This is the seminar from the book *Re-Enchantment,* vol. 7 of the series *The Art Seminar.* More information is here.

The Art Seminar

This conversation was held April 17, 2007, at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The participants were: Gregg Bordowitz (School of the Art Institute of Chicago), Thierry de Duve (Université Charles-de-Gaulle Lille 3), Wendy Doniger (University of Chicago—in the morning session only), James Elkins (School of the Art Institute of Chicago), Kajri Jain (University of Western Ontario), Boris Groys (Hochschule für Gestaltung, Karlsruhe), Tomoko Masuzawa (University of Michigan), David Morgan (Valparaiso University), and Taylor Worley (PhD candidate in the University of Durham—in the afternoon session only).

James Elkins: Welcome, everyone. All the volumes in this series, the *Art Seminar,* have been dedicated to problems that are unsolved, in the sense that there is no consensus about how the problem might be framed: whether it is a single problem or several, whether it is amenable to one methodological approach, or requires several; whether it has leading concepts or metaphors. Volume 1, *Art History versus Aesthetics,* documents a series of, I think, fundamental misapprehensions of art history by aesthetics and vice versa. Afterward, Arthur Danto, who was on that panel, said the conversation was "like herding cats." The book is scrappy, but for a systemic reason. Volume 2, *Photography Theory,* has deep disagreements not only about the leading concepts of photography but over the relevance of *any* definition of those concepts, and even the possibility of conceptualizing photography—*any* photography—at all. In that book Rosalind Krauss argues with Joel Snyder about the interpretation of Peirce's index and Barthes's *punctum,* and a few authors join in, but several others completely ignore the problem—they don't disagree, they don't misunderstand the argument, they don't devalue the issues involved: they just

don't participate.[1] Volume 4, on art criticism, shows an especially interesting division between critics who judge, such as Dave Hickey, and others, such as Steve Melville, for whom criticism is more about understanding the conditions under which someone might make a judgment. It's hard to imagine a more intractable difference, and no one in the book resolves it.

I think that today's event may well produce even deeper differences. I have doubts over whether this issue—the inclusion, or rejection, or place of religion or spirituality in contemporary art—is resolvable or even definable: but that is our project for today.

I want to preface our talk by telling a brief story that has to do with the composition of this panel. I invited a couple of art historians whose positions against the inclusion of talk about religion in talk about contemporary art are particularly severe and consistent. Michael Fried and T.J. Clark both politely declined to participate. In different but very similar ways, they both said—in so many word, although one of them actually used the word—that it would simply be too "painful" to sit at a table at which people would talk about religion and art at the same time. The name, *Re-Enchantment,* has an interesting history, which I hope we'll explore later, but one reason I chose it was to include both Fried and Clark, who have used the word in speaking about modernism.[2] (Fried has found evidence of a kind of "re-enchantment of the world" in painting by Adolph Menzel.[3]) I

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[1] This assessment is expanded in "Is Anyone Listening?" *Photofile* 80 (winter 2007): 80.

[2] Re-enchantment comes, via Max Weber, from Schiller. It has a range of resonances that are pertinent to this discussion. Aside form those mentioned below, there is Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde, Une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985) and Mark Schneider, *Culture and Enchantment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

[3] Michael Fried, *Menzel's Realism: Art and Embodiment in Nineteenth-Century Berlin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 76, 232. A discussion of Fried's and Clark's

