and very much are metaphysical. There is a powerful draw for neo-fascists to a “mythic yesterday” when and where “comfort resides in a phantom past” in which their ancestors existed in their “rightful elite place” now perceivably denied to the descendants (even if there are no ties to aristocratic lineage).⁴⁴⁵ Metaphysical traditionalism promises the past. In current US politics, that promise of the past is “a great America – destined to someday, somehow, become a radiant tomorrow.” In essence, contemporary US metaphysical traditionalism promises to “make America great again.”⁴⁴⁶

Like Nazis and neo-Nazis in the following decades, contemporary political figures in the US have drawn on Evola’s paradigms and even cited him as a source of inspiration. Since current metaphysical traditionalism is basically spiritualistic MAGA it should be little surprise to learn that a member of Trump’s inner-circle has expressed the influence of metaphysical traditionalism on their politics (if only implicitly). In a 2014 Q and A for the Human Dignity Institute’s conference in Vatican City, former White House Chief Strategist Steve Bannon cited Evola’s influence among far-right circles in Russia and although he does not cite him as a direct source of inspiration his speech suggests otherwise. Repeatedly warning that the “Judeo-Christian West” was in crisis (from crisis

⁴⁴⁴ Eco, “Ur-Fascism,” 7.

⁴⁴⁵ Jones.

⁴⁴⁶ Typing that sentence made me feel icky.

of capitalism, church, faith, etc.,) and coming upon a “new Dark Age.”⁴⁴⁷ Capitalism is the tradition Bannon evokes throughout the session (which would probably make Evola roll his eyes). Similarly ironic, Evola was indisputably anti-Christian, believing that the Catholic Church’s (Bannon’s religion) position to be an ‘open’ religion disrupted traditional pagan hierarchies that enclosed spiritual purity to the aristocratic class.⁴⁴⁸ Where Bannon and Evola again coalesce is their admonishment of secularism. “Evola despised the secular, cosmopolitan and liberal concerns of the modern world,”⁴⁴⁹ and likewise, Bannon has decried “an immense secularization of the West,” particularly, among millennials, and such lack of faith has “sapped the strength of the Judeo-Christian West to defend its ideals.”⁴⁵⁰ The Dark Age of secularism is making Western society fall to our “baser instincts” already changing the world from what it has been and is supposed to be:

And we’re at the very beginning stages of a very brutal and bloody conflict, of which if the people in this room, the people in the church, do not bind together and really form what I feel is an aspect of the church militant, to really be able to not just stand with our beliefs, but to fight for our beliefs against this new barbarity that’s starting, that will completely eradicate everything that we’ve been bequeathed over the last 2,000, 2,500 years.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁷ Feder, “This Is How Steve.” This article provides a transcript for the entire speech which can be found in several videos on Youtube.

⁴⁴⁸ Momigliano, “The Alt-Right’s Intellectual” Similarly, this sentiment has been noted by Goodrick-Clarke, Jones, Lachman, and Urban.

⁴⁴⁹ Jones.

⁴⁵⁰ Feder.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

For Bannon and Evola, it is the militant actions of the faithful, learned ideological acolyte – the actions of heroes – that will bring light to the Dark Age. Traditionalism (politically and metaphysically) is a cult of heroism promising elitist standings through the gnostic prophecy of a society run by “exceptional beings” with shared ideological consensus and clear social identity they were lacking in the Dark Age of modernity.⁴⁵² Eco (unknowingly) explains Bannon’s ideological position in noting “Ur-Fascism can only advocate a popular elitism.”⁴⁵³ I share Annalisa Merelli’s assessment of Bannon’s Q and A in contending “references to Evola don’t prove he sees eye to eye with the philosopher, [yet] the openness with which he mentioned the Italian philosopher suggests that Evola’s name is not only circulating in Bannon’s circles, but that Bannon does not consider Evola’s thinking particularly problematic.”⁴⁵⁴

Bannon’s reference of Evola caught national attention three years later with a *Buzzfeed News* transcript of the speech and subsequent *New York Times* report, Anna Momigliano explains that “references to Evola abounded on websites such as Breitbart News, The Daily Stormer, and AltRight.com well before The New York Times noted the Bannon-Evola [connection Feb. 2017].”⁴⁵⁵ In fact, a 2016 *Breitbart* editorial from alt-right celebrity edge-lord Milo Yiannopoulos and Allum Bokhari support Momigliano’s assessment in arguing alt-right “thinkers” (citing Evola and others) were “dangerously

⁴⁵² Eco, 7.

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Merelli, “Steve Bannon’s Interest.”

⁴⁵⁵ For reference, Breitbart News is Bannon’s alt-right website, The Daily Stormfront is a white supremacist newsletter, and AltRight.com is Richard Spencer’s site.

bright.”⁴⁵⁶ Dangerous? Absolutely. Bright? Well, that is justifiably arguable. Richard Spencer and those he publishes on AltRight.com are much more explicit than Bannon with desires for a white ethnostate, but it should shock absolutely no one to know that they share many commonalities. Pertinent to this conversation is both alt-right leaders (and their affiliated publications) have publicly discussed and shared Julius Evola’s metaphysical traditionalism. It has been reported that Spencer has called Evola “one of the most fascinating men of the 20th”.⁴⁵⁷ Similarly, Evola’s ideologies have been clearly represented in Spencer’s speech. Following Trump’s election, Spencer and his white nationalist sycophants celebrated a “victory of will” – a phrase that alludes to Evola’s “absolute individual” and a prominent Nazi propaganda film. The notion of willing something into existence is not an uncommon metaphysical belief but it does take a significant place in Evola’s traditionalist frameworks because it served as a “doctrine of power and autarchy.”⁴⁵⁸ The extension of said doctrine is a positioning of modern society as “metaphysically evil,” and corrupted by “illusionary ideals” like democracy.⁴⁵⁹ Spencer too has forwarded this position, specifically in an interview with *The Atlantic*’s Graeme Wood when he contended that democracy and freedom were/are “false ideals”

⁴⁵⁶ Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, “An Establishment Conservative’s Guide.”

⁴⁵⁷ This has been noted by several pieces like Jones, Lachman and the *New York Times* article “Steve Bannon Cited Italian Thinker Who Inspired Fascists,” by Jason Horowitz. However, I have been unable to independently verify this quote. Admittedly, I did not go onto Spencer’s website or like-minded white supremacist sites and podcasts. It can be argued that this is bad research, but I would respond that I am maintaining a certain ethic in not giving “clicks” to alt-right and white supremacist publishers. That, and I am in no way trying to give my personal computer white supremacist cookies because... well, you get it...

⁴⁵⁸ Lachman, 179.

⁴⁵⁹ Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 143.

that distract/(ed) from traditional racial hierarchies.⁴⁶⁰ Though not specifically invoking Evola's *Kali Yuga* occult language, Spencer does call forth a Dark Age image in arguing that the US has turned into "a sick, corrupted society" which has lost its white tradition, and laments "it is our creation, it is our inheritance, and it belongs to us."⁴⁶¹ Notably, Spencer said that the US is the inheritance of white people - the "children of the sun" – a name Evola's followers dubbed themselves after his apotheosis of the solar, masculine, and heroic path of spiritual practice.⁴⁶² Wood even notes that Spencer "imagines himself having a heroic role in the grand cycle of history."⁴⁶³

Enacting what Wood called a "lowbrow" form of magic, Spencer creates an intellectual disorientation through his superficial readings of philosophers like Nietzsche and "obnoxious, needling harassment that he and his shitlords call trolling."⁴⁶⁴ One example of Spencer's heroic warfare sees him and his followers sending strobe light GIFS to a journalist with epilepsy, triggering a series of seizures and temporary partial paralysis.⁴⁶⁵ Spencer relies heavily on the use of the internet and his "army of trolls" as forceful strategies deployed in a total war. The use of memes in the alt-right magic wars

⁴⁶⁰ Wood, "His Kampf."

⁴⁶¹ Goldstein, "Alt-Right Gathering Exults."

⁴⁶² Ibid. Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun*, 60-66. Similarly, a photo in the Wood article cited above shows a file folder in Spencer's home titled "Loyalty and Betrayal," a publication of the heavily Evola-inspired Greek neofascist party called Golden Dawn who take their name from the same idea of being "children of the sun."

⁴⁶³ Wood.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid. For reference, "shitlord" is another term for vitriolic trolling that is used both as an insult and as a self-identifier.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

is discussed in the following pages. For now, it is important to call attention to how this perceived war is considered necessary in the path to fulfill white people's destiny – their Primordial Truth. In his speeches, it is clear that Spencer “envision[s] a special destiny [for white people], like that of an apex predator, expanding its territory until it occupied the land nature intended for it.”⁴⁶⁶ According to Spencer, white people are natural “strivers” and “explorers” which thus gives them “merit” to inherit the world. In order to secure their ancestral endowments, white people are also “crusaders” and more importantly, “conquerors.”⁴⁶⁷ Evola's metaphysical traditionalism is “also a philosophy of total war,” and the Primordial Truth was/is destiny.⁴⁶⁸ Bringing an end to the Dark Age require(s/d) direct and violent action which would then bring the Primordial Truth as destiny into being – as opposed the “wait and see” method to societal collapse. The priestly elite and whatever the occult version of Plato's Guardians are would “rule from above” as opposed to republics and democracies which opened the potential of “rule from below.”⁴⁶⁹ Spencer notes in the above cited interview that “politics is inherently brutal,” and his crusaders and conquerors are in likeness of Evola's hero figure who fights on behalf of their divine place in the synarchy against the “mundane condition of the bestial common masses.”⁴⁷⁰ Destiny instills a sense of certainty among those who believe which

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Wood.

⁴⁶⁸ Goodrick-Clarke. *Black Sun*, 67.

⁴⁶⁹ Goodrick-Clarke. 59-70. Lachman, 173. Eco, 7. Additionally, this is a uniquely Evolian interpretation of the occult-popularized phrase “as above, so below” which generally refers to the similar/same applications and manifestations across various “planes of existence.”

⁴⁷⁰ Urban, 160.

in turn, bestows them with an unrelenting sense of rightness in their actions – they perceive themselves to be literally holier than thou.

Even when contemporary alt-right references to/of Evola and his works are devoid of their metaphysical and occultist groundings they still present a mystical aura. We can assume that this could be because his writings cannot be divorced from the Orientalist frameworks he possessed and discursively (and epistemologically) transfers through to the present day. It also could be because totalitarianism and fascism is a transcendent ideal to many – especially those seeking elitism found in being privy to gnostic knowledges.⁴⁷¹ The fact that Spencer is a recognizable alt-right figure who evokes bombastic tropes of Nazism in this seemingly ‘progressive’ modern Western society demonstrates a mysticism attached to political figures seen as intellectual and spiritual guides (“savior” or even “sage” seem a little too grand of a characterization for Spencer).⁴⁷² Urban, Lachman, Goodrick-Clarke and others note the deep impact of Evola’s metaphysical traditionalism in contemporary US conservatism with his work being highly republished on the internet for free or sold digitally through conservative publishers who maintain they are only upholding “free speech.” “In short, there are many among both occultist and right-wing political factions who continue to find Evola’s remarkable combination of sex, magic, and imperial power an attractive alternative,” to the already included within dominant symbolic/social orders who fear the seemingly

⁴⁷¹ Goodrick-Clarke, 53-54.

⁴⁷² Yes, Richard Spencer is fairly educated but his arguments act as prime examples of how educated people are not necessarily smart and/or/both is indicative of an aptitude for critical thinking. All readers will inevitably know someone who possesses impressive educational credentials while also being the image appearing alongside the definition of “mediocrity” in the dictionary.

ever-increasingly ability of the “lower” to overtake the “higher.” Goodrick-Clarke suggests metaphysical traditionalism is a particularly powerful form of reactionary discourse that *speaks directly to* those who seek an aristocratic *being* that continues a hegemonic pursuit of “tradition against progress, hierarchy against equality, rule from above against democracy and the primacy of aristocratic over plebeian values.”⁴⁷³

Considering metaphysical traditionalism is a philosophy of constant, permanent, and total warfare, it is safe to assume that their constructed war includes cyberwarfare.⁴⁷⁴ Online imageboard culture intersects with occultism and mysticism around a central political figure (Trump) in the advent of “meme magic.” Largely derived on/from infamously toxic imageboard websites like 4chan and 8chan (which would later become 8kun),⁴⁷⁵ meme magic has been touted as a major mobilizing force for the alt-right during the 2016 US election.⁴⁷⁶ The central intellectual’ source is Saint Obamas MomJeans (obviously a pseudonym) who has self-published the “holy texts” of meme magic and what would later be constructed as The Cult of Kek. This self-designated patron saint and “first scribe of the holiest Kek” pinpoints this history as starting in the 2010’s on imageboards where users would craft meme-centered rituals and craft superstitions

⁴⁷³ Goodrick-Clarke, 70. An important note to make is that both Evola and Spencer come from what would largely be considered “aristocratic” backgrounds.

⁴⁷⁴ Eco, 7.

⁴⁷⁵ For reasons soon to be illustrated I feel it is important to remind readers that all of these sites have faced severe and justified scrutiny and controversy over their links to white supremacy, mediums for mass killers to disseminate their manifestos, and child pornography. 8chan/kun owners/operators, the Watkins father/son duo, are known as prominent Q Anon supporters (with some speculation a Watkins is the anonymous Q feigning faux-insider details as a mean to sustain his site).

⁴⁷⁶ Liyanage, “The Cult of Kek.”

around internet idiosyncrasies.⁴⁷⁷ I do not wish to go into detail about the likes of “ebola-
chan” (trust me, you do not want me to either), but Aspren explains that:

Causal links between memes and real-world events were a central element in the conception of meme magic and crucial to the subjective experience that “there is something going on.” The bare-knuckles tactics of meme magic were, however, much less enchanted, aligning closely with techniques of information warfare, psyops, or simple cyberbullying and online harassment of the type that characterized the Gamergate controversy in 2013–2014.⁴⁷⁸

With meme magic, internet visual ideographs are weaponized as a form of metapolitics that change political systems by targeting cultural actors.⁴⁷⁹ Saint MomJeans describes meme magic as “a slang term used to describe the hypothetical power of sorcery and voodoo supposedly derived from certain internet memes that can transcend the realm of cyberspace and result in real life consequences.”⁴⁸⁰ Chamila Liyanage explains that meme magic “refers to the transferring of “idea viruses” online in order to change the subconscious. Memes are visually and textually appealing thought elements. They can spread like viruses, creating trends or habit-forming thought movements.”⁴⁸¹ After reading through several of these “holy texts” and associating Kekian literature I think Liyanage’s descriptor of virus is appropriately applied to alt-right meme magic.⁴⁸² The right’s use of meme is commonly misunderstood from all sides of the political aisle;

⁴⁷⁷ Momjeans, *Intermediate Meme Magic*.

⁴⁷⁸ Aspren, 26.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 22.

⁴⁸⁰ Momjeans.

⁴⁸¹ Liyanage.

⁴⁸² I had very weird dreams the night after reading this. This does not speak to meme sorcerers’ magical power as much as it is literally nightmare fuel.

while Bokhari and Yiannopoulous call the alt-right “meme brigade” youthful “mischief makers” who are merely “anti-establishment” one anonyms meme sorcerer contends these memes are not harmlessly “propagated by teenagers on the internet.”⁴⁸³ A 2015 essay from the white supremacist Daily Stormer outlines meme magic as “the trve [sic] power of skillful memes is to meme the karmic nation into reality, the process of meme magick [sic]. By spreading and repeating the meme mantra, it is possible to generate the karma needed for the rebirth of the nation.”⁴⁸⁴ Notwithstanding white supremacists expectedly culturally misappropriating ideas like karma and mantra, meme magic quickly became an alt-right phenomena. Alt-right meme magic is firmly planted in this contemporary milieu, while also looking to constructed pasts for divine justification. Asprem forwards that “the tactics of information warfare mixed with notions of magical efficacy, right-wing ideology, and alternative religion to create the Cult of Kek.”⁴⁸⁵

The Cult of Kek is often labeled as “post-ironic” and clarity on if proclaimed adherents spiritually believe in Kek or not is usually met with vague responses that also act as coded, esoteric languages only accessible to other Kekians. The creatio myth of Kek described by meme magicians truly perform some Olympic-caliber mental gymnastics but I will try my best to explain it.⁴⁸⁶ Essentially, Kek is the deification of Pepe the Frog (known alt-right mascot) which was then applied to the Egyptian frog

⁴⁸³ “The Real Story Behind.”