also chose it because both Fried and Clark deliberately ignore the previous use of the word by Suzi Gablik (where it names the hope that some of modernism can be understood as a spiritual enterprise with roots as far back as the Neolithic). That exclusion is an epitome, for me, of the tremendous distance between two discourses on art.[4] I also tried to invite several people who have engaged their disengagement, especially Karl Werckmeister, who wrote a brilliant and challenging review of Clark's *Farewell to an Idea,* accusing Clark of admitting a kind of bourgeois interest in religion even—or rather especially—where he hoped to exclude it.[5] Werckmeister couldn't make it, but I've found that the virus of the fear of the religious is virulent and contagious. On the other side, there are people for whom our subject here is a non-issue. The claim there would be that all art *is* spiritual or religious if it is looked at correctly. That kind of difference produces a situation where one side refuses argument as being outside of any recoverable understanding of the subject (that is, of modernism), and the other side claims that any conversation that does not include religion or spirituality can only be partial and may be more seriously misleading. In my own book, I took two epigraphs as an emblem of this difference. The first is Tim Clark's line from *Farewell to an Idea:* "[I will have nothing to do with] that self-satisfied leftist clap-trap of 'art as substitute religion.'" The other is something Updike said somewhere: "modern art is a religion assembled from the

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uses, with further references, is in my *The Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art* (New York: Routledge, 2005), partly reprinted in this book.

[4] Suzi Gablik, *The Re-Enchantment of Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1991), not mentioned by either Fried or Clark.

[5] Karl Werckmeister, "A Critique of T.J. Clark's *Farewell to an Idea,* in *Critical Inquiry* 28 no. 4 (2002): 855-67, especially p. 864, where Werckmeister criticizes Clark's relapse "into a romantic, middle-class penchant for substituting art for religion." This is also discussed in Elkins, *Strange Place of Religion.*

fragments of our everyday life." So that is one form of the division—one of the divisions—I hope we can explore today.

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I thought it would be helpful if we divided our conversation into three subjects. First, let's look at the histories that could be said to have led to our contemporary condition, perhaps starting with the widest and most cross-cultural accounts that can make sense. Then, as our second topic this morning, I thought we could look at the leading concepts that emerge from those histories—words like religion, spirituality, belief, enchantment, and any number of others. And let's reserve the afternoon session for a discussion of specific examples of the difference in contemporary art and the writing that addresses it.

Kajri Jain: Before we talk about modernism, which I think some of you are probably dying to do, I would like to introduce a model that goes slightly further back. I blame this on Hegel, basically. I propose that the kind of choice you have placed before us, Jim, either saying art was always religious, or saying they can have nothing to do with each other, *becomes* that kind of choice because of guys like Hegel. I'm sure you're all familiar with his *Aesthetics,* where he starts to talk about art in terms of the movement of the Spirit. Immediately you get art and religion as projects of the Spirit, which begins to then define what happens to the fate of images in the West, as opposed to the fate of images in other kinds of cultures, where they are perhaps not so clearly aligned to the progress of the Spirit, but speak more to material practices. I am thinking here of Hinduism, and other kinds of Asian, African… many other religious trajectories.

What happens in the West is you get Hegel, you get a spiritualization of religion, and at the same time you get a privatization of religion, this idea that religion is a matter of religious faith, which takes it out of a collective sphere of practice and makes it into a matter of belief—it becomes abstract, remote, etc. And then, if we are to follow Hegel, Spirit is no longer satisfied with what art can do for it, and Spirit goes into the province of philosophy. Or, we could say Spirit is sublimated into a different kind of art practice. In that case, the issue is a polarization of art and religion, and so I perfectly sympathize with Tim Clark and Michael Fried. I think contemporary art just doesn't *do* religion. That is so, in any case, if we are looking at this from the perspective of contemporary art, as many of

us here would probably like to do. If we're taking a visual studies perspective, we can look at various kinds of art production, such as some of those incredibly kitschy images you showed us yesterday, Jim.[6]

JE: Well, some of what I showed was partly private or idiosyncratic, yes, but much more of it represents widespread groups, and recognized religions—very large communities of Protestants and Catholics—and it still seems kitschy. But if you mean the art that sometimes represents new religious movements, NRMs, then yes.

KJ: That is the fate of art that tries to be religious in this private, spiritual way, because it is not speaking to a community of practice. So it has no alternative but to be kitsch.