⁴⁸⁴ Cited in Liyanage. Additionally, here is a reminder that I have intentionally avoided spelling with a magic with a “k” because I do not agree with Crowley’s pretentious justifications of/for the “k.”

⁴⁸⁵ Asprem, 27.

⁴⁸⁶ What can I say? They are effective in their intellectual disorienting.

headed god Kuk/Kek found in the Ogdoad pantheon.⁴⁸⁷ Interestingly, both the unnamed meme sorcerer mentioned above and MomJeans forward Kek as a representation of “primordial darkness and chaos” who contradictorily brings the light of an alt-right new age.⁴⁸⁸ This apotheosis of Pepe took place on the 8chan /pol/ imageboard which is a digital space created to rail against what users deem is “political correctness.”⁴⁸⁹ The Cult of Kek is hard to explain because its cosmogeny was crafted to be disorienting; occupying demarcations of “irony, mocking, and serious ideology,” the Cult of Kek is simultaneously “a big joke to pull on liberals and a reflection of the Alt-Right’s own self-image as serious agents of chaos in modern society.”⁴⁹⁰ According to the myth, Kek has supposedly blessed Trump to herald in this alt-right new age and like sorcerers who used to be employed by European courts, these internet sorcerers use memes to magically attack those who would depose their king – people MomJeans specifically call

⁴⁸⁷ “The Real Story” and *Intermediate Meme Magic* associate the common image-board culture version of “lol” (kek) with a version of Kuk’s name spelled with an “e” as a (maybe ironic) sign that the frog headed god is a primordial Pepe, even though all four gods in that specific pantheon are frog headed. However, the article “Study of the Ogdoad Scenes in the Late Period” by Mofeda El Weshahy, Faten Hamdy El Elimi, Sherin M. Hafez, & Samar M. Mosleh only refer to the deity with the u spelling. Furthermore, this creation deity can be interpreted as a potentially non-binary/agender figure as the goddess counterpart (Kauket) shares the same distinctions as Kuk. Weshahy, El Elimi, Hafez, & Mosleh argue “Kuk has no gender, but has the aspect that can represent as male or female.”

⁴⁸⁸ “The Real Story” copy and pastes a description of Kuk from *religion.fandom.com* wiki that describes Kuk being known as the “bringer-in of light.” However, Weshahy, El Elimi, Hafez, & Mosleh assert that with the association with primordial darkness Kauket (not Kuk) is given the epithet “bringer-in of the night.” You know, the total opposite of what they copy and pasted. Oh, by the way, I found the information in this footnote and the one above in about five minutes through open-access sources available to Kekians at the time their creation myth was conceived. I can only speculate the reason(s) they chose to exclude the above sources, but I am pretty sure many of us will share similar assumptions.

⁴⁸⁹ Asprem, 23. MomJeans and “The Real Story” article also situate /pol/ as Kek’s digital place of origin.

⁴⁹⁰ Southern Poverty Law Center: Intelligence Report, “Explaining the Alt-Right.”

“witches.”⁴⁹¹ Citing an alt-right blogger who writes under the pen-name Lawrence Murry (a known white supremacist), Asprem elucidates that “the goal of meme warfare [is] to control the normies [and] to gain imperium over them.”⁴⁹² *Intermediate Meme Magic For the ordained* [sic] outlines tactics meme sorcerers should use in their pursuits including the use of popular trolling techniques like “astroturfing,” making memes and content specific for audiences, strategies for targeting certain audiences (like “bernouts”), appealing to emotions, and “literally be[ing] the hate machine we're known as.”⁴⁹³ This “holy text” is actually “an instruction in weaponized social epistemology.”⁴⁹⁴ There are stressors placed on remaining anonymous when engaging in meme magical warfare which is not surprising in the context of the alt-right as a whole but MomJeans’s manual specifically outlines that in hiding one’s identity they “can say and spread whatever we want,” which is then followed with listing out a bunch of racist, misogynistic, homophobic, anti-Semitic, pro-violence, pro-slander, etc., uses of language. MomJeans wants meme sorcerers to do “the worst shit you can think of.”⁴⁹⁵

The “primordial darkness and chaos” Kek represents to alt-right meme sorcerers is not unlike the destiny Spencer envisions for the white race or Evola’s Primordial Truth.

⁴⁹¹ MomJeans.

⁴⁹² Asprem, 27. For reference, “normies” is a common internet term used to reference “normal people” outside of the know of internet culture. In the alt-right technosphere, this term means anyone who does not identify with or as one of them.

⁴⁹³ MomJeans. For reference, “astroterfing” refers to the strategy of trolls taking over comments sections on social media posts, so it looks like there is an overwhelming consensus which encourages group think. Additionally, “bernouts” refers to Bernie Sanders supporters who were disillusioned when Clinton got the 2016 Democratic nomination and chose to vote against Democrats in 2016.

⁴⁹⁴ Asprem, 26.

⁴⁹⁵ MomJeans.

With Trump as the spiritual, priestly head of their new age of order, they will *finally* inherit the world they were supposed to. The witches, “degenerate left,” and undesirables will be purged from any semblance of power once they rebuild the social order in Kek’s image.⁴⁹⁶ As soldier sorcerers throwing meme bombs in this total war, Kekians/ meme magicians see themselves as heroes – the Guardians of the proper order. Additionally, their anonymity provides these alt-right patron saints an air of mysticism surrounding their online personas. They do not have regular (read: human/plebian) names; they are patron saints and prophets, divinely ordained heroes who are able to escape the PC police’s justice with Kek’s blessing. The proof of their divine power is seen in how they have changed the courses of materiality with the likes of alters to Kek, the aforementioned ebola-chan, winter-chan, the downed Germanwings flight, and other imageboard threads turned ‘prophecy.’ Even the epithet of ebola-chan can tell you that these posts rely heavily on white hegemonic violent ideologies. Though users of these imageboards like the unknown author of “The Real Story” will emphatically assert that these imageboard sites and iconography like Pepe are by no means white supremacist, posts on the site itself – especially those engraved with the frog’s image – emphasize “terms like *civilization, culture, and identity*.”⁴⁹⁷ Saint Obamas MomJeans follow-up holy text *Advanced Meme Magic*, provides a summoning spell that includes the phrase “make me whiter than snow.”⁴⁹⁸ There is no illusion that Pepe as/and Kek is a symbol of white

⁴⁹⁶ Liyanage.

⁴⁹⁷ Asprem, 22.

⁴⁹⁸ Momjeans, *Advanced Meme Magic*.”

supremacy when the ‘Kekistan’ flag (which looks like a memed-out Nazi flag) has been seen at various alt-right gatherings like Unite the Right.⁴⁹⁹ There’s also their celebration of “88 day” – 88 being an explicitly white supremacist code harkening back to the Third Reich.⁵⁰⁰ Really, I wonder why they even try to obscure their racism at this point.

Even when he is not cited, it is evident that Evola and his metaphysical traditionalism live rent free (like a true aristocrat) in the minds of present-day alt-right neo-fascists. Unlike right-wing fascists of decades past, the internet has allowed white supremacists and fascists in general to rebrand “right-wing extremism through rapprochement with traditionalist spirituality.”⁵⁰¹ In a total war, assimilatory battles must also be total in their scope: “since both permanent war and heroism are difficult games to play, the Ur-Fascist transfers his will to power to sexual matters. This is the origin of machismo (which implies both disdain for women and intolerance and condemnation of nonstandard sexual habits, from chastity to homosexuality).”⁵⁰² This section has not delved into the specific language alluded to above but there are derogatory terms for women and queer folks scattered throughout *Intermediate Meme Magic*. Additionally, *Advanced Meme Magic* details the act of masturbation as a summoning force and even provides instruction on how to summon a girlfriend and “not be alone forever.”⁵⁰³ There are moments when reading these kinds of texts can be nearly laughable until one

⁴⁹⁹ Southern Poverty Law Center, “What the Kek.”

⁵⁰⁰ MomJeans, *Advanced Meme Magic*.

⁵⁰¹ Asprem, 22.

⁵⁰² Eco, 7.

⁵⁰³ MomJeans, *Advanced Meme Magic*.

remembers just how dangerous the ideologies underpinning them are. Metaphysical traditionalism unnervingly concerns itself with male virility which they connect to a divine order: “empire belongs to the virile peoples who have the power to spread their race over the face of the earth.”⁵⁰⁴ For Evola, his cultural misappropriation of Tantra was “a path of power, martial strength, and war,” that went so far as to advocate rape as the natural inclination of women: “man is a subject and woman is an object whose only desire is to be formed and given meaning by male attention and sexual coitus. Ontologically, she is a nullity, and her existence simply guarantees the continued reproduction of the material, sensate world.”⁵⁰⁵ The fascists of yesterday and the alt-right neo-fascists of today share the sense that ‘undesirables’ are overpopulating while “aristocratic stock” are severely underpopulated. Often labeled as “post-ironic”, there is little clarity on if Kekians *really* believe in this metaphysical paradigm. However, several texts describe occult rituals in ways similar to that of standard New Age mystical documents and there is an underlying earnestness implied that leaves me to assess that Kekians, at the very least, align themselves with metaphysical traditionalism and occultic fascism – even if they do not believe Pepe is Kek. When these ideas coalesces with internet incel culture and the increasing decline of reproductive rights in the US we have to consider what Alito *really means* when he cites a witch-hanging judge in his opinion of *Dobbs* – why is Alito interested in underpopulation, what are the metaphysical fascist ideologies underlying this “good Catholic boys” interest in who does and does not

⁵⁰⁴ Urban, 149.

⁵⁰⁵ Goodrick-Clarke, 60.

reproduce? If politics is, as Spencer said, “*nonconsensual by its very nature*; the state is crystallized violence,” then maybe we should heed the oracle of history’s warning about what could follow if we let such sorcery go unchallenged.⁵⁰⁶

Meme magicians and violent alt-right magical groups like Order of the Nine Angles (briefly highlighted in the second chapter) are sometimes given the designation of being “left-handed.” The left-hand path refers a Crowleyan cultural misappropriation of Tantric “left vs. right hand” paths which usually infers that a magi is willing to break established norms in their paths of ‘dark’ and destructive spiritualities. It is through their use of ‘darkness’ that they will bring about the ‘light.’⁵⁰⁷ Associated with being a light-bringer are the pursuits of self-deification which in turn, perceivably gives left-handed magi the ability to transform their current conditions into destiny: “man becomes a god when he ceases to be a creation and instead becomes a creator.”⁵⁰⁸ Evola saw himself and other priestly elite as “gods in search of absolute liberation” from the conditions of modernity that kept them from their rightful and certain place in the divine, absolutist cosmology. It is evident that contemporary alt-right sorcerers also see themselves as gods denied their rightful place, Kek is simply their avatar and Trump their false prophet. The idea of killing gods and having no masters strikes fear in wannabe gods trying to construct a synarchy. As we move into the next section of this chapter it is pertinent to ask what kind of magic reminds these sorcerers that gods can die too?

⁵⁰⁶ Wood, emphasis added.

⁵⁰⁷ Drury, 81.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

4.3 Transgressing the Tower

Interestingly, when MomJeans forwards meme sorcerer's enemy as witches they are also positioning the magical battle of US politics within Covino's sorcerer/witch framework. If the sorcery described above is indication of the depths the right/alt-right were/are willing to go to in order to build their hierarchical tradition it is reasonable that the reaction to these actions (and non-magical actions of the right in general) was "many turn[ing] to magic as a means of resistance."⁵⁰⁹ Like their counterparts, contemporary US witches demonstrate unique amalgamations of historical knowledge/traditions, cyberspace, digital culture, and reconfigurations of what magic means within specific socio-cultural-political contexts. As highlighted in the previous chapter, there is a long lineage of magical resistance to the status quo and those in power. The witch is diametrically opposed to the sorcerer but "the witch" is by no means a singular unified idea, practice, way of living, or means of resistance. What has been described as the "Magical Resistance" usually centers on highly public/reported resistive performance spells like Michael Hughes's "Bind Trump" ritual and the hashtags #magicalresistance, #bindTrump, and #hexthepresident (among other hex/curse centered hashtags).⁵¹⁰ This section hopes to offer an expand the scope of magical resistance (as an act and 'movement'), and how its nuances are enacted through the politics of subaltern transgression. According to Sabina Magliocco, the Magical Resistance is not a singular

⁵⁰⁹ Magliocco, "Witchcraft as Political Resistance," 45.

⁵¹⁰ This could include hashtags like #hexwhitesupremacy, #cursecongress, etc.

‘unified’ movement (if such a thing has ever existed to begin with).⁵¹¹ I feel at this point in the dissertation it is clear that magic is incredibly hard to define because there is no singular idea of what magic is and therefore, we can only anticipate that fragmentation among its various practitioners. Just as there exists schisms and counterpublics within the larger feminist/social justice public “magical practitioners involved in the magical resistance movement mirror this diversity of [political] interests.”⁵¹²

Some might locate witches’ response to Trump’s election with the visibility of witches at protest marches that followed. Many marches dressed as witches and/or held signs reading:

We are the granddaughters of the witches you couldn’t burn.
Witches against white supremacy.
Hex white supremacy.
Good night alt-right.
Education not deportation.
Aquí estamos y nos quedamos.
Witches against walls.
Witches for black lives.
A time to build, a time to burn.⁵¹³

Aside from marching witches, magical resistance (as an action) went viral a month after Trump’s inauguration when Michael Hughes published his “Bind Trump” ritual on *Medium* in February 2017. Because Hughes’s ritual has been highly detailed by scholars like Asprey, Magliocco, Julia C. Fine, and Hughes himself in his book *Magic for Resistance* I will only provide a brief overview of this protest ritual because it serves as

⁵¹¹ Magliocco, “Witchcraft as Political Resistance,” 44.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵¹³ This is obviously not a complete list of all witchy signs at marches across the country, just a notable and widely circulated few.

context to what follows in this chapter. Hughes disseminated “a spell to bind Donald Trump and all those who abet him,” urging interested practitioners to use his spell as a framework and sigil (created specifically for this purpose) in attempts to magically thwart Trump and his administration’s actions.⁵¹⁴ Binding spells can be considered a form of “defensive” magic as it entails spellcasting to limit a person, group, and/or/all an institution’s infliction of violence and harm. Providing a list of magical supplies needed and instructions for setting up an alter Hughes advances that this ritual must be repeated until Trump is stopped:

[This ritual is] to be performed at midnight on every waning crescent moon until he is removed from office. The first ritual takes place Friday evening, February 24th, at the stroke of midnight. This binding spell is open source, and may be modified to fit your preferred spiritual practice or magical system — the critical elements are the simultaneity of the working (midnight, EST—DC, Mar-a-Lago, and Trump Tower NYC time) and the mass energy of participants.⁵¹⁵

In keeping with this ritualistic protest, Hughes continued to update the page and expand the framework of binding spells up until Trump left office (with the last binding being held on January 12, 2021).⁵¹⁶ Regardless of perceived efficacy, Hughes’s binding spell offers a case study in symbolic action *in action*. Both the symbol of the witch and Hughes’s binding symbol worked as consubstantiating symbols that facilitated “performances of resistance against both power regimes and feelings of powerlessness in the face of authoritarianism.”⁵¹⁷ Hughes contends that the first binding ritual on February

⁵¹⁴ Hughes, “A Spell to Bind.”

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Magliocco, “Witchcraft as Political Resistance,” 64.

24, 2017, was “the largest mass magical ritual in history.”⁵¹⁸ That claim is difficult to reject or verify but there was significant visibility of Hughes’s spell. Endorsed by pop star Lana Del Ray and written about in such publications as *Elle*, *Vanity Fair*, *Vice* and others, the spell’s dissemination was the catalyst for the creation of online groups and spaces focused on politically transgressive magic.⁵¹⁹

Despite Hughes’ binding spell often being situated as the Magical Resistance starting point, a group calling themselves the Yerbamala Collective (YMC) released an antifascist digital spell book/e-zine in the immediate aftermath of Trump’s inauguration.⁵²⁰ Like Hughes, they continued to release more spellbooks on various social media platforms. Most YMC members remain anonymous largely due to retaliatory efforts made by the alt-right/right, but in an interview with Callie Beusman for *Vice* the group noted that most of their members lived in the US but also in the UK, Brazil, and Puerto Rico.⁵²¹ Their name is derived from the Spanish phrase “*yerba mala nunca muere*,” the English translation being “a bad weed never dies.” Written in 60 pt., Ariel font, in all caps, and compiled in a Google Doc that was shared on platforms like Twitter and Tumblr, the Yerbamala Collective encouraged the mass dissemination of these spells and encouraged other witches to “destroy fascism with poetic witchcraft.”⁵²²

One member who has gone public with their identity is Puerto Rican poet Dr. Raquel

⁵¹⁸ Hughes, *Magic for Resistance*, Chapter Three.

⁵¹⁹ Asprem, 19.

⁵²⁰ Sollee, *Witches, Sluts, Feminist*, 141.

⁵²¹ Beusman, “Is It OK to Hex.”

⁵²² Mandybur, “How Modern Witches .”

Salas Rivera who has described the collective as “a rhizomatic net anyone who is antifascist can partake in by creating their own hexes and leaving or posting them in public spaces.”⁵²³

For the YMC the goal of their transgressive conjurations is to break hegemonic ideologies they perceive as curses – specifically their spells “interrogate the crushing logic[s] of capitalism, colonialism, racism, and heteropatriarchy.”⁵²⁴ The title of their first spellbook, *Our Vendetta: Witches vs. Fascists*, positions those who use the aforementioned traditional ideologies to craft a falsely universal reality as the enemy of witches: “LET THE END OF OUR ILLUSORY COMFORTS PRECIPITATE OUR TOTAL REFUSAL.”⁵²⁵ Their subsequent spell books keep within the themes of using witchcraft to combat fascist traditionalism and all these grimoires base their magic in intersectional, decolonial, body-inclusive, trans-inclusive, and generally radical perceptions of kindness to the “fearsome creatures” created by fascist demarcations. If all those who have been othered are monstrous, YMC calls for a monstrous uprising: “IF THE BROOM FITS WITCH IT IS TIME TO RIDE IT. ACT UP. RESIST.”⁵²⁶ Refusing hegemony’s tight margins, magic is the means through which witches can “BE THE FIST YOU WANT TO SEE IN A FASCIST’S FACE.” The witch is a symbol

⁵²³ Rivera, “Yerbamala Collective.”

⁵²⁴ Beusman.

⁵²⁵ Yerbamala Collective, *Our Vendetta*. The YMC intentionally wrote these spell books in all caps and I believe their authorial intent is conveyed through their stylistic choices. I do not wish to alter their meaning in switching to a more normative form. For this reason, I have made the decision to maintain their stylistic intentions when I directly quote large portions of their texts.

⁵²⁶ Yerbamala Collective, *Our Vendetta*.

representing lineage of dissent with their cosmological underpinnings best being described in likeliness to the arc of the moral universe because “BOTH SUN & MOON COME OUT TO FUCK UP FASCISTS.”⁵²⁷ The YMC outlines the situated knowledges derived from marginalization as ecologies of defiance passed down through generations. “OUR HISTORIES ARE HISTORIES OF RESISTANCE OLDER THAN HISTORY,” with witch ancestors and those killed by “fashtrash” as saints and icons of protection and whose memory offers frameworks of/for world making that are reconfigured for contemporary contexts:⁵²⁸

WE CALL UPON THE ANCESTORS, MARSHA P.
JOHNSON, WE INVOKE THEE.
WE CALL UPON THE ANCESTORS, SYLVIA RIVERA,
WE INVOKE THEE.
WE CALL UPON THE ANCESTORS, SOPHIA ISABEL
MARRERO CRUZ, WE INVOKE THEE.
WE CALL UPON THE ANCESTORS, ALL THE REINXS
FROM BELOW & BEYOND THE FALSE WALLS, COME
FORTH, WE INVOKE THEE.
THE SKIES THE EARTH THE WATERS SEE
THE FASCISTS SILENT THE PRISONS FREE
PIGS WITH FISH HANDS WRAPPED IN VINES
SERPENT’S GNASH OF PROTEST LINES
THERE IS NO WALL NO POWER FELT
AS ALL YR FASCIST ANTICS MELT
OUR LAUGHS PODER & FUCKING TRUTH
WITCHES POWER WITCHES PROOF
WITH TAPPING NAILS & CLICKING HEELS
OUR HEARTS OF FURY CRUSH WITH FEELS
REINXS OF THE TIMES BEFORE
AS ALL YR QUEENDOM GLITTERS MORE
LET EVERY TIME A FASCIST TRIES
BE EVERY TIME A FASCIST DIES
AS LXS BRUJXS REVOLT DEVOURS

⁵²⁷ Yermbamala Collective. *Burn it All Down*.

⁵²⁸ Yermbamala Collective, *Sanctuary Summoning Spellbook*. For reference, “fashtrash” is cultural shorthand for “fascist trash.”

GO FORTH REINXS & TAKE WHAT’S OURS!⁵²⁹

Calling upon queer and trans activist forebearers like Johnson, Rivera, and Marrero Cruz works to bring forth their memories as specters to hauntologically disrupt and “unsettle the living present.”⁵³⁰

The intergenerational trauma of oppression/subjugation works as an open wound that continuously festers and the YMC declares that “THIS OPEN WOUND IS OUR LINEAGE.”⁵³¹ In doing so, YMC witches reject the precarity forced on their existence by pouring their cankered cruor on those who would make them bleed: “WE WILL BLEED ON YR [your] FACES TIL YOU BREAK.” Despite seeking to break the curse of oppression through generations, the YMC makes it clear that this is a long fight that existed before them and will certainly exist after them. “OUR HISTORIES ARE HISTORIES OF RESISTANCE OLDER THAN HISTORY,” and that lineage teaches an episteme not fearful of ghosts but in multifaceted co-existence with them, which includes the idea that one day witches too might become ghosts.⁵³² The potential of their spectral existence also works as a threat: “EVEN IF YOU KILL US WE WILL HAUNT YOU OUR GHOSTS WILL KILL YOUR DOG.”⁵³³ In the YMC’s “RISING ANCESTRAL RESISTANCE” their spells are an utterance of collapsed time – a phantasmal form of parrhesia whereby disobedience entails exposing the falsities of conflating technological

⁵²⁹ Yermbamala Collective *Burn it All Down*.

⁵³⁰ Munford & Waters, *Feminism in Popular Culture*, 20.

⁵³¹ Yermbamala Collective, *Our Vendetta*.

⁵³² Yermbamala Collective, *Sanctuary Summoning Spellbook*.

⁵³³ Yermbamala Collective, *Our Vendetta*.

progress with social and temporal progress.⁵³⁴ Deployed because they believe their spells are necessary to combat fascist, violent, and oppressive force in the here-and-now they are still deeply and rhizomatically connected to the precedents of how we got *here*. In essence, they are elucidating on the “relationship between the individual, speech, power, and the truth.”⁵³⁵ Invoking trans ancestors like those listed above displays the YMC’s spells as “part legacy, part prophecy, the specter is an emissary of pasts and possible futures that the present cannot exorcize.”⁵³⁶ If history is required for a haunting then we can see witches ‘communing’ with ancestors through shared, almost ineffable oppression, trauma, and abjection; intending/acting to break that curse can provide witches with a supernatural-like aura with their message of dissidence framing them as other-worldly emissaries of justice.⁵³⁷

When the YMC asserts that “WE WILL NOT LIVE IN YR TIGHT MARGINS ANYMORE” they dismiss the lie(s) and arbitrary boundaries set down by hegemonic powers in which they are supposed to live. In doing so, they also “suspend one’s participation in this system.”⁵³⁸ There is no doubt in meaning when “FASCISTS ARE PURE FUCKERY,” essentially jumps out from the screen/page. Witches under YMC paradigms are ungovernable and that anarchistic being is derived from generational

⁵³⁴ Yerbamala Collective, *Sanctuary Summoning Spellbook*.

⁵³⁵ Szabari, “Rabelais Parrhesiastes,” S86.

⁵³⁶ Munford & Waters, 19.

⁵³⁷ Fitch, *Paranormal Nation*, 289-290.; McLuhan, *Cynic Satire*, 68.

⁵³⁸ Prozorov, Foucault’s Affirmative Biopolitics,” 815.

knowledges passed down from ungovernable witch forebearers: “WE WERE HERE BEFORE YOUR BORING AF HATRED.”⁵³⁹

Just as Diogenes’s stick justified blame so too does the witches’ spells. The contemporary public sphere has seen a growing number of people becoming disillusioned with systems considered infallible; the increasing tendency orienting people (mostly young people) towards nihilism is not necessarily as bleak as many might think – it actually means there is an exposure of the “artificiality and falsity of official codes of civilized life.”⁵⁴⁰ Once that illusion is broken it is easy to see that hegemonic powers are not limitless and there are fissures that can be exploited for emancipatory purposes.⁵⁴¹ Relying on the meanings applied to ungovernable bodies, the YMC calls for other abject and monstrous witches to “DANCE IN THE DARK TO CREATE” a different, hopefully better tomorrow.⁵⁴² That alternative tomorrow is capable if witches truly become the “FEARSOME CREATURE UNBOUND BY SPACE & [sic] TIME DRINKING THE TEARS & [sic] BLOOD OF FASCISM’S CHILDREN.”⁵⁴³ Such magical monsters are embodied examples of a contradictory and exclusionary polis that can only be ameliorated by/through disrupting the moral, discursive systems that keep the polis operating on microsocial levels.

⁵³⁹ Yermbamala Collective, *Our Vendetta*. For reference “AF” is internet short-hand for “as fuck.”

⁵⁴⁰ Kennedy, “Hipparchia the Cynic,” 53.

⁵⁴¹ This idea was largely conceptualized around the YMC’s stance in *Burn it All Down* that states: “YR POWER IS NOT LIMITLESS. WE’LL FIND THE FISSURES IN YR STRUCTURES.”

⁵⁴² Yermbamala Collective, *Burn it All Down*.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*

In addition to digitally public bindings and the dissemination of anti-hegemonic conjurations, the Trump era also saw the hexings of prominent individuals directly associated with the administration and/or representative of the same power structure enabling hegemonic violence. Even before Trump's election witches were publicized to have hexed Brock Turner in June 2016 as a means of justice when his light sentence essentially guaranteed little would be seen.⁵⁴⁴ This protest, like other hexings, was publicized online and soon attracted other witches eager to participate. When Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing was underway hexings subsequently followed. Organized by the owners of Catland Books in Brooklyn, New York and live streamed online, this specific hexing drew in dozens of in-person participants and thousands of live viewers.⁵⁴⁵ Co-organizer and co-owner of Catland, Dakota Bracciale, expressed that the hex was "aimed at exposing Brett Kavanaugh for what he truly is, to cause him harm and see him undone."⁵⁴⁶ *Vice* writer Sara David attended and documented the event; their interview with Bracciale offered an expanded focus of the hex to include rapists and those who enable them. David explains:

To those on the outside, a hex may seem like no more than a malicious curse, but to Dakota and other organizers, the ritual is actually about healing and the need to face, express, and address trauma. Dakota set out to facilitate an act of solidarity, to find the liminal space victims are forced to occupy and rip it wide open—to free us all or invite everyone in, to harness our rage and allow it to destroy something other than ourselves.⁵⁴⁷

⁵⁴⁴Dicker, "Witches Hex Brock Turner."

⁵⁴⁵ *BBC*, "New York witches place hex on Brett Kavanaugh."

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ David, "Hexing Brett Kavanaugh."

Opposition to the event prior to it taking place accused these witches of starting a war with their magic, a claim Bracciale responded with “it is war—and we’re not the ones who declared war.”⁵⁴⁸ In the total war of metaphysical traditionalism witches are the enemy and they are fighting back. If sorcerers wanted a witch hunt, they would get one but this time it was the witches hunting all of *them*. The them in question was Kavanaugh, men like him, and people who supported their actions (like the meme sorcerers aiding their modern-day court). The symbolism of this distinction was represented in the hexing ritual and performance:

In the center of the event space—a long, black room with chalkboard walls— there is an elaborate altar replete with candles (seven-day burners, as well as white, penis-shaped candles with coffin nails through them), animal parts (skulls, antlers, claws), and three poppets (dolls meant to represent someone) with the faces of President Donald Trump, Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh, and Senator Mitch McConnell. Above the altar, the chalkboard wall has a sigil, and above that, the Latin "*Lavetur in nobis sanguis tyrannus*" and its English translation, "We bathe in the blood of tyrants."⁵⁴⁹

After a series of recitations participants were encouraged to write the name of their abuser and/or abusers that deserve cursing onto pieces of paper that were buried in glass jars filled with a variety of magical paraphernalia with the plan of continuously keeping candles lit on top of the jars (and therein keeping the metaphorical flame lit under the hexed abusers) until they “pay for what they’ve done.”⁵⁵⁰ The ritual hex ended with Bracciale by singing a “hymn to the war torn body” and having participants enactment an

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid.

“anointment of solidarity.” According to David, most of the participants at the in-person hexing identified as survivors of sexual violence with the hex reminding their war-torn bodies they are still alive despite/in spite of everything and everyone who has tried to extinguish their existence – the act of living acting is a sign of the innate power that lives within them.⁵⁵¹ The ritual offered the survivor-participants with symbolism that expressed the ineffable experience of victimization while also providing them a liminal, mystical place that was here but not here where they were able to engage in enacting their own agentive restorative justice. In this space, strangers became an impromptu coven.

Fine argues that “archaisms and poeticality are among the most salient characteristics,” of the Magical Resistance.⁵⁵² Their utterances haunted by dead languages and seemingly immortal symbols in efforts to communicate and vocalize ineffable experiences of oppression that once expressed have the potential to shape reality into something different. As exiles, subversive spells conducted in public fashions demonstrate the inability of powerful forces to contain these witchy monsters in their tight, assigned margins. In this sense, we can see this as an active reconfiguring of reality visible to all; a sort of magic, you might say. The Cynic, made monstrous and abject, may or may not become the witch. Regardless, the brazenness of a Cynic’s mouth or the clamorous witch’s tongue are scandalous in their discernment and revealing of an opposing interlocuter’s hypocrisies and moral qualities.⁵⁵³ They are a *seer* whose unruly

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Fine, 75.

⁵⁵³ Szabari, S103.

body in a position of exile gives them the ability (that to the insider might appear supernatural and/or unreal) to see the world and the people therein differently than those within the illusion of a status quo. While a hex might be conducted to necessarily begin the healing process for the afflicted and offer catharsis through performance another is performed to transmute the conditions under which we live.

Fear and anxiety are common descriptors applied to many of those who opposed Trump's election, with rage being a less talked about but an arguably more socially forceful emotion. Jex Blackmore's magical rage was on full display in their 2018 performance piece "Subversive Autonomous Ritual" in Detroit. Though often associated with their work in The Satanic Temple, Blackmore's self-identification as a Satanic witch and their long history of performance protest and guerrilla theater warrants their inclusion within the scope of the Magical Resistance.⁵⁵⁴ Blackmore's 2016 "Cumrags for Congress" campaign and other reproductive rights protests also warrant inclusion within the larger context of magically resistive actions those actions took place before the 2016 election and are therefore unfortunately outside of the scope of this evaluation. Taking place in a warehouse like space (with a stage) on February 10, 2018, Blackmore's ritual displayed a pulpit surrounded by candles with a spotlight shining directly on Blackmore.⁵⁵⁵ On the stage to the left of Blackmore two nude white males wearing only boots, bondage gear, and black hoods stand in front of a curtain of long, incandescent

⁵⁵⁴ Despite experiencing major contentions with TST's National Council prior to this event, this performance is what ultimately led to Blackmore being removed from TST altogether because they were considered too radical for the (satanic) organization.

⁵⁵⁵ Lane, *Hail Satan?*, Other recordings of the ritual outside of the documentary are inaccessible. Therefore, all descriptions of the ritual are from this singular source.

light bulbs before kneeling in praise positions (arms stretched out above). Blackmore, dressed in a black puffy coat and white fuzzy beanie looks simultaneously ethereal and imposing under the forceful spotlight:

After centuries of biblical patriarchal dominance, the annihilation of native and diverse cultures, the propagation of racism and homophobia, we owe our oppressors! [...]