David Morgan: Jim was reading that imagery through a fine-art lens, and asking it to do things that it was not designed to do. He was lifting it out of its social context. It was fun, it was clever, but it violated the work itself, which shouldn't be treated as fine art, because it's not. It should be treated as another kind of imagery.

KJ: Right, it requires a different lens. But I am saying we can look at this problem through the lens of contemporary art discourse, and modernism—you're all welcome to do that.

[Laughter.]

JE: Kajri, I am happy to enlist Hegel as a place where our issue begins. David, your objection is perhaps a different issue, which we can return to later on.

Thierry de Duve: I agree with you, Kajri, in making Hegel the bad guy who forced us to think in contrived alternatives. Either we go along with him and we admit that art is intrinsically religion practiced with imperfect means, or we claim that art and religion are totally different and have nothing to do with each other. The way out is simply not to be Hegelian, and to consider this alternative as an open question; then the open question becomes a matter of choice: you have to decide whether something is art or religion—I mean, a work of art or a religious artifact or both. I, as a modern Westerner interested in aesthetic issues, have no more difficulty looking at an African fetish as a work of art than recognizing that a Memling Madonna is *also* an object of religious worship; but I know historians and anthropologists who might challenge my views. Whatever, I personally feel

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[6] [In the introductory lecture, not reprinted here—Eds.]

free to choose, and sometimes obliged to. The nature of such choices—whether they are scientific or ethical or aesthetic decisions—is a very complicated question for me.

Personally, I find it necessary to state my approach and perspective. It never came to my mind to say that I would find it painful to sit at a table with people who have religious beliefs about art—not at all. Nevertheless, I do situate myself as a grand-grandchild of the Enlightenment, and that entails a particular conception of what the word "religion" means.

DM: For the sake of clarification, my point was that the images that Jim showed did not purport in most cases to be, or at least in fact were not fine art, but commercial illustration, didactic imagery for religious instruction, or devotional images.

TdD: The basic question is asking ourselves whether there is a God out there. Do we believe there is a God, or don't we? And what does "a God" mean? Let's define God from within the Christian tradition (which is the only one I know a little) as the idea that there is a creator to the world, and that he is good (he or she, but in the Christian tradition he has to be a *He*). Notice in passing how the idea of God bridges the scientific and the ethical. God is the original cause (Aristotle's first motor) that has generated all other, subsequent, cause and effect relationships that science accounts for; and he is fundamentally good, that is, he wishes humankind happiness. He guarantees that virtue will be rewarded, if not in this life then in the next. He acts as a warranty for our moral acts. Therefore hope in a better world has to be articulated with religious eschatology. I think that what the Enlightenment has brought—and this is where I situate myself—is that we don't need that. We're on our own; we don't need a primal cause to explain the world as it is, and we must do without a warrantor for our ethical behavior. We can be in the world without the crutch that is the idea of God.

So, now that I have positioned myself in this debate, I would like to submit my postulate: that art and religion were born together. I call it a postulate, though for paleontologists it might be a working hypothesis open to further discoveries, because I cannot prove it—I was not around. The context is that very long and slow Darwinian process of hominization, where the unfathomable question is: at which point did the animal become human, fully human? What kind of traces do we have that might indicate that a threshold has been crossed? Some say, and I find that a reasonable assumption, that the minute those primitive beings began to bury their dead, they ascertained their humanity. Well, it seems that that very

same minute, or not much later, they also began to put things in the tombs that were useless and looked as if they had been deemed beautiful: red ochre, for example, which is merely pigment and is found everywhere in tombs from the Middle Paleolithic on. Perhaps it was meant to nourish the soul of the deceased; nobody knows. Whatever other meanings it may have had, an *aesthetic* gesture was made at the very same time as respect began to be paid to the dead, and therefore, I suppose, at the same time as the concept of afterlife must have come to the mind of those primitive humans. With the cult of the ancestors, we witness the simultaneous birth of religion and of art. And since then, what we (at least what we, modern Westerners) call art, or high art, has been religious art, in every culture on the planet… until the Enlightenment arrived.

The question I am asking, then, as a grand-grandson of the Enlightenment who thinks that we don't need gods any more, is this: can art and religion be disentangled? Have they been disentangled? Modernism is best described as an attempt at this disentanglement, successful or unsuccessful—I don't think this has been decided yet. It probably won't be for quite a while for the simple reason that we lack the historical distance. Imagine a time line, between here and there. [*Stretching out his arms.*] It is perhaps 100,000 years long if we date the left end of the line from the first tombs, and at least 35,000 years long if we wait for more sophisticated manifestations of aesthetic activity, such as cave paintings, to appear. [*Measuring a very thin slice of space between thumb and index.*] Well, *this* would be the duration of modernity: the last 200, 250 years at most, of that long, long line. We—and then not all of us—have been learning to live without God, or gods, for a mere 250 years. It's extremely brief. We are only beginning to see what this may lead to.

JE: Let me register two things about that long history, because it illuminates two aspects of the very difficult problem we're considering here. First, there would be people on this panel—perhaps Tomoko would be one—who would want to say something about your use of the word *religion* in describing Neolithic tombs. And many people, I think, might want to say something about your use of the words *art* and *aesthetic* in relation to those objects. For example, someone like Hans Belting would say that *art* can't be legitimately used for objects made before the end of the middle ages.

TdD: I know, I know.

JE: And second, I note that your history could lead to two opposed conclusions. In one, we might say to ourselves: Well, Clement Greenberg isn't a deity, so let's continue to pay attention to that longer tradition, and think of it as our lineage instead of developments since the Enlightenment. But in the other, we might say: We are, in fact, children of the Enlightenment, and we need to think seriously about how different we have suddenly become. These two readings are compatible with your sense of the undecided nature of the question, but they also show how treacherous the very long duration history can be.

Wendy Doniger: There is another way to look at this, which sheds light on what Jim described as the "painful" aspect of our subject. There is a division between people who believe in god, and people who study god. The second category is what the Enlightenment was all about. On the one hand, you have fundamentalists, and people who blow up abortion clinics, and all those things that make people say, Religious maniacs! Religious fanatics! But the idea that people who would argue that art is religious should themselves be religious people is I think, completely wrong. The study of religion by people like Freud and Marx, who hated religion and wanted to talk about all the harm it did—the study of religion, which is the Enlightenment, the modernist moment, presumes that the people doing the study do not believe in god. The argument we're interested in here, about whether art is religious, has nothing to do with whether religious people are right or wrong.

Boris Groys: Thierry, we have to look at the *topology* of the question. Where do we find god? Do we find god in heaven, or somewhere else outside of the image? The modern intuition is that god is *behind* the image, that he is the medium. That is very much a Hegelian point of view, and I completely agree with Kajri in this sense.

But it starts even earlier, with German mysticism, centuries before Hegel. It's a change in the topology of the relation between the human and the divine. The divine, god, is something which is behind the image, and which shows the image to us. This is something that we can even find in Heidegger, formulated in a very modern and suggestive way.

This changed topology is something we are still living within. Even Greenberg is in this new topology, except that there, god is flatness—it's one of the possible interpretations of the divine.

Gregg Bordowitz: I am afraid of starting with an already established opposition between the religious and the secular, between believers and non-believers as the basis of the conversation. Polemical divisions have a way of reproducing discussions. They discipline us and ultimately imprison us within current ideological formations that we must change. I am wary of reproducing what Foucault warned us against in his "repressive hypothesis." Starting with the presumption that there is a hidden bias and/or a ban against religious art in the fine art world is a disingenuous way, an invidious way of discussing the shared terrain between religion and art. Presuming there is a ban on contemporary religious art in the galleries or museums—without really demonstrating that such a thing exists as a systemic bias—leads us to police both art and religion along the lines of ideological investments. I have difficulty establishing a strong, clear division among religionists and secularists when it comes time to discuss aesthetics. The grey area between religion and art is vast. My fears arise because of the political context of this discussion. Our conversation occurs at a time when politics are being determined by various kinds of religious fundamentalism. The issue of religion is extremely charged. We can't ignore that. Recent events cause us tremendous anxiety around these issues and we must pay attention to the sources of our current anxieties to explore the relation between religion and art today.