The satanic gimp-like figures crawl over to a spiked anvil which secures a long chain they begin wrapping and ultimately locking around their necks.⁵⁵⁶ The two satanic gimps pull the chain back-and-forth in this weird and morbid tug-of-war:

We owe them hostility, inextinguishable justice, and uncompromising destruction.
We outnumber them.
We possess the fortitude to bring down powerful men and dismantle racist systems. Their existence is only made possible by our own inaction.
They have given us just enough to have something to lose.
They have built a system that grinds us down, and they tell us to swallow our grief and our rage in the name of respectability, that obedience is patriotism.
There is no model for moving forward.
We are the model.

A masked, ominous figure dressed in white butcher's attire walks over to the anvil and reveals a pig's head which is then shoved on one of the anvil's spikes which is then followed with another pig's head on another spike:

Who taught you how to protest?
Who taught you how to get mad?
Who taught you how to speak up?

⁵⁵⁶ The "satanic gimp-like" characterization is not an attempt to be edgy or minimizing of the performance. I just cannot conceive of any other/ more apt descriptors.

With pig's heads on pikes and gimps chained to the landlock anchors around their necks, the butcher then takes a bat to the lightbulb curtain, smashing the backdrop and the illusion of expected 'respectful' politics:

'Cause we are going to disrupt, distort, destroy, and reclaim, resist, and rebuild!
We are going to storm press conferences!
Kidnap an executive!
Release Snakes in the Governor's mansion!
Execute the president!
- Hail Satan! (x7)

Obviously, since Trump is still alive, we can take Blackmore's words as allusions to the fear inspired by witches' abilities to disrupt and destroy established orders and not actually literal. Nearly evoking the image of the castrating and penis-stealing witch who is about to take the members of powerful men and keep them as pets, Blackmore is performing their abject monstrosity to take advantage of Euro androcentric fears in order to deny those systems of power more harshly. As exiles who operate outside of established mores of proper political speech, witches' subversive spells inherently turn the world, as it is commonly seen, upside down and are therefore intrinsically antagonistic and inciteful towards prophets of traditionalism.⁵⁵⁷ With carnivalesque contemptuousness, witches are telling the untold stories of villainous witches and pointing cursing fingers at the moral failures of authors fearful of the power in their parrhesia. There exists an underlying sense of absurdity in these magical Cynical carnivals largely contrived around ideas of improper and seemingly impolite political speech being deployed in such unapologetic fashions. However, the poetic registrar of

⁵⁵⁷ Fine, 83.

witchcraft rituals as magical speech reveals the “hollowness of official discourse” and creates a “necessary distance between political subjects and oppressive circumstances – distance from which an agentive consciousness of resistance can take root.”⁵⁵⁸

Absurdity and diatribe work in similar ways to Cynical laughter in that it forwards the established order is not omnipotent and/or to be taken seriously. Hughes has even encouraged those binding Trump to laugh at hypocritical absurdity surrounding the contemporary US condition for both catharsis and resistance because Trump “hates people laughing at him.”⁵⁵⁹ This is not empty rhetoric. In fact, witches debasing accepted norms of speech and their place in the polis is a parrhesiac expression that re/transvalues absolutist meanings and governance by disrupting hegemony’s supposed incontestable boundaries. Highlighting the moral ineptitude of their more powerful interlocutors is by its nature a “polymorphic, topsy-turvy, and perverse” form of resistance, while their existing (and generational) abject monstrosity makes this act “is tapinosis and meiosis writ large.”⁵⁶⁰ It is not difficult to see how acts like the Catland Kavanaugh Hexing are emblematic of diatribe and laughter as coping mechanisms that also facilitate participation within the/a polis.⁵⁶¹ Making poppets to represent cursed political figures (who are all cis white hetero Christian men) is a debasement of their power. As is Blackmore’s oracle-like warning to “release the snakes” and owe oppressors “total destruction.” The YMC debase with more overt and humorous statements of mockery

⁵⁵⁸ Brock, “Political Satire,” 291. Citing Roudakova.

⁵⁵⁹ Cited in Fine, 83.

⁵⁶⁰ McLuhan, xvi & 61.

⁵⁶¹ Brock, 282.

like: “WATCH YR LAWNS FASCISTS,” and “YR MASTER RACE SUCKS CUZ YOU THINK MAYO IS A FOOD GROUP.”⁵⁶² The witches’ humor is again in opposition of established meanings and orderings with assertions like “FASCISTS ARE A HUMORLESS PUNCHLINE & [sic] HAVE DEAD RAT SOULS,” and questioning “HOW THE HELL IS A FLESH SACK OF FUCKERY GONNA DEFINE WHAT A PERSON IS?”⁵⁶³

The cursing witch’s finger is the middle one in these scenarios. Such ‘lowly’ forms of expression are in actuality demonstrative of rhetors who are finely attuned to their various rhetorical situations and available means of persuasion. They been excluded from the polis by design, therefore traditional standards of decorum do not work and are not applicable to their inclusion. The shock of their interruption and disruption of the polis through nontraditional expressions like art and spells forces those therein to question the absolutism of established norms, behaviors, and values.⁵⁶⁴ “What unites both political art and political humor is the importance placed on breaking frames of perception,” or as the YMC says: “LET THE END OF OUR ILLUSORY COMFORTS PRECIPITATE OUR TOTAL REFUSAL.”⁵⁶⁵ Instead of trying to fit into margins they can never comfortably be confined in or trying to institute hierarchical metaphysical realities, the witches described in this section deploy their spells as an “ethical imperative to speak” and authentically articulate their contentions with the status quo and hegemonic

⁵⁶² Yerbamala Collective, *Burn it All Down*.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ Kennedy, “Cynic Rhetoric,” 30.

⁵⁶⁵ Brock, 293. Yerbamala Collective, *Our Vendetta*.

systems that continue to oppress and subjugate in spite of proclamations of progress.⁵⁶⁶ Their diatribes ironically make agency possible within the symbolic/social order. Not a mask or a persona, these witches *are* the witches from folklore who invoke fear through the disruption of fundamental organizing epistemes and structures. In Beusman’s interview, one witch of the YMC illustrated witches’ social power as lying within their liminal social space of ‘not existing’ but also dangerously very real: “if witches do not exist. We cannot be eliminated. This puts us in a unique position to fight.”⁵⁶⁷ “Carried to [their] logical conclusion,” these ‘low’ performances of spells “turn into serious art” that are capable spreading, changing the epistemes of others and therefore, effecting how they see reality.⁵⁶⁸ In essence these witches are calling on/to fellow witches and other monsters to “REMIND THEM WITH EACH STEP FORWARD THAT THEY CANNOT TAKE YOU BACK TO THEIR HEARTLESS HOLE OF YT LIGHT.”⁵⁶⁹

In the Major Arcana of most tarot decks, The Tower card represents a fundamental, towering structure in one’s life falling to pieces. Macro and micro socially this can mean both the destruction of everything we thought we knew and the liberation possible in the beginning of something else. Through the three cases explained in this section we can see witches as being the precedent – their spells hope to cause the fall of the domineering tower we call Western society. If the sorcerers in the preceding section seek to create a palace in which they reign and eventually become gods, the witches they

⁵⁶⁶ Kennedy, “Cynic Rhetoric,” 37.

⁵⁶⁷ Beusman.

⁵⁶⁸ McLuhan, 183.

⁵⁶⁹ Yermbamala Collective. *Sanctuary Summoning Spellbook*. For reference, “YT” is internet vernacular for “white.”

hope to subjugate promise disruption, destruction, the blood of tyrants, and an active refusal of their proposition with promise of sabotage. As the YMC explains, witches in the Magical Resistance are “INCANTING PAST YR DEGRADATION WE LAUGH AT YOUR LAST GASP.”⁵⁷⁰ All of the gods, kings, and sorcerers in the tower fall when it does. With a force of witches and other monsters who have shown their excessive cannot be contained, they represent that the confines of a tower are obviously penetrable. In other words, “WHEN THE POWERLESS FINALLY REALIZE THEIR CAPABILITY WATCH OUT SHIT’S ABT TO BE LIT.”⁵⁷¹

4.4 A Commentary on Chaos

Interestingly and ironically, alt-right occultists, reporters, and academic researchers (including those cited in this chapter) often characterize their actions as representative of chaos magic and the left-hand path. Personally, I find this designation to be a continuation of occultists from socially powerful identities drastically misinterpreting and misappropriating the sources in which they construct their ideologies on. If I was to be charitable to these practitioners and the writers describing them (spoiler: I am not) I could argue that such designation is derived from center-left/neoliberal US politicians assessing Trump’s presidency as “chaotic.” It can also be asserted that the “anything goes” approach to magic not based on predesigned esoteric rituals is also ground for “chaotic” classifiers. However, I find it necessary to point to the philosophies underlying this form of magic to understand its place within the linked political and

⁵⁷⁰ Yermbamala Collective. *Burn it All Down*.

⁵⁷¹ Ibid.

metaphysical spheres. Often considered the “punk rock” of magical practices, chaos magic is an “explicitly disorganized”⁵⁷² magical philosophy concerned with achieving a “psychological anarchy” in which consciousness is expanded through chaotic creativity and “disordering our belief structures” through humor, random belief, and information counter to masternarratives/hegemonic ideologies.⁵⁷³ Prominent chaos magician Peter J. Carroll contends that chaos magic exists in opposition to “repressive forms of order which often impose themselves by evil means,” and committed to “individual freedom and consciousness and its interest in all other life forms on this planet.”⁵⁷⁴ Cosmological ontologies are vast for practitioners of chaos magic because this paradigm rejects absolutism and universals – there is no ‘right way’ to tear down what has been sold as sacred (rhetorically and capitalistically). Pluralistic, antiauthoritarian, and idiosyncratic to each practitioner, the guiding principle(s) of chaos magic highlight the cultivation of knowledges and techniques that aid in manifestations of emancipation/liberation through tools that have the potential to “increase one's possibilities for future action.”⁵⁷⁵ In essence, chaos magic works as the alter tool(s) thrown in our witch satchels that can be deployed when needed for agentive means. Challenging hegemonic ideologies and the limits placed on othered bodies through ritualistic, daily, quotidian liberatory actions enact what Zakia Salime calls “microrebellions” which are “individual acts of dissent” not central to metanarratives of social change but no less important because constant

⁵⁷² Urban, *Magia Sexualis*, 233.

⁵⁷³ Carroll, *Liber Null and Psychonaut*, 115.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid, 44.

transgressive acts that have the ability to spread.”⁵⁷⁶ Carroll expresses a similar sentiment in arguing “energy is liberated when an individual breaks through rules of conditioning with some glorious act of disobedience or blasphemy. This energy strengthens the spirit and gives courage for further acts of insurrection.”⁵⁷⁷ Not solely resigned to what can be classified as Western occultism (albeit transgressive of those ideologies), epistemes of creative and potentially liberatory chaos “play a central role in the creation of the universe, the earth, and humankind in the mythology of all ancient cultures. Chaos and its offspring, creativity, are the generative forces of the universe.”⁵⁷⁸

The dismantling of foundational Western ideologies often lends chaos magic to the designation of a “postmodern religion” that rejects absolute truth and “emphasi[zes] spontaneity, play, and shock; an attitude of irony and parody; and an aesthetic of radical eclecticism, picking and choosing freely from a wide array of philosophical views, recombining them in ever new ways.”⁵⁷⁹ Within the US, assessments of Trump as the being the epitome of a “post-modern” president in a “post-truth” age have potentially contributed to his sorcerer followers being placed (by themselves and researchers) in ironically constructed boundaries of chaos. If this project has taught me anything it is that the wheel of time keeps spinning, hitting the same spokes slightly differently in every rotation; the indentations of previous turns engraving themselves differently and deeper on each paling. Myriam Houssay-Holzschuch argues that the prefix “post” often acts as a

⁵⁷⁶ Salime, “New Feminism as Personal Revolutions,” 18.

⁵⁷⁷ Carroll, 46.

⁵⁷⁸ Cajete, “Philosophy of Native Science,” 447.

⁵⁷⁹ Urban, 223.

“floating signifier” of linear temporal changes in societies with previous systems/societies “having ended in a glorious bang or being gradually replaced.”⁵⁸⁰ Instead of demarcating a definite end, post situations “point to the difficulty of making a clean break with the past, to the coexistence of (not so) past and ‘post’ logics, and to the messiness and entanglements of social dynamics.”⁵⁸¹ Linearity has not necessarily manifested the progress promised, and the scars imprinted on spaces (including bodies), psyches, and society at large have been inherited generationally in many ways. Moving into a post stage leaves little time to bury our dead and lay them to rest, an act that precipitates social hauntings that confront our ideas of progress with “the ruins of what was destroyed.”⁵⁸² The YMC expresses this sentiment when they say: “NO APOCALYPSE NO POST-ANYTHING UNLESS WE MEAN THE END OF CAPITALISM.”⁵⁸³ The ending implied in a post situation limits our imaginative considerations of how chaos can/could potentially break the wheel. Because contemporary space/time is shaped by our inheritances and our possibilities, chaos also can act kairotically by taking advantage of the contradictions of late capitalism in a similar way as the Cynics when calling out the hypocrisies of authorities – by shattering the illusions “of reality and the boundaries of the self.”⁵⁸⁴ In order to “remake the impossible” we first have to dismantle and reconfigure what we think is possible, which

⁵⁸⁰ Houssay-Holzschuch, “Keeping You Post-ed,” 453-456.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid, 456.

⁵⁸² Ibid, 461.

⁵⁸³ Yermbamala Collective. *Our Vendetta*.

⁵⁸⁴ Urban, 253.

requires the heretical and chaotic rejection of hegemonic, ordered epistemes.⁵⁸⁵ Unlike scholars and social critics who lament the nihilistic collapsing of meaning cited as prevalent among younger generations we can instead embrace a chaotic perspective that sees the tower falling as an opportunity for creation and evolution. We assume a collapse in meaning entails an ending of human eudaimonia but “nothing could be further from the truth, human agency is possible,” when we are able to craft reality outside of strict standards of authorship.⁵⁸⁶

Trump and the alt-right’s ideological wars and pursuits to reinforce hegemonic *orderings* more forcefully is not discord – it is just louder – more explicit – more bombastic than quieter pursuits of decades past. In fact, the pompous expression and “irreverent humor” of meme magicians is another characteristic that some authors point to as a marker of chaos. Unequivocally, it must be stated that Trump and the alt-right are only chaotic within the context of neoliberal polity. Discordian humor is more representative of a Cynical “benevolent anarchy” in that they laugh at the absurdity and mock authorities who maintain (arguably) Platonic universals – they expose the falsity existing codes. Similarly, chaos magic/metaphysics disorder established systems built on binaries and thus explicitly reject metaphysical traditional Primordial Truth, with Carroll arguing “absolute truth would be absolute tyranny and historically it has always been.”⁵⁸⁷ There is no official doctrine of chaos magic and no large organization overseeing how

⁵⁸⁵ “Remake the impossible” comes from the YMC. I have chosen to not capitalize this small section for the purpose of organizational flow.

⁵⁸⁶ Young, “Chaos Theory and Human Agency,” 447.

⁵⁸⁷ This was originally written by Peter J. Carroll in his essay “The Magic of Chaos.” However, that text is no longer free accessible online like it was at the time of Urban’s *Magia Sexualis* on page 241.

individuals conduct themselves in accordance with a scripture (because again, it does not exist). This is because the philosophy of chaotic metaphysics is based in a perspective of existence as already topsy-turvy, perpetually upside-down, and moving in unpredictable directions. Just as Chaos Theory challenges the universalist laws applied to the natural sciences, chaos magic advances that there are infinite possibilities of/for transformation in the ecological and social cycles of ordering and disordering.⁵⁸⁸ If one maintains chaos as a condition of reality they must also (at least partially) recognize the potential of forces unknown – those able to be categorized as magic. Chaotic principles question, reject, dismantle, and disregard the rigid authoring of reality proposed by Evola and those (explicitly and implicitly) evoking his image. Or, in line with Blackmore we can see Chaos Magic as the vehicle in which some witches “disrupt, distort, destroy, reclaim, resist, and rebuild.”