JE: Well, the aim of breaking ideologies is unarguable, but I think you're just wrong in your assessment of the place of religion. Outside of specifiable, minor exceptions, it is systemic and it could easily be systematically demonstrated. Clark's anxiety, for example, comes from his experiences in the 1960s, and from his understanding of the claims of modernism going back through people like Pissarro to Courbet and beyond. The anarchist project at the beginning of twentieth-century modernism was deeply alienated from what it understood as institutional religion. And I suppose I might add that my own involvement with the issue came partly from the difficulty I saw art students experiencing when they wanted, or needed, serious instruction on religious issues in their art. So that's by way of saying I think there are other genealogies at work—not to disagree that oppositions with no middle terms are unproductive. My epigraphs from Clark and Updike were meant to show the possible distances, not maybe the typical ones.

Tomoko Masuzawa: I'm drawn into this conversation and finding myself curiously in sympathy with several points other panelists already made—curious because these points may seem contradictory. But I think there is a logic to them. Thierry, you said a moment ago that art and religion were born together, long before *you* were born, most probably at the dawn of humanity. And you also implied that these twins were in a state of pre-critical cohabitation until the Enlightenment, at which point art walked out on religion, to be on its own, I guess, as humanity itself came of age. Now, we could say that all sorts of things followed from that moment of awakening or maturity, for example, spiritualizing of religion *and* art—at least as far as *real* art is concerned, or *high* art—and for that, we could either thank Kant or blame Hegel, as Kajri would have it. And Jim, I take it that you also suspect to find in the Enlightenment something like a root cause of the present condition, where art shuns religion. Meanwhile, Gregg bristles at this "prohibition," or I should say he wants to caution us against giving into this regime of separation before we even get started on our conversation; and of course he has Foucault on his side.

I'm in sympathy with all of these sentiments, but I want to add something to do with "religio," or "religion as we know it," or the *concept* of religion, though I'm hesitant to put it this way because it puts me on the defensive. I'm not talking about a *mere* concept as opposed to the real thing. I won't get into fights over matters of ontology, but just let me say, as plainly as possible: "religion as we know it" has a rather recent birth date, and this means that whatever people were doing, which we *now* recognize, organize, and regulate *as* religion*, became* religion in some important sense. And that's what we're dealing with here today, a certain conceptualized object, "religion." We couldn't be having a roundtable discussion about something that hasn't already consolidated itself under some epistemic regime.

So on one hand there is "religion" as we understand it, and on the other, so-called secularization—the "evacuation of religion from the world," disenchantment. These two things, religion and secularization, were born together, and their birth date was roughly around the Enlightenment.

Boris Groys: I would like to refer to the term "re-enchantment," and ask why it is that we feel there is a re-enchantment in the art world. It is of course partly due to fundamentalist movements, but I would argue that has to do with something equally recent: digitalization.

We read everywhere about the *immaterial,* about a new spirituality (on the left and the right—everywhere), that has to do with the new way of experiencing the digital image. I don't believe in immateriality per se, because of course digital media are material, but what's interesting about it is that it's invisible. A digital code, a digital image file as such, is invisible. You have to be the hero of *Matrix* to actually look at the digital code as such. That means the digitalized image actually visualizes something that is itself invisible. Every visualizing of digital code produces an image of something that is invisible. In a certain way this harks back to the time of the icons, because each digital image is an image of the invisible code. We know that if we perform digital codes in different circumstances, using different equipment, we get very different results. Now, what is the digital? It is something that has its truth in electricity and magnetism. In modernity we have a very long history of enchantments using electricity and magnetism as their paradigms.

For me, this is a specific way of thinking about re-enchantment today. It is a theme that suddenly brings us back to the problematics of the Byzantine icon: it is a visualization of the unvisualizable.

JE: That is an interesting history—it has resonance with a broad spectrum of current concerns about the unrepresentable in art.[7] But I would say the lineage goes in directions other than the digital and, ultimately, the iconic.

BG: To a certain degree. Canvas, for example, is invisible because it is covered in paint, and so Greenberg's problematics is also pertinent. But I would pursue a different genealogy. There is interesting research about the metaphor of electricity. In the eighteenth century,

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[7] Further references are in Elkins, "Einige Gedanken über die Unbestimmtheit der Darstellung [On the Unrepresentable in Pictures]," in *Das unendliche Kunstwerk: Von der Bestimmtheit des Unbestimmten in der ästhetischen Erfahrung,* edited by Gerhard Gramm and Eva Schürmann (Berlin: Philo, 2006), 119-40; also "Visual Culture: First Draft," review of *Iconoclash!,* edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, in *Art Journal* 62 no. 3 (2003): 104–107. For the pertinence of Byzantine icons in this regard see [ ].

there are romantic images of the cross as an electrical device, bringing divine power to the earth.[8] So there is a long history here; Marshall McLuhan is also part of it—and he also speaks, of course, about a kind of re-enchantment of the world. In my reading, Antonio Negri's "immaterial worker" is like a medieval monk (he is very Catholic!). So digitalization is a complex model, which permanently—consciously or not—influences our imaginations.

JE: That is an *extremely* odd genealogy, but an interesting one. Philosophically, it links German mystics (I assume you're thinking of Böhme and Ekhart) with Hegel and Heidegger—

BG: It is a fundamentally changed topology in the relation to the divine. Digitalization is like the *zero-medium spirit,* which is Hegelian. The image has the immaterial bearer, but at the same time it shows us everything that we can see. It occurs in Heidegger, in the *Origin of the Work of Art,* as Being, *das Sein:* a kind of zero-medium that shows us everything we can see. Digitalization is nothing other than the new avatar of Spirit or Being. We are still in this new topology, we cannot escape it.

JE: Boris, your theories are great! But I am also drawn to very familiar genealogies, like the one that looks back to the early twentieth century, to international abstraction and to the *fin-de-siècle,* as places where painting was sometimes understood to have transcendent purposes that were later doubted or reinterpreted. It's not that I wonder if those histories are effectively independent of histories that find their origins in Hegel or Böhme: it's that I wonder about the explanatory power of philosophic histories when it comes to the self-descriptions of modernist art movements. (I had the same problem with Alain Besançon's

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[8] Siegfried Zielinski, "Theologici electrici," in Bernd Witte, Mauro Ponzi, editors, Theologie und Politik: Walter Benjamin und ein Paradigma der Moderne (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2005), 254-68.

book, which keeps to Plato, Plotinus, Calvin, and Pascal in tracing its own history of iconoclasm, and barely mentions Kandinsky, Mondrian, and other artists.[9])

TM: I agree. I think you are pointing to a huge issue, about the universal viability of the conceptual apparatuses and genealogical schemata that we all use and desperately need. These conceptual devices constantly refer us back to those highly mediated Western philosophical brand-names, among which Greeks and Germans are particularly overrepresented. Isn't this a giveaway? What are these apparatuses made of? What is their date of manufacture and their historicity? These questions point to a yawning abyss, I think. We often try to cross it over by saying something like: "well, at least in the West…" (as if we knew what that meant!), relinquishing responsibility to say anything about the rest. That mantra may tie you over for the moment, but it doesn't resolve the issue.