Just as chaos is a force of nature it is also an embodied force; it is generative and “involve[s] substantial creativity by both individual actors and the universe.”⁵⁸⁹ Hegemonic fears of disordered, othered bodies are presented through witches and other monsters whose abjection warrants their exile. Witches specifically signify and are the “harbingers of social chaos,” who “functions as a foil for the symbol of imperial order, peace, and domestic harmony embodied in the chaste women of the imperial house.”⁵⁹⁰ Because chaos can make anything possible, a witch’s violation could theoretically break

⁵⁸⁸ Urban, 239.

⁵⁸⁹ Welch, “Native American Chaos Theory,” 373.

⁵⁹⁰ Stratton, *Naming the Witch*, 96-99.

down the symbolic/social order, dependent on various factors of possibility; it is the tower falling leaving an unknown to be built in its place. In bringing bedlam, witches breach boundaries of exile/ (cynical) participant, sacred/profane, mortal/immortal/divine, living/dead.⁵⁹¹ Witches disrupt all established arrangements, including divine hierarchies because they chaotically “steal fire from the heavens” which is brought down to Earth and shared by the powerless.⁵⁹² As the symbolization of femme dangerousness, witches have subversive power in their words, actions, embodiments, and intentions. The reason their chaos is considered dangerous by hegemonic forces is the same reason mages and sorcerers should not be considered chaotic: witches not only rebuke control by powerful humans, their power also “competes with and even overpowers the gods.”⁵⁹³ Chaos reminds gods and wannabe deities alike that they can die too.

Put simply, metaphysical traditionalism seeks to reimplement traditional Western power structures and stagnate any sense of upward mobility for those cast below in hierarchies. Evola and his predecessor René Guénon both criticized the chaos brought by liberalism and modernity, specifically the *disordering* of traditionalist hierarchical systems. Chaos Magic calls for removing the “excess baggage of tradition” in order to expand consciousness/epistemology beyond an individual’s preassigned state of *being* in acts that are designed to be antiauthoritarian and antihegemonic.⁵⁹⁴ Whether knowingly or not, self-designations of alt-right sorcerers as “chaotic” disseminates the message they

⁵⁹¹ Spaeth, “From Goddess to Hag,” 50.

⁵⁹² Drury, 82.

⁵⁹³ Spaeth 54.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid. Urban, 238-242.

adhere to not just the methods but also the philosophical/ideological underpinnings of those methods when they clearly do not. This discursive delineation enacts Eco's explanation that syncretic synarchy "must tolerate contradictions," and those writing about these sorcerers should but commonly do not adequately interrogate those contradictions and self-descriptors. Labeling alt-right meme magic and their apotheosis of Pepe as chaos magic is antithetical to both Evolian traditionalism and chaos magic as metaphysical and political philosophies/ideologies.

4.5 Conclusion

Unlike their meme wielding sorcerer counterparts who were not as visible in online and physical spaces after 2017, "the Magic Resistance persisted as a marginal subsection of a much bigger demographic of political discontents."⁵⁹⁵ In turn, the Magic Resistance experienced significantly more public backlash than far-right sorcerers and prophets of Kek (who experienced little attention outside of a few publications and their own internet vacuums). Unsurprisingly, that backlash included condemnation from the Christian right who saw this as a sign of demonic influence in politics with Magliocco noting that political witchcraft "only further inflamed the passions of those on the evangelical right wing, who see it as proof positive of the need to counter satanic opposition to Trump's presidency."⁵⁹⁶ Self-proclaimed prophet, Rev. John A. Kilpatrick from the Assemblies of God warned his congregation that "witchcraft trying to take this

⁵⁹⁵ Asprem, 19.

⁵⁹⁶ Magliocco, "Magic and Politics," 11.

country over” by using magic in attempts to kill Trump.⁵⁹⁷ Kilpatrick proclaimed that such information was revealed to him in a vision that foretold of “Jezebel [...] fixing to step out from the shadows” and as such, can only be combatted with prayer.⁵⁹⁸ This is only one example. Additionally, the Magical Resistance caught the ire of the right-wing sorcerers who now run the latest iteration of the magical society Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (HOGD).⁵⁹⁹ David Griffin of HOGD sought to mobilize “true” magi practicing “white magick” in order to thwart the “army of witches” bindings and hexings/curses. In a blog post from March 2017 Griffin includes a badly photoshopped wanted poster of Hughes who must be brought to heel due to his practicing of black magic(k).⁶⁰⁰ Additionally, HOGD performed a public spell at Trump’s star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame to aid Trump “liberate humanity” and “break the enchantment” of witches after repeated vandalizations of Trump’s star.⁶⁰¹

Concern over the “black magic(k)” of hexing/cursing was not limited to magi on the right. The Wiccan Rede and Law of Threefold Return were brought up as justifications for repeated criticisms. For these critics, there were/are clear delineations between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ magic and doing any harm (including towards people who commit violent acts). According to these adherents, it can likely lead to nefarious

⁵⁹⁷ Blair, "Assemblies of God Pastor."

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁹ I did not know this until researching this chapter, but HOGD is headquartered right outside of my hometown. According to my Google Maps snooping of their location, they seem to be located between brothels and the nothingness of desert, with their parking lot almost always empty. So, you know, this gives me some hope in my home state.

⁶⁰⁰ Griffin, "Ancient Mystery School."

⁶⁰¹ Asprem, 21-22.

influence from and/or targeting by perceivably ‘dark’ forces.⁶⁰² Further contentions arose around the mass dissemination of occult literature/discourses through social media. Even among magi who would largely classify themselves as more politically aligned with the witches compared to the sorcerers, we again see practitioners engage in exclusionary and gatekeeping actions based around the construction of magical knowledges as *recondite*.⁶⁰³ Making witchcraft accessible to a wider audience “threatened the boundaries of the community of magical practitioners, eliciting a variety of cautionary responses aimed at reinforcing authenticity and underlining the importance of secrecy to the hidden transcript.”⁶⁰⁴ In line with Cynically chaotic philosophies, witches in the *Magical Resistance* were “de-esoterisizing” ritual and making magic accessible to anyone with shared goals.⁶⁰⁵ While these responses are notable and illustrative of discourses circulating around political magic a more significant antiphon was also expressed: to learn about the untold stories of political witchcraft, and to recognize and understand how paradigms of good vs. bad/black vs. white magic are constructions that reflect existing power structure. Witch “is word that carries weight, even as it liberates,” and magic cannot be emancipatory unless practitioners understand and work towards breaking the curses of capitalism, colonialism, racism, and heteropatriarchy. The emergence of liberatory/emancipatory witchcraft is illustrated on in the final chapter alongside a more

⁶⁰² Magliocco, “Witchcraft as Political Resistance, 55

⁶⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰⁵ Cynics were known to teach to the general public free of charge. In addition to being a political expression, *parrhesia* was also a pedagogical act. Similarly, Urban describes the accessibility of chaotic paradigms as a “de-esotericization” of magical ritual.

in-depth conversation of the black/white magical binary (or else this chapter would have been even more exhaustively long).

For this fixed here and now it is important to focus on contemporary performances of political magic in the US as responses to late capitalism and masternarratives of progress. Magi on all sides do not bemoan our current landscape as inherently evil but rather a scene shaped by the ravages of “post-industrial decline and the depredations of” neoliberal modernity.⁶⁰⁶ Again, technological advancement must be divorced from this conversation of magic as nearly all contemporary users share use and even an affinity for technological techniques of magic. Like many non-magical people, modern magi see the digital as part of the material; it is a liminal space in which they build community, disseminate information, and deploy their willed intent in various ways. We can see political magical rituals as an expression of participants hopes and fears.⁶⁰⁷ Magical epistemologies and ontologies provide adherents with “an inherently inspirited, participatory way of perceiving the universe” as interconnected and they have the potential to actively engage in reality changing actions.⁶⁰⁸ Where the key difference in how conservative vs. liberal magi contest conditions of modernity is in how each perceive the past. For the conservative sorcerer, rapid industrial and social changes challenge what they consider to be ‘natural law’ that distinguishes their supposed superiority. Traditionalist metaphysics rhetorically present an invented heritage

⁶⁰⁶ Spooner, “Lucifer of Lancashire,” 17.

⁶⁰⁷ Magliocco, “Witchcraft as Political Resistance,” 59.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

constructed with a cosmologically ordained hierarchy that relies on unrelenting certainty in their attempts to reify social power. Meme/traditionalist sorcerers long for a nostalgic version of the past that saw them ostensibly invoke their self-proclaimed birthright of seemingly aristocratic rule. The sorcerers' ideation of the past and the social power they perceive themselves to be lacking is countered with the witches' contention that the past has never actually materialized to any real "post" event/situation. Representing the chaotic antihegemonic meanings that lie at the core of witch tropes/mythos/symbols, the subversive witchery explained in the latter half of this chapter can be understood as a response to the promise of progress gone perpetually unfulfilled. "Exile from the sorcerer's kingdom," has remained static for centuries of witches yet their constant visibility as the foil of established norms and beliefs imbues them with a liminality considered dangerous to hegemonic binaries and closed systems of knowledge.⁶⁰⁹

The key differences to situate variations of political magic is within the context of a magi's positionality within established dominant systems and motivation to preserve the status quo. Sorcerers and witches within contemporary US society are an altered reflection of their ancestors in that the latter and their blasphemous discourses disrupt the status quo whereas the former seeks to reinforce a status quo (and their power therein) in response to power dynamics they see as shifting. "Modernity [in part] has been constituted on [an] ideology of purification," that reifies existing social dynamics between what seemingly is and is through neoliberal parameters of what is considered civilized. The premodern peripheries 21st century sorcerers root their symbolism,

⁶⁰⁹ Covino, "Walt Disney Meets Mary Daly," 163.

discourses, and ideologies in (like Kuk/Kek) is a misdirection; their magic shifts audiences' (including fellow practitioners) gazes towards an entirely constructed heritage that assumes few will investigate their actual creation and instead focus on the myth. Like many myths told throughout time, the myth authored by right-wing sorcerers is positioned as proof that their absolutist and authoritative frameworks are divinely ordained and representative of "authentic magical potency."⁶¹⁰ The subversive speech of heresy is an identifier of an exile – an other – who instead of staying in their hierarchical place transgresses social boundaries with an imperative to speak. Utterances of heretical witches do not act in service for hegemonic compositions and in turn, are not considered harmless. Perhaps, it is the dissidence dripping from the twitching tongues of witches that acted/acts as motivation for those in the general public, sorcerers, and fellow "witches" to rebuke their hexes. In another recapitulation of the past, these castigations (alongside of scholarly anti-magical theories) work as contemporary civilizing discourses/acts that are more of a vehicle for "disciplining wayward desire" than they are constructively ethical.⁶¹¹

Essentially, magic has and continues to "function as forms of social critique," even when witchcraft/sorcery present entirely separate motivations for such judgement.⁶¹² Finding ways to enact agency and see yourself as an active participant in the creation of reality is a performance that is fixed in specific here-and-nows yet, it is the relatively

⁶¹⁰ Goto-Jones, 9.

⁶¹¹ Styers, 23.

⁶¹² Ibid, 20.

static nature of social change that also makes political magic fluid throughout time/space. For the sorcerer, magic is a strategy of reification. For the witch, it is a tactic of resistance. Technology influences how magi disseminate their conjurations and build community but the historical ethers of domination haunt all. Witchcraft/sorcery/magic is “constitutive [and/]or symptomatic of” what is hegemonically considered modern and its contrast, primitive.⁶¹³ Sorcerers evoke benchmarks of modernity that comprise the civilized while simultaneously echoing back to perceivably ancient and arcane sources to assert a tradition of control. On the other hand, the witch as exiled othered heretic embody and call forth the ghosts of witches past to display the similarities between past and perceived post. The construction of reality with words and ideological enactment of will occurs on various fronts and evolves with technology. However, this wheel has continued to turn in a performance that sees the sorcerer “conceal [their] wizardry behind a naturalizing veil” of cosmological unity in sameness and the witch as antagonist disruptively lifts the curtain to reveal what has been hiding in plain sight all along.⁶¹⁴

Notwithstanding the length of this chapter there are several obvious limitations to this analysis. Most specifically, the use of social platforms like TikTok and Twitter alongside the creation of magical enclaves (WitchTok and Witch Twitter). These digital sites offer researchers more facets to the coalescence of digital and physical in the context of political magic. Additionally, though I have tried my best to cover a wide scope of this phenomenon there is no way to exhaustively highlight idiosyncrasies under the

⁶¹³ Owen, *The Place of Enchantment*, 8.

⁶¹⁴ Styers, 22.

parameters of a dissertation. Even if that was a viable option, this research has personally illustrated that there will always be human experiences that remain ineffable and lend themselves to perceptions of magic (for better and worse). With the ending of *Roe*, constant opinion pieces spouting the fear of a second US civil war, growing fascist policies and organizations, and the rising tide of Christian nationalism all I can wonder is what can happen if something wicked comes.

Chapter 5 Must Be the Season of the Witch: Witchcraft and Subaltern Spells in a Precarious Present

You taught me language, and my profit on't

Is I know how to curse

- Caliban, "The Tempest"

I am writing this final chapter as Halloween approaches. Samhain: the indisputable season of the witch. The leaves are changing color; they will soon fall, be covered by blanched ice, and decay. They are the *prima materia* for the transmutation birthed in Spring. At this moment, in this here and now, I cannot help but wonder if the leaves carry the same uneasiness in their veins as I do. Does the bract brace themselves for the precarity of what lies ahead? Myself, the foliage, and what seems like much of the world are at a crossroads between the apparent certainty of what has been, the unease of now, and the precarious, wholly consuming uncertainty of what could be. This here and now – whether it be called postmodern, late-stage capitalism, or the Anthropocene – is an age *in crisis* spurred on by “death-dealing difference; abstracted, hierarchical difference that those in power cast as innate.”⁶¹⁵ The definitions and applications of these

⁶¹⁵ Collard & Dempsey, “Accumulation by Difference-Making.” 1352.

chronological categorizations mostly live in the scholarly boundaries of Western hegemony with foundational assumptions of universality and sameness. The chaotic relativism and nihilism present contemporarily has been lamented by lay-person and scholar alike as representative of some sort of cultural decline. The words rarely/not spoken is that their worry lies in a decline of hegemonic ideologies that reinforce Western power structures. Yet, almost ironically, the deconstruction of these absolutist categorizations shares an important implication with political magic/witchcraft: both are indexes of social disenchantment and discontent with universal paradigms of power framed as inherent. The shared implication stated above is not surprising if we consider both as conditions of and responses to dominant logics of modernity.

The modern subject is continuously de/reterritorialized in accordance with existing and expanding efforts to reify dominant power structures. The onset of modernity was predicated on the institutionalization of violence against othered bodies enacted through the European and colonial witch hunts. Recalling Federici's assessment in the first chapter, witch hunts were normalized and reimagined instead of ever really ending. Since the very beginning of what is traditionally considered the 'modern' era witches and their crafts have acted as the foil for what is proper, civilized, righteous, and rational. The witch *is* the heretical other and the political history of this figure offers a deep, intricate narrative of femme agency in which haunted memories act as equipment for living. The witch as a transgressive symbol is nuanced yet the chapters in this project illustrate her/them as an archetype of subversive subalternity that is a point of identification for political movements and social identities. Contemporarily, radical identifications with the witch are performed through ritualistic practices that engage in

spiritual-political transformation through authentic truth telling and creating cognitive spaces for imaginative possibilities.

This conclusion begins by expanding on the previous chapter's evaluation on the current status of political magic/witchcraft in the US. This expanded conversation is necessary to understand how contemporaneous political witchcraft is firmly rooted in the past and also cognizant of the possibility that lies in the future. With the here and now situated, we can see just how precarious yet powerful this particular moment is when placed in the context of history and the witch's relationship to power. Considering the fragile kairos of this moment in time, it feels only right to end this project by building on the scholarship of Covino and others in advancing an assessment of spells as rhetoric. Specifically, this project ends with an evaluation of witches' spells as a rhetoric of subalternity that seeks to transform oppressive conditions of reality.

5.1 The Sacredness of Sacrilege

Recalling the previous chapter, right-wing/alt-right sorcerers occupying online imageboards did not gain as much public attention as their leftist counterparts. Additionally, these sorcerers all but vanished from public consciousness and spaces after 2017. Though they certainly exist, and Richard Spencer is proof that they are never too far from an opportunity to spew their corrosive ideologies, it appears that the rise in Christian nationalism over the last five years has all but pushed these neo-fascist magical practitioners back into the esoteric cupboard. The only real significant diversion from this trend is HOGD but their online and public presence has too been seemingly muted since January 2020.

Prior to their absence, “Rosicrucian Emperor” and operator of HOGD, David Griffin, published a couple of notable blog posts that warrant detailing. In his “Summer Solstice 2017” piece he argues that the totaling of his Jaguar Vanden Plas limosine was the result of a “magical attack” deployed by a “growing magical army” of “magical terrorists” who were only growing “thanks to Lena [sic] del Rey, Rolling Stone and the New York Times.”⁶¹⁶ Following the totaling of his “precious Jag” Griffin asserts that he and fellow magician Leslie McQuade “trumped” the “wi-atches” by making poppets of themselves to act as lightning rods to misdirect magical attacks against them. However, it is implied that it did not work as Griffin attests to the threat of “a gaggle of Communist leaning magicians and witches” throughout the post. Lamenting that their defenses “looked as hopeless as Washington's army faced at Valley Forge!” and leftist witches binding Trump (and those who abet him) were in actuality trying to “topple a duly elected President of the United States or bind and curse the American people who voted for him.” Oh, I guess witches also killed the dog of his late son too, according to Griffin, thus fulfilling the YMC’s prophecy of specters killing dogs.⁶¹⁷ Commenters with usernames like “Kekist” and “White Lighter” reveals, at the very least, a loose connectedness between right-wing/alt-right sorcerers in various online enclaves. A 2018 piece reblogged on the HOGD blog by author Leo Zagami (who apparently writes a lot about the Illuminati) proclaims that both George Soros and Pope Francis are allies

⁶¹⁶ Griffin, "The Magickal War Update."

⁶¹⁷ It should be noted that Griffin details how the dog injured its paw while out with McQuade in the Mojave Desert. Citing McQuade’s lack of strength to carry the dog, Griffin explains that the former left the injured dog behind in the desert. When McQuade returned with Griffin they found that the dog had died of heat exhaustion. As someone born and raised (as a white settler) in the Mojave I see this tragic death as an obvious consequence of leaving any living being injured in the desert during peak summer heat.

deploying an army of witches and “openly resorting to Black Magic and other diableries inspired by the dark side of the Illuminati to win the midterm elections and sabotage president Trump” in the 2018 US midterm elections.⁶¹⁸ Well, there is obviously a lot of baggage to unpack there. Fortunately for everyone, I will maintain that the time and pages required to deconstruct this line of thought warrants such refutation outside the scope of this chapter. However, a later quote by Griffin in Zagami’s piece does warrant evaluation within the context of power relations in magical practice(s). Responding to Catland Kavanaugh hexing detailed in Chapter Four and again reinforcing the threat of subversive witches, Griffin, seemingly exasperated, by magical attacks declares:

This nonsense has nothing at all to do with religion. These are not even real Witches. This is just a sick, twisted, BLACK MAGICK CULT of misguided SJW wannabe witchlets who have no moral compass and think it’s fine to go around hexing people and attacking our Republic just because they don’t get what they want. Politics is not a realm where, when you lose, you get to turn over the table and get your way by throwing temper tantrums. Get over it already or move to Venezuela. Rules are RULES. Most REAL witches CONDEMN the misuse of Magick [sic] by these poor misguided fools for ethical reasons as do I. These are not even real witches. They are just lost girls playing with dolls, dressed up in their mommies’ heels, pretending to be all grown-up.⁶¹⁹

Notwithstanding the infantilization of the women and queer folks commonly conducting anti-Trump ritual performances Griffin’s words are telling of a deeper, more ingrained magical ideology formulated during the onset of modernity and colonization. Maybe you have noticed that Griffin’s statements in Chapter Four and above often evoke ideas of white and black magic(k) with white magic(k) being the qualifier for a ‘true’ and ‘right’

⁶¹⁸Zagami, "George Soros."

⁶¹⁹ Ibid. Also, considering the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the US Capitol it does not need to be stated the irony dripping in Griffin’s words. But I am going to state the obvious anyway.

practitioner. The black/white magical binary does not exist in a HOGD adjacent vacuum. In fact, this dichotomy is highly prevalent in most Western occult paradigms. White vs black magic perspectives support white hetero capitalistic endeavors with supposed magical traditions, but based in hegemonic ideological binaries that conflate ‘goodness’ with sameness.

Whiteness is the foundation of white magic. The lightness vs. darkness dualism is common in Christian theology and was/is used widely to justify determinations of a proper and working social order.⁶²⁰ Christian ideologies were not omitted from Enlightened objectivity, no matter what adherents said to the contrary. The phantom objectivity in Enlightened rationales preserved light/dark binaries “by presenting all that is offensive about the present as holdovers; relics from the past, which will be cast out by those ‘thinking the future thought of the world.’”⁶²¹ Colonizers were often concerned with the “primitive” magic practiced by those they oppressed. However, they also recognized (through European gnostic/alchemical history and folklore: á la Merlin or John Dee) that certain magical acts could benefit the state. Some colonial campaigns sought to control the types of magic conducted by colonial subjects with the end goal being “a more intensive program of colonial education” that “educated [them] away from their beliefs.”⁶²² White magic(k) thus can be understood as a process of indoctrinating subjects to the logics of whiteness. There are no real clear delineations between

⁶²⁰ Machielsens, “Bad Reasons,” 408.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

⁶²² Styers, *Making Magic*, 209.

white/black magic, but most common themes place the white magic boundaries around healing, (sometimes) love spells, cleansing, money manifesting, and (sometimes) protection spells – all ideas that conform to hegemonic labor expectations of women, people of color, and other marginalized identities. On the other end, black magic(k) is nefarious in its capability to draw in ‘darkness’ through hexes, curses, poisonous potions, and subversive utterances that take practitioners beyond their assigned limits. The white/black magic(k) false dichotomy is a recapitulation of the white/black socio-political racial binary that has situated a near-absolute ontological state that has (and continues to) define who are and fixes that identity in relation to others.⁶²³ Notwithstanding the mystical aura surrounding magic, witchcraft (like any spirituality) is a remarkably quotidian experience that can and often does “relate to one cultural mode of being over and against another as if categories, communities, and belonging are positioned in finite relationship[s].”⁶²⁴

Contemporarily, the white/black magic episteme is performed with a New Age spin that is palatable to “eccentric” Western consumers. Douglas Ezzy forwards white magic as “a ‘site’ of tension and struggle between the values and ethics of consumer capitalism and the values and ethics of traditional Witchcraft.”⁶²⁵ Commonly located in “popularized Witchcraft literature aimed at the consumerist mass market,” white magic reconfigures the witch in conformity with white consumer capitalist standards; “the

⁶²³ Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*, 8.

⁶²⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁶²⁵Ezzy, 21.

purveyors of white witchcraft do not challenge or question the goals and values of consumer capitalism, but explicitly celebrate them.”⁶²⁶ White magic is the bread and butter of the New Age spiritualism industry and what many novices encounter upon their introduction to magic. Unrelentingly individualistic, white magic is divorced from history and the ideological underpinnings that make witchcraft inherently political like situated knowledges, connection to community, and cosmologies that favor concern for the environment.⁶²⁷ A “good vibes only” discourse proliferates white magic ideology which in turn upholds Western ideologies of womanhood under capitalism. Love spells, “how to get rich” rituals, and aesthetically glamorous glamor magic is sold as sacred. Like Glinda from *The Wizard of Oz*, the white witch is discursively framed as the good witch whereas the black witch practices a “darker” more nefarious form of magic that is disruptive of the status quo.⁶²⁸ Those who prescribe to this magical script commonly liken hexing/cursing and bindings as bad magic (and those doing these acts as bad witches) because the goal is to impede the freewill of another – even if the subject is violently imposing that freewill. White witchcraft is in reality a vehicle for colonial civilizing but revamped and made shiny with gemstones.

Under Covino’s framework, white witches would actually be sorcerers. Within the context of contemporary US political relations, we can see white witches as the white women who pursue individualistic empowerment but are otherwise firmly entrenched in

⁶²⁶ Ibid, 15-16.

⁶²⁷ Ibid. Additionally, Ezzy explains that most white magic texts do not situate magic within any other context aside from understandings that rely on stereotypes. Therefore, these texts provide no/little citations or offer any frameworks elucidating on the reasoning and motivations behind their spells.

⁶²⁸ Ezzy, 23.

white cis-hetero capitalist systems – the ‘Karens,’ if you will. For the purpose of this project (and for life in general) it may provide clarity to consider white magic practitioners as simply Karens with crystals.⁶²⁹ Like any Karen, the ones with crystals also position their viewpoint as the righteous, good, and true perspective. The capitalistic drive to assimilate witchcraft and make it more conforming to hegemonic ethics has created a variant meaning of witchcraft that sells the superficial performance of witchiness without focusing on the heretical historical cross-cultural embodiments. Ezzy notes that the white vs black magic is divorced from history because it is “deeply entwined with the promotion of consumption.”⁶³⁰ Conversations about “social justice, gender equality, and environmentalism barely rate a mention for white witches,” while spells that adhere to ideas of the ‘American dream’ are the literal currency guiding their principles.⁶³¹ Those castigating Hughes, the YMC, and other witches for magically acting against systematically violent forces are enacting “a rhetorical device used [...] to emphasize their virtuousness” while simultaneously ignoring that life and reality is not actually good vibes *only*.⁶³² The toxic positivity and hegemony disseminated through “light and love” magical frameworks are seeing more widespread challenges than ever before because so

⁶²⁹ This is not to say that white magic practitioners do not need and/or find empowerment when they absolutely do. To them, self-care is necessary to act in the world. This idea has also been expressed by intersectional and decolonial witches like Juliet Diaz. However, as a white woman, witch, and researcher I feel like it is necessary to challenge the limits of self-care in relation to existing power structures. Specifically, proclamations of self-care by white witches (magically and racially) are used rhetorically to justify their ignorance and inaction of/towards intersectional issues. At what point does it become a way to legitimize not doing the craft part of witchcraft – the crafting of a different world?

⁶³⁰ Ezzy, 21.

⁶³¹ Ibid, 19.

⁶³² Ibid, 23.

many “feel disconnected from these easy slogans meant to apply to dark oceans and impossibly Divine principles.”⁶³³ The shadows and darkness so often associated with black/bad magic are not aspects to be rejected - abjected - from magical practice because they are inescapable in the act of existing. To say any different is both a lie and a sign of an overwhelmingly positive privileged being. Staci Ivori, a witch highlighted in Frances F. Denny’s book *Major Arcana: Portraits of Witches in America*, specifically challenges ideas of white magic and explains that “in reality we need balance and duality. Shadow work is just as, if not more, important than ‘love and light’ practices, but not as popular, especially with some of today’s witches who want a pretty, curated experience.”⁶³⁴

The aesthetic experiences white witches attach themselves to is simultaneously historically accurate and inaccurate. To begin, the false precedent being presented is seen through the use of subjective moral standards about goodness, rightness, and the ‘correct’ way of doing craft rituals the origins of which have always been individual yet also cultural, and also wholly outside of hegemonic judgements of right and wrong. However, contemporary white witches do follow colonial traditions in which indigenous spiritual practices of colonized people and lands are stolen, appropriated, and then used to benefit the already privileged pursuing personal pursuits of power. For these magi, power lies within the status quo and their judgements about the ‘right’ way to perform magical

⁶³³ Diaz, *The Alter Within*, xvi.

⁶³⁴ Denny, *Major Arcana*, 116.

rituals imposes a hegemonic ethical standard that has never existed inherently.⁶³⁵ Astrologer and author Alice Sparkly Kat forwards that meanings of magic/witchcraft have “been constructed within political economic history.”⁶³⁶ We are still haunted by that past and in order to be responsible to our ghosts, witches must know the history and actively work to combat its effects in the here and now. The efforts to recognize, understand, and engage in more intersectional actions in feminist circles is also happening within witchcraft communities in the US. The digital sphere has allowed for more information to be disseminated about these harmful practices and how they relate to sociopolitical epistemes and ontologies. In the Magical Resistance “antiracist discourses are prevalent [...] and many practitioners of color are active participants,” with calls to recenter witchcraft and magic in relation to its political nature as an anti-hegemonic way of living, to resist capitalist assimilation, and actively work to decolonize practices/rituals.⁶³⁷ The one way, absolutist, esoteric, and toxically positive paradigms that comprise much of Western occultism is what author and activist Juliet Diaz says is “some whitewashed, full-of-privilege way of practicing the Divine.”⁶³⁸ Similarly, Twitter user @witchdoctorpoet wrote a widely shared post that declares: “if your witchcraft ain’t about decolonization, reparations and ancestral healing then it’s a GIMMICK hiding behind sage bundles and kkkrystal kkkclusters.”⁶³⁹ Decolonial and intersectional

⁶³⁵ Ezzy, 27.

⁶³⁶ Kat, *Post-Colonial Astrology*, 1-8.

⁶³⁷ Fine, “#MagicResistance,” 79.

⁶³⁸ Diaz, xxi.

⁶³⁹ Cited in Fine, 79.

interventions to Western occultism have become more publicly visible and while there are still many tensions over misinformation about “tradition” there is also an increased awareness of cultural appropriations associated with New Age spiritualities, decolonial and antiracist ethics applied to the craft, and a recentering/reinforcement of the heretical, revolutionary history of witchcraft. Many of these witches have prolific online engagements that have also manifested materially in various ways. In large part because of witches of color, witchcraft spiritualities are more actively engaged in social justice actions than our immediate forbearers.

In recentering the history of witch as heretic, witches of color have also reified the precedent of how the term ‘witch’ has been applied differently to different bodies and the experiences attached to those nuances demand to be recognized on their own terms within the larger witch public. Another witch profiled in *Major Arcana*, Djinn Wolf asserts “I believe there are secrets that are never meant to be shared outside a race, class, coven, or entity group. Everything is not for everyone. Knowing your own shit is the key. Wield it.”⁶⁴⁰ An example of this becoming a more common ethic are the conversations surrounding appropriated materials and rituals. The use of white sage for “smudging” has been a topic that has appeared frequently online/social media. Specifically, there are greater calls for non-Indigenous witches to stop burning it during smoke cleansing and to stop calling it “smudging.” Additionally, there have been significant calls for white sage to stop being sold as sacred smoke cleansing by non-Indigenous retailers. Though the act of smoke cleansing is both cross-cultural and

⁶⁴⁰Denny, 34.

historical, the burning of white sage in particular (usually with an abalone shell and bird's feather) is specific to several indigenous tribes in North America and was a religious rite denied to tribes through centuries of colonization. Furthermore, white sage is incredibly hard to harvest on any kind of large scale. The consumerist drive for white sage has led to its over-harvesting and reports have emerged of large-scale poaching of the herb from national parks and other public spaces.⁶⁴¹ Because of climate change and demand created by the New Age white magic market (sometimes also called the "wellness" market) indigenous tribes have been finding it increasingly hard to access a plant they consider sacred. Diaz explains:

Today, we see so many blatant appropriations of ancient sacred practices, people using the word *appreciation* to excuse their exploitation and profiting off of other people's cultures. You can't come into my home and take whatever you want just because you like it, no matter how you phrase it, it is still stealing.⁶⁴²

Likewise, conversations about closed practices are also not uncommon in witchy corners of the internet. Certain magical traditions were directly formulated or made clandestine due to specific enactments of power and domination (like slavery and colonization) and are therefore idiosyncratic and specific to the needs of a specific community. For example, Hoodoo has its roots as a means to keep African spiritualities alive during slavery and was necessary to the survival of those enslaved. Hoodoo is a closed practice. On a very basic level it is not difficult to see that those practices and the power derived from performing those rituals mean something completely different when conducted by

⁶⁴¹de Greef, "The White Sage Black Market."