DM: One may object with good reason to the exclusive dominance of Greek and German thought in constructing the intellectual history that bolsters prevailing ideas of "the West," yet the momentum of the history continues to press forcefully on discourse today. This is very evident from the many invocations of Kant and Hegel in our conversation so far! Right or wrong, historians of religion need to account for its influence. To say "in the West" is not an idle or clueless utterance. It means something powerful: it bequeaths on the speaker a privileged genealogy. What is "the West" but a history of ideas fixed to political, religious, and social institutions? It is no chimera.

JE: I would like to make a rough count of the genealogies that we are proposing here. So far, I count four: (1) Thierry's account of the *longue durée* from the Paleolithic to the Enlightenment, which Wendy enlarged upon; (2) Kajri's reminder of Hegel's influence, which several of us would agree with in somewhat different forms; (3) Boris's idea of a topology of the divine, which leads back into fifteenth-century German mysticism and forward into Heidegger and now the digital realm. And (4) I have just briefly conjured an account which traces the skepticism about art's religious or spiritual affiliations to a time

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[9] Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm,* translated by Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

just after mid-century.[10] That history would have everything to do with the rise of a certain kind of academic study of modernism and postmodernism—but more on that, I'm sure, this afternoon.

GB: I would like introduce another genealogy. Instead of going back to the prehistory of humans, I want to go back to our own pre-histories, our childhoods. That's where art and religion get confused within the more primary formations of the psyche. We must look at the development of belief in the psyche. For example, you can read a psychoanalyst like D.W. Winnicott. Winnicott taught us that what we believe is not nearly as remarkable as the fact that we believe at all.[11] How do children come to believe in anything? From a psychological and a psychoanalytic perspective, how we come to believe is nothing less than a process of world creation. Each one of us has to believe that we create the world for ourselves. That is a necessary fiction. Hopefully, that fiction never gets undone for anyone in this room. At some point, you realize that the world preceded you, but, according to psychoanalysis, on some very basic level you must also believe that you are the creator of the world. Maintaining that you are both the inheritor and the creator of the world is a fundamental structuring contradiction and it is the very foundation of psychological well-being. I think that the fundamental faculty of belief is where we can locate connections between art and religion. I think it is possible to draw connections between art and religion by understanding the necessary psychic function of belief. (I also think that art

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[10] A starting point for that genealogy might be 1949, when Greenberg wrote that "our period style" needs to remain "uninflated by illegitimate content—no religion or mysticism." ("Our Period Style," *Partisan Review* [November 1949], 1138, in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism,* edited by David O'Brian, vol. 2 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [ ]], [ ].

[11] D.W. Winnicott, "Home Is Where We Start From, Essays by a Psychoanalyst", Compiled and edited by Clare Winnicott, Ray Shephard, Madeleine Davis, W.W. Norton and Company, New York, London, 1990.

and religion are each autonomous spheres. That may be a contradiction. I'll have to work that out.) I have formulated a few questions about this:

1. Is it possible that the job of art is to give everyone concerned—the artist, the viewer, the critic, and the collector—an ethical part of creation? We see in religion and in art two different answers to that question.

2. Is the ideal of every aesthetic program to reinvigorate the beholder's interest in the world? What is the job of the work of art? The dispositions and affects produced by various works of art may differ dramatically, but the production of interest may be a common consequence of aesthetic experiences.

3. What are the many ways that works of art invite, elicit, and stimulate sensual engagement with existence? This question points to the area where religion and art coincide. Although they may perform different functions, both religion and art bear directly, and reflectively, on the meaning of our sensual engagement with existence.

These three questions unfold from a psychoanalytic perspective.

DM: May I add a question to that? There is a point most of us face when we realize we actually didn't create the world. You describe that point as "ego shattering." Is there then a dimension of artistic experience where this becomes definitive of religion, spirituality, or the sacred?

GB: You mean how ego-shattering is related to religion?

DM: Yes, if world-making is part of what art helps us do, does art also help us negotiate the destruction of our sense of reality, or of the world—in some way to re-create it? Or is the function of serious art principally critical or deconstructive?