⁶⁴² Diaz, 34.

white bodies. Digital platforms like Instagram and TikTok cultivates vast amount of content regarding spirituality, witchcraft, and magic and much of that content sees white ‘witchcraft’ influencers (read: commonly *white* witches) who lack knowledge of why certain rituals are done and/or/both the history of why it is practiced.⁶⁴³ Though the pretty, curated, ‘gram-worthy witchcraft experiences are favored by platform algorithms, witches of color and other marginalized identities are growing in voice and recognition on and off these platform, though still not fully included (let us recall the previous chapter’s evaluation of systematic injustices being built into digital codes).

Further, these conversations have also highlighted the neoliberal cooption of witchcraft symbols, tools, and rituals seen in and outside of metaphysical contexts. For example, cosmetic company Sephora came under heavy criticism when they released their “Starter Witch Kit” in August 2018. In their collaboration with fragrance brand Pinrose, the kit “included tarot cards, white sage, a rose quartz crystal, fragrances, and an instructional guide advising how to ‘create and cleanse your ceremony space, charge your crystal, read your tarot card and anoint your fragrance.’”⁶⁴⁴ Spiritual buzzwords aside, this product inspired much backlash and conversations regarding appropriation (by both companies and individuals) and consumer ethics of the craft. Specific to the consumer ethics highlighted in online discourses, many practitioners advanced arguments centering the history of violence for capitalistic pursuits to justify buying craft ‘ingredients’ at local

⁶⁴³Meley, “The TikTokers.”

⁶⁴⁴ Miller, “Sephora’s Starter Witch Kit,” 88.

small businesses who are usually knowledgeable about what they mean and do.⁶⁴⁵

Though not directly in response to Sephora, the YMC further rejects consumerist co-option by recentering a witch's tools as innate: MY FINGER IS MY ATHAME/ MY HANDS ARE MY CHALICE/ MY HEART IS MY PENTACLE/ MY BELLY IS MY CAULDRON [...] RESIST THE IDEA THAT YOU NEED TO BUY TOOLS TO BE A WITCH: FUCK THAT CAPITALIST BULLSHIT.⁶⁴⁶ The discourses of authentic witchcraft circulating around Sephora's "witch kit" and other neoliberal/white magic endeavors were messy but also illustrative of the power dynamics at play in magical circles.

When we consider the history of the heretical witch it is honestly somewhat confounding (though not necessarily wholly so) that there have been significant attempts to assimilate magic within consumerist neoliberal paradigms. Notwithstanding the 'love and light,' 'good vibes only,' and 'smudge your troubles away' platitudes sold as artifacts of *real* witchcraft, traditional magical epistemes existing before modernity are still present in spite of countless attempts at erasure. In these cosmologies "unpleasant experiences and 'dark' desires or forces are not externalized or separated from good or 'white' aspects."⁶⁴⁷ Liberation and agency – not luxury – is the historical root of witchcraft traditions.⁶⁴⁸ Emancipatory witchcraft and magic are not "willfully ignorant to

⁶⁴⁵ Ibid, 96.

⁶⁴⁶ Yermbamala Collective, *Sanctuary Summoning Spellbook*.

⁶⁴⁷ Ezzy, 25.

⁶⁴⁸ Diaz, 150.

the systems in place” that keep othered bodies (including fellow witches) subjugated.⁶⁴⁹

In their interview with Denny, witch Alex Dyck echoes Diaz’s assessment:

What I believe needs to occur within the community is we as individuals need to decolonize our beliefs, minds, medicine, and the spaces in which we gather. To be open to discussion and questioning of culturally appropriative practices in order to end that practice. To listen to the voices and experiences of trans, queer, nonbinary, Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Doing this in a way that isn’t extracting free, exhausting, and painful labor from these groups of people from whom we can learn. Letting go of practices that we may have attached ourselves to that felt good but then we learned are problematic (burning white sage/palo santo, using words/ language that are appropriative) and understanding that entitled mind-set. Be accountable for some of the ways we may be benefitting from colonial privileges and worldviews. Educating ourselves and others through an intersectional lens. Examining our behaviors and how we can heal ourselves to better heal others and our communities. We have a lot of work to do to smash the system and we can only do it together.⁶⁵⁰

There is no right/official/certain way to practice witchcraft authentic to traditions existing before modernity, but a clear ethic has emerged in these discourses that reflect a deep connection with the past and understanding of how we got *here*. Witchcraft is political. Witchcraft is heretical. Magic cannot be emancipatory unless practitioners understand and work towards breaking the curses of capitalism, colonialism, racism, and heteropatriarchy. For Kat, knowing how witches got here is vital to remaking the future.⁶⁵¹

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid, 6.

⁶⁵⁰ Denny, 16.

⁶⁵¹ Kat, 6.

5.2 Chapter Summary

So here we are, the point in the conclusion where readers are left with the ultimate question of in-depth research: so, what? Why is this important? Why should you, the reader, care? Throughout this project I have tried to provide pieces to the larger discursive picture painted about magic, witches, heresy, and hegemony. In this conclusion, I seek to expose the narrative underlying the image painted – a story which is ultimately about survival. The elements highlighted in the previous chapters and others not discussed all contribute to magic being an inherently political discursive construction of otherness. The threatening heretic with magical power (usually in form of the witch) is “the product of an underlying differential in social power.”⁶⁵² Following Covino’s postulation that “different types of power entail different languages,” we can understand witches and the spells they deploy as magical languages of subversion.⁶⁵³ The witch threatens the status quo because she/they transform the material with their transgression.

This project joins other academic conversations regarding the dynamics of power, modernity, witchcraft, and magic within the contexts of Western hegemony. Occasioned by kairotic cultural events and reinforcement of ideologies like those seen in the *Dobbs* decision, QAnon conspiracy, and rise of Christian Nationalism it is necessary to consider the potential political power residing in witchery. Chapter One described the unique challenges modernity poses to bearing witness to witching. It then advanced critical rhetoric and intersectional feminism as allied methods for this project. As demonstrated

⁶⁵² Styers, 206.

⁶⁵³ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 146.

in the second chapter, witch archetypes conform to, and challenge various hegemonic meanings of the witch as the disruptive and unruly femme. *The Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* is illustrative of many of the sub-archetypes of witches and reflects the dynamic presentations of magical and supernatural subversion. Witches as the foil to order and righteousness are a cosmic-and-infinite force - their epistemes threaten to “overtake [dominant] intelligence that establish the symbolic and social orders.”⁶⁵⁴ In the Netflix show, we see that witches are not only chaotic to the mortal white androcentric cis hetero realm but also the magical realm enacting those same ideologies. Through CAoS we see the archetype of the witch as heretical femme rebel is complicated and messy but also one of the first widespread symbols of feminine agency. The witch resists arguments that her/their power is bestowed by any patriarchal figure. This representation of agency can be particularly enchanting to those excluded from the symbolic/social order which purports their inclusion “yet is unable to rationalize [their] existence within it.”⁶⁵⁵

The witch has picked up many meanings on her/their journeys throughout historical space and time. As noted in introductory chapter, the witch shapeshifts but agency remains the evergreen characteristic pinpointing her/their existence. This makes the archetype of the witch a point of identification for marginalized bodies – historically femme bodies – to gather around. Working as a type of discursive umbrella, the historical deployment of the witch archetype as a means to civilize and assimilate others into the standards of European modernity has had the unintended consequence of creating a broad

⁶⁵⁴ Covino, “Walt Disney Meets Mary Daly,” 158.

⁶⁵⁵ Keeling, *The Witch's Flight*, 142.

but nuanced symbol for others across intersections to gather under. Witchcraft offers the exiles of society an alternative symbolic/social order that aids in their survival on the peripheries of hegemonic boundaries. Occult languages, connotations, and symbols offer a vocabulary for their experiences that “ordinary language” has made ineffable. As monstrous others not simply exiled but abjected from the status quo their existence therein is always considered an affront to the good, polite, working order. Witches’ spells are made impolite because they are deployed from mouths already considered dangerous and clamorous. Though firmly outside of order the witch is also readily and always present within the establishment as a permanent and constant threat. This positionality is liminal and aids the witch in shapeshifting into whatever image she/they need to be dangerous to the state and an appealing ally to other monsters wanting to refuse tight margins. WITCHes used this liminality to weave in and out of public visibility with their zaps. Instantaneously appearing in acts of guerilla theater and then disappearing just as quickly leaves audiences with a spectral imprint of their spells – forever there but not there; WITCHes lurked in the shadows waiting for the right moments to implant their disruption within the status quo. According to Katherine J. Lehman, “through rituals and theatrical protests, witchcraft becomes a means to express resistance and tap into a powerful legacy.”⁶⁵⁶

Notwithstanding modernity’s framing of magic as antithetical to the conditions set with ‘progress’ the witch as a constant shapeshifting threat adapts to technological advancement and wields it in various ways. Contemporarily the use of digital influences

⁶⁵⁶ Lehman, ““This is a Reckoning,” 11.

in magical epistemes and techniques is demonstrated with how the internet has become a main contemporary disembodied space in which embodied magical voices can congregate. The digital sphere has created spaces for magi of all stripes to disseminate information, build community, and deploy their spells.

Despite magic mostly being associated with the actions of the other, those working to maintain the status quo and existing power relations are not unfamiliar with deploying conjurations in their efforts. In a weird, somewhat unexpected turn, the internet has made the magic enacted by right-wing traditionalist sorcerers more visible to the general public and their enemy, witches. Technological advancements like digital innovations have presented the wider material world with an interplay between magical factions never seen on such a scale before. Overall, these chapters illustrate magic as a means to enable agency and power for those who are and/or/both feel powerless under dominant conditions. Specific to the witch as heretical other, use of magic is a symbolic signifier of subalternity. Some of the witches presented in the chapters of this project exist in different, fictional Elsewheres. Others exist at different points in linear time and different conditions of materiality. I have tried to illustrate that even though they are all witches they all live and transgress differently. There is no singular image of the witch. There is no one generalizable truth for practicing the craft. The consistent characteristic seen among those analyzed is magic as a response to symbolic/social marginalization. This is because witchcraft, as the foil to modern subjectivities, is simultaneously distinct and amorphous. The witch is a near-universal idea applied to femme bodies/characteristics, but it has been applied differently based on the conditions of slavery, colonization, neoliberalism, and variations in which epistemic violence has been

enacted. With the witches in these chapters, we can see how hegemonic violence is “confronted, contained, and [potentially] defeated through witchcraft” by the socially powerless.⁶⁵⁷

5.3 Crafting Reality: Spells as Rhetoric

“Language is a powerful force” and our discipline has long constructed paradigms of/for evaluation predicated on language/discourses/meaning being a vital component in the creation of material reality. In ‘speaking of’ something we are manifesting its image (and perceivably innate likenesses in minds and sometimes, right before eyes). The very foundation of rhetoric as a field of study and practice relies on the occupation “with the invocatory and generative powers of words.”⁶⁵⁸ Even Derrida describes the magical efficacy of words when postulating:

"Conjuration" signifies, on the other hand, the magical incantation destined to evoke, to bring forth with the voice, to convoke a charm or a spirit. Conjuration says in sum the appeal that causes to come forth with the voice and thus it makes come, by definition, what is not there at the present moment of the appeal. This voice does not describe what it says certifies nothing; its words cause something to happen.⁶⁵⁹

Words weave in and out of the material seamlessly and without much notice. This magical experience in essence, is *so* quotidian it is not even considered extraordinary and therefore is not tied to dominant connotations associated with conjuration/witchcraft/the occult. The utterances of living beings are simultaneously ordered and disordered,

⁶⁵⁷ Brick, “When Witches Don’t Fight,” 97.

⁶⁵⁸ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 31.

⁶⁵⁹Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, 50.

systematic and chaotic but almost always approaching or transgressing the boundaries of language. Covino argues that “magic is and always has been symbolic action [...] in the service of individual or social transformation.”⁶⁶⁰

The deployment and enactment of meaning is “at once invocative, value laden, interactive, and indeterminate; language is an exploratory act, a range of appeals to the mysterious.”⁶⁶¹ Speech as action “participates in the authoring of reality, and as such, all language is, properly understood, ‘magic’—an act of summoning.”⁶⁶² Oliveira further illustrates:

It was therefore (as Derrida points out) no accident that the Egyptian Thoth was god of both writing and magic both summon from nothing; both fret at the skin around which reality is constructed. A book of magical rituals is called a ‘grimoire’ (merely a French term for ‘grammar’); we ‘spell’ words (that is, invoke them through language to bring them forth); magic and language are inextricably, inexhaustibly fused. Every smoker who asks for a light, every vagrant and every politician who solicits for change, is a spellcaster of the utmost accomplishment: they speak, and the world’s warp and woof bend to their will.⁶⁶³

Put simply, meaning creates in ways that defy traditional delineations of the ‘real.’

Intrinsically humans “really do make and re-make reality, we ‘do magic’ when we ‘do rhetoric,’ and vice-versa.”⁶⁶⁴ On a basic level, every utterance carries the potential to

⁶⁶⁰ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 12.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid, 59.

⁶⁶²Oliveira, “One Devil Too Many,” 5.

⁶⁶³ Ibid, 15.

⁶⁶⁴ Covino, “Magic and/as,” 255.

deploy meanings deemed dangerous.⁶⁶⁵ Though all voices are capable of “perform[ing] magic by effecting real action through the use of existing powerful symbols,” the dominant associations of spellcasting ultimately determine the parameters of what is and is not considered magic.⁶⁶⁶ “What is at issue then is not whether rhetoric is magic,” but what kinds of conjurations become assimilated and normalized by hegemonic standards of symbolic order to the point of becoming “non-magical”?

Rhetoric is innately magical however, “the word ‘magic’ itself is not a measure of its wielder, but of its observer and interlocutor.”⁶⁶⁷ Characteristics associated with witchcraft/spellcasting/magic and the malicious meanings therein underly ideologies of otherness, with Goto-Jones arguing “the domain of magic itself is conceived of as a radical other to ordinary life.”⁶⁶⁸ Western powers have framed witchcraft as antithetical to established systems predicated on a determined and fixed symbolic order. The powerful define the limits, demarcate the boundaries, and abject those who do not conform to the standards set. The actions of those abjected and existing in the peripheries constitute what has traditionally been considered wickedly magical. The heretical witch is the archetypal femme rebel. Having committed the unforgiveable sins of unlicensed knowledge and condemnable curiosity, the witch inspires imagination, fantasy, and invention of a world considered unreal under current material conditions. Imagination is a mental space that coalesces memory with possibility. Usually considered to be the “realm

⁶⁶⁵ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 60.

⁶⁶⁶ Covino, “Magic and/as,” 255.

⁶⁶⁷ Oliveira, 18.

⁶⁶⁸ Goto-Jones, “Magic, Modernity, and Orientalism,” 1453.

of the fictional and fantastic,” Phillips explains that imagination has traditionally been considered antithetical to the study of memory because it can contribute to how the recollections of memory are “remembered differently.”⁶⁶⁹ Covino frames imagination as a *phantasy* – the “contemplation of what is nonexistent in the sensible world; phantasy is the mental entertainment of the graspable.”⁶⁷⁰ Living outside of the established order provides different perspectives of living which then can be offered as alternatives to that of the established order. Even though the knowledges of magical others have been hegemonically categorized as ‘unreal’ they have posed a significantly real threat collapsing the tower representing the symbolic order, because if the tower falls so too does the cohesive identity of the social body based in sameness. Hegemonic Western ideologies have simultaneously and contradictorily proclaimed magic as existing with the other, the abject unreal, that which does not exist within a proper working social order while also conjuring illusions of reality that ultimately benefit the powerful. Derrida contends that hegemonic “conjunction is striving in truth to disavow, and therefore to hide from,” the subversive reality that “all the old models of the capitalist and liberal world [are] dark, threatening, and threatened.”⁶⁷¹

The difference between spells and ‘ordinary’ speech is that summoner of spells has been cast as a “radical and inhuman other,” who acts as a necessary foil and interlocuter of proper, ‘ordinary’ speech.⁶⁷² Monstrous witches wielding magic are so

⁶⁶⁹ Phillips, “The Failure of Memory,” 214.

⁶⁷⁰ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 120.

⁶⁷¹ Derrida, 64.

⁶⁷² Oliveira, 5.

threatening because "magic uncovers the inherent abjection of human existence."⁶⁷³ Stratton explains that witches "challenge the very core of social identity" in their cynical disregard of social hierarchies and dogmatic absolutist orderings. Witches have "the power to subordinate a social superior" with heretical knowledges and fantasies of a different reality.⁶⁷⁴ *Phantasms* emerge from the witch's unreal yet graspable world. Though ephemeral, ghosts are not (necessarily) immaterial or void of meanings of materiality. Revenants unsettle the boundaries of the dominant authoring of reality by challenging the social body to "contemplate what is nonexistent in the sensible world."⁶⁷⁵ These ghosts take form in the multifaceted likeness of promise. Promise denied. Promise achieved. Promise out of reach and promise that is graspable. According to Derrida, the state is constantly haunted by the specters of revolution who conspire with heretics/witches in clandestine political alliances, deploying *paranormal* methods of "neutralizing hegemony or overturning some power."⁶⁷⁶ Recalling chapter two, ghosts and witches are incredibly familiar with each other. Metaphysically intimate, even. Since many witchcraft traditions rely on generational subjugated knowledges and have deep reverence for their ancestors, the bond between witches and ghosts is not unfounded. Both entities separately disrupt the symbolic/social order by "collapsing distinctions of past, present, and future, and in this collapse consequently, demand actions."⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷³ Stratton, "Magic, Abjection, and Gender," 159.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid, 164.

⁶⁷⁵ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 33.

⁶⁷⁶ Derrida, 58.

⁶⁷⁷ Kosmina, "Re-Remembering the Past," 52.

According to Kosmina “living with the specter is a matter of justice.”⁶⁷⁸ Folklore across varying cultures maintain that spirits cannot rest until their affairs are in order or the wrongs they experienced are righted. Witches summon, live with, and act as voice in the material world to the shadows seemingly left behind in linear time and immaterial space. The existence and persistence of witches and their ghostly comrades opens a liminal space for audiences to have what Derrida calls “agency for speculation.” This space, not unlike Deleuze’s ‘radical Elsewhere’ (explained below), offers audiences a broader range of discoverable truths and possibilities.⁶⁷⁹

Both ghosts and witches must be exorcised from the symbolic and spiritual orders and excised from the social body. The techniques deployed in these efforts “are also irrational, using magical, mysterious, even mystifying practices.” Derrida explains that exorcism rituals of the state “proceeds by formulae, and sometimes theoretical formulae play this role with an efficacy that is all the greater because they mislead as to their magical nature, their authoritarian dogmatism, the occult power they share with what they claim to combat.”⁶⁸⁰ The incantations of witches call forth the wraiths of history that live within exiled monstrous bodies – they invoke a promise of possibility. The bodies of witches are a site in which meaning collapses in violation of preassigned limits.⁶⁸¹ The multi-monstrous performance of witches queers dominant temporalities of progress with their embodied performances able to deconstruct the walls separating space, time, and

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid, 51.

⁶⁷⁹ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 34.

⁶⁸⁰ Derrida, 59.

⁶⁸¹ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2-5.

bodies.⁶⁸² Like the Cynics, spellcasting by witches/heretical magi is a form of parrhesia – an expression of truth telling that exposes the simulacra of absolute order conjured by the state. This kind of magic is inherently carnivalesque – it turns the world upside down in being “a volatile force [that] ceaselessly attempts to consume, break down divisions, hybridize” the material conditions of society to expose its ideological falsities.⁶⁸³

When we consider spells as rhetoric, we consider the available means of persuasion and agency for the powerless. The power in a witch’s twitching tongue is found in “the dynamic complexity of celestial and terrestrial intelligences that attend any word [and] render it a calculus of possibilities.”⁶⁸⁴ For those in the social hierarchy with existing power to define and limit, the rhetorical spells of magical others might very well feel blasphemous, heretical, demonic, or nonsensical. Hegemonic symbolic/social orders were constructed in very particular ways yet have been/are framed as inherent and natural through both religious and scientific justifications. With this conjuration cast, dominant ideologies are able to set and reaffirm any deviation outside of ‘order’ as an aberration. Rejecting hierarchical placement in the symbolic/social order is in a sense, *supernatural*, *paranormal*, *other-worldly*. To quote Poole: “to fail to be an angel is to be a devil.”⁶⁸⁵ Witches are ominous emissaries of another world which is seen as upside down.

As rhetoricians we explicitly and implicitly guide our scholarship (and lives) on the magical knowledge that immaterial meanings carry material effects; it creates,

⁶⁸² Calafell, *Monstrosity*, 4.

⁶⁸³ Foust, *Transgression as a Mode of Resistance*, 3.

⁶⁸⁴ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 59.

⁶⁸⁵ Poole, *Monsters in America*, 76.

rewrites, and influences the discursive structures grounding reality. Too often, critics have sided with the sorcerer, having denied and disclaimed the mystical power of language while also denying their own conjurations of reality. Accusations of magic have been and continue to be the vehicle in which nondominant characteristics are civilized in accordance with the hegemonic symbolic order and hierarchy. In our field it is crystal clear that “stigma supported by social ritual can have a very long life, even when the memory of the causes for our actions is gone.”⁶⁸⁶ We need only to look at Plato’s arguments against the magic of Sophists who were “responsible for illusions of truth achieved via the incantatory spell of language.”⁶⁸⁷ According to Socrates (through Plato, of course), Sophists practiced “bad magic.”⁶⁸⁸ Sarah Amira de la Garza argues that “we may choose to live in secular societies today, but the cultural imprints from the past are undeniable. We have learned to be afraid to be disrupters of the norms expected by the powerful, and this fear lingers in the most mundane and secular of our social experiences today.”⁶⁸⁹ No matter how much we as researchers try to divorce ourselves from our lived experiences, the phantom objectivity we seemingly hold is grounded in “the social construction of formal routines of destructive and prejudicial ostracizing, culminating in the possibilities of banishment or death,” that has disciplined nonconformity for centuries. This orthodoxy to order has assimilated secular, ‘enlightened’ and rationalistic frameworks and thus have “contributed to the flawed sense that it is somehow natural to

⁶⁸⁶ de la Garza, “Mindful Heresy,” 233.

⁶⁸⁷ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 20.

⁶⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁹ de la Garza, 234.

maintain hierarchies of privilege.”⁶⁹⁰ If we as communication scholars are to attend to the alchemical transmutation of words into matter we must as de la Garza states, have “the courage to be a heretic” who sees the power in meanings outside of the norm.⁶⁹¹

Conformity is stagnant and static in its maintenance of order. Heresy brings chaos and therefore the generative potential that lies in the traditionally unpredictable. The politics of knowledge are in actuality epistemic violence that thwarts changing the material conditions of power. If we are to really attend to the meanings that proliferate our world and expand the field of knowledge we must first “become mindful heretics, daring to disrupt disciplining routines of politeness with public expressions and acts of conscious social change.”⁶⁹²

5.4 Conclusion: The Witch Always Rises

The supposed eradication of witchcraft and magic is the creation myth of modernity. Whether it be religious or scientific justifications, witchcraft and magic present a threat to the establishment – to their order within arbitrary hierarchies. But the eradication of these undesirables and their magical behaviors was a bedtime story – a fantasy hegemonically constructed to sooth fear of power being subverted and/or replaced. Poole explains that forces in society create the monster down to the last detail and then seek to destroy them.⁶⁹³

⁶⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid.

⁶⁹² Ibid, 236.

⁶⁹³ Poole, 209.

Witches are the cultural root for everything the modern system is not. Hegemonic demarcation of boundaries in the never-ending defining of modernity has marked identifications for human/inhuman, subject/monster, civilized/primitive, witch/hunter. These constructed “essential” difference divides community in the creation of “two entirely distinct ontological zones.”⁶⁹⁴ The other exists outside of order – they are an affront to the artificially constructed frames of natural goodness and purity. In essence, the other represents chaos to the seemingly ordered. Social identity and cohesion maintain the status quo by containing disturbances, the abject.⁶⁹⁵ That which refuses its margins threatens to “wreck the infinite.”⁶⁹⁶ These heretical magi (usually in form of the witch) “personifies a fundamental— if tantalizing—perversion of modern social norms [that] point us toward the basic preoccupation with social order underlying theories of magic.”⁶⁹⁷

The scourge of witchcraft and magic purportedly eliminated (at the very least significantly minimized) with the institutionalization of modern norms has never actually been fully erased. Witches have and continue to live in the shadows of social order. Despite or in spite of, dominant efforts to erase practices determined to be witchcraft, those traditions still live on in various ways. Magic persists and the survival of witchcraft traditions highlights the fragility of modern strategies of containment. Every time the problem of witchcraft ostensibly is solved witches “reappear with ghostly power at the

⁶⁹⁴ Styers, 18.

⁶⁹⁵ Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender,” 154.

⁶⁹⁶ Kristeva, 159.

⁶⁹⁷ Styers, 129.

very heart of the modern.”⁶⁹⁸ The witch’s persistent presence and threat demonstrates that the differences supporting order actually refuse separation. The symbol of the witch is a shifting signifier: the beacon to/of subalternity and a bellwether to modern hegemony. Monsters, particularly witches, are excessively transgressive in refusing tight margins. Witches are protean figures who are consistently seen as indeterminate, unstable, unpredictable, *unsettling*, and emergent. We can see that the witch’s inability to be contained in simple, clean borders extends beyond enactments in the social and includes theoretical frameworks that have traditionally demanded clear generalizable truths. This liminality is powerful. The positionality of witches provides them with an ability to see beyond limits painted as a horizon; possibility exists in the peripheries.

Styers contends that the “paradoxical and duplicitous processes, the incessant efforts to consolidate some sort of stable modern identity inevitably falter. The pure, modern subject is an elusive figment, always incoherent and impossible.”⁶⁹⁹ Rejecting their places and uttering their spells is destructive to the symbolic order which in turn, threatens dominant social meanings and a citizen’s sense of self.⁷⁰⁰ Put simply, witches have social power to transform material conditions “*because they are unsettling.*”⁷⁰¹ Witches hold a political valence in large part because magical epistemes persist regardless of attempts to eradicate them. Subjugated knowledges housed in the subaltern bodies of witches have been continuously (re)produced throughout the centuries that

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid, 18.

⁶⁹⁹ Styers, 18.

⁷⁰⁰ Stratton, “Magic, Abjection, and Gender,” 169.

⁷⁰¹ Rowe, *The Unruly Woman*, 219.

comprise modernity and those ways of living continue to resist being fully incorporated into “dominant regimes of knowledge.”⁷⁰² Modernity is a precarious construct built on purifying order from the other. The fragility of these systems and ideologies has left many among the others to turn towards premodern “conceptions [of magic] that license the powers of imagination to find a language for intellectual and political revolution.”⁷⁰³ The parrhesia presented throughout the previous chapters opens an imaginative “radical Elsewhere” that Deleuze argues exists outside of conventional reality.⁷⁰⁴ According to Kara Keeling, dominant ‘common senses’ that determine what is/is not irrational, unreal, and even abject are interrogated in the space of a radical Elsewhere and therein, new and alternative forms of sociality can be contrived.⁷⁰⁵ Magical epistememes defy closed systems of knowledge and the witch insists that a radical Elsewhere not only exists but is possible.

I assert no generalizable absolute truth in answering a question outlined in the first chapter of this project: why does the witch continue to arise despite modernity’s effort to eradicate her/them and burn magic’s subversion from memory? Even though we all rhetorically practice “magic,” the social designation and categorizations of such have almost exclusively been applied to those living on the margins of the symbolic/social order. Witches are the perpetual rebellious subjects and “magic answers the need to recast what we perceive as an oppressive and ineffectually complex environment, into a

⁷⁰² Keeling, 7.

⁷⁰³ Covino, “Magic and/as,” 254

⁷⁰⁴ Claire Colebrook, *Deleuze: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum Books, 2006), 49.

⁷⁰⁵ Keeling, 152.

different form.”⁷⁰⁶ Witches represent a form of anti-culture that though imperfect, is an ongoing “effort to forge ways of living that enable the survival of expressions of life that, to invoke Audre Lorde, were never meant to survive.”⁷⁰⁷ Because magic has served such a vital function to the outlining of modern Western identity witchcraft is “far too amorphous and pliable, far too potent, to remain under any type of hegemonic control.”⁷⁰⁸ Connotatively, witches have been constructed as antithetical to idealized modern subjectivities and those meanings still exist regardless of attempts to assimilate them into dominant mores. The witch persists because the witch survives – even when put to the flame.

Recalling Federici’s historiography outlined in the first chapter of this project, the witch hunts broke apart longstanding community solidarities among the proletariat in both Europe and colonized lands. Breaking communal bonds and solidarity with other subaltern identities divorces us from seeing the connectedness we share despite differences and recognizing the innate magical power living in our chests. Diaz explains “this system of oppression has made it more difficult for us to realize our true power and the power of unity within our own communities and spiritual realms.”⁷⁰⁹ The witch is a symbol of subaltern agency and power against domination. Representing alternative

⁷⁰⁶ Covino, *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy*, 118.

⁷⁰⁷ Keeling, 1. I would also like to make clear that Keeling’s evaluation focuses on black butch-femme sociality. My goal is not to appropriate the experiences of black butch-femme social existences and resistances outlined by Keeling. I do not wish to propose a universalist framework but rather I hope to draw rhizomatic connections to/with subaltern socialities along intersectional identities.

⁷⁰⁸ Styers, 213.

⁷⁰⁹ Diaz, 6.

systems of meaning and being, the witch cultivates new configurations of what is possible under the conditions of hegemonic containment. When we consider the parallels between the current moment and historical onset of modernity starting with the witch hunts, we are left with a striking picture. In both cases we see population declines, a growth of heretical ideas, and reproductive crises (to name a few).⁷¹⁰ Witches have and continue to be considered obstacles to modern pursuits of power. Right now, in this current recontextualization of what it means to be a modern subject under Western hegemony, we need visions of a magical radical Elsewhere. For Diaz, “remembering and restoring our Divinity disrupts systemic oppression and decolonizes spirituality. When one of us wakes up, it ripples into our communities, helping to wake others. And this continues until we are all standing in the power of our Divine selves, collectively showing up for one another to fight against injustices, racism, and oppression.”⁷¹¹ In an ironic twist unforeseen to dominant powers centuries ago, subalternity occupying the same social space as magic is at once oppressive and empowering. Witches and heretical magi, through abject rejection and reconstruction of language, “disrupt the ostensibly rational principles of a [‘civilized’] modern society.”⁷¹²

Through this project I hope to have demonstrated the reality of witchcraft and magic as a foil to modern hegemonic norms ordering society. I continue to remain steadfast in the belief that powerful words emerge from powerless bodies in ways that are

⁷¹⁰ Collard & Dempsey, 1353.

⁷¹¹ Diaz, 7.

⁷¹² Goto-Jones, “Magic, Modernity, and Orientalism,” 1453.

not simply transgressive, but transformative of the conditions comprising reality. Even without a clear definition or absolute framework, witchcraft provides scholars with an understanding of how magic is a “non-conventional way to think about and make sense of the world around us, and it also gives us techniques and technologies for living in and controlling that world.”⁷¹³ Ultimately, I hope this dissertation has contributed a rhetorical perspective to academic engagement with witchcraft as a mechanism countering the politics of hegemonic modernity. At the very least, I hope this project has provided a framework within communication studies to understand and recognize that language has always carried the magical capacity to alter materiality before our eyes. I end this project with the inevitable trepidation of feeling like I can never fully explain the bigger picture of witchcraft within the parameters of a dissertation, but I am told that is normal. However, what continues to feel abnormal is how uneasy the path to the future feels. Still, both the leaves currently changing, and I are left without a clear vision of what comes next. The current moment in the US social order is overwhelmingly precarious. It would be a lie to say that this academic endeavor has left me feeling optimistic about the wheels of time hitting the same political spokes over and over again. To be quite honest, the past several years living in the US and working on this project has left me feeling like a disenchanted oracle so exhausted of being told I was right only after political prophecy, based in deep subjugated embodied knowledges, has gone unheeded. We need the transgressions of witches to act as obstacles towards contemporarily disastrous endeavors of modernity, perhaps now more than ever. I find comfort in the chaos of magic to create

⁷¹³ Ibid, 1452-1453.

something different – a radical Elsewhere. Until that Elsewhere emerges, I have to find solace in knowing that witches in all their disruptive power have the potential to wreck the infinite.

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