GB: If you look at Klein and other psychoanalysts, they talk about the "reparative drive." Ego-shattering cannot exist without its relationship to repair. The process of the ego, and the psyche, is a constant dynamic of renewal and shattering. Both of those experiences have great pleasures and great dangers. There is tension in the psyche between two tendencies, between eros and the death drive; between conjugation and the tendency to an absolute zero degree of tension. These conflicting tendencies are relevant to the study of both religion and art. Neither religion nor art is reducible to one of these two tendencies. Both religious practice and/or art-making proceed from a central conflict in the psyche between creation and its negation.

TM: I realize I am adding yet another genealogy as a kind of overlay. I am very much in agreement with Thierry's emphasis on the Enlightenment (it is also decisive for my genealogy), which is about the modern epistemic regime that I referred to earlier. I called it the regime of "religion as we know it" or "religion as we recognize it and regulate it." But for me it is decisive in a different way. I want to emphasize that the significance of the Enlightenment is in that it was a moment of crisis—and in a way, we're still in the same crisis. The Enlightenment marked the inception of something definitively different, of course, but at the same time it was the moment when, all of a sudden, a certain kind of past was created, or conjured up—a past that was supposed to have preceded it. In a way, at that moment, past becomes something essentially ahistorical, something like sheer anteriority.

In my own work I try to understand this moment of critical emergence *historically*, as the moment when a new conceptual regime emerges and a new ahistorical past comes with it. "Religion," as I see it, comes into visibility during the Enlightenment precisely as something essentially allied with this ahistorical past. "Religion" as a Western discursive object fascinates me because of this: it signifies a powerful historical imaginary. And I don't think this is unrelated to the fact that religion is one of the last—if not the very last—conceptualized objects to be historicized. At least in the academy I think people have generally acknowledged the notion—even if they haven't really accepted it—that entities such as "race," "nation," and "gender" were not anything naturally given but they were historically constructed. But the very same people seem to go on talking quite comfortably about religion as if it were a self-evident category; as if it simply referred to something they knew to exist out there, ubiquitously if not eternally, only we can't know it whole because it exists in infinite varieties. That seems to be the overwhelmingly common assumption. "Religion" remains essentialized, un-historicized, un-analyzed. The

only thing I know that's worse than "religion" in this respect is "spirituality," which has a much more recent birth date—in the 1970s, as far as I know.[12]

The Enlightenment is the moment when we see the emergence of "religion as we know it," the discursive regime that's more or less ours. And from that moment on, "religion" has become a matter of *belief.* Also, in this regime, "religion" is in the plural. The use of the word "religions" can be traced back a couple of centuries before the Enlightenment; it may be convenient to say that it was sometime after the Council of Trent (1545-63), when Europe no longer could hold Christianity as a single entity.[13] So, from the beginning the discourse on religion has been predicated on a very contentious kind of pluralism.[14] This, I think, is the genealogy of our modern "religion" discourse in a nutshell, and I offer it as an overlay or substructure of the Enlightenment narrative, though this layer seems largely invisible behind the master narrative. It's definitely underwriting and constraining our discussion of genealogies, though, and I would like to contest it by bringing it out in the open.

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[12] Jonathan Z. Smith once remarked that the concerted use of the term "spirituality"—at least in English—can be traced to the Alcoholics Anonymous and their Twelve-Step Program. I came to the same observation independently in the 1990s when I was surveying casually the publications that mentioned "spirituality" in the title or as a subject field.

[13] Cf. Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies,* edited by Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269-84.

[14] Discussed at length in Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), especially ch. 9, 309-28.

TdD: Do you then challenge my postulate? You see religion as a construction? As a text that is projected back upon the past?

TM: Yes and no. Sure, what we *intend* to refer to when we name something "religion," those myriad varieties of things *we* call religion, obviously had reality well before this discourse on religion was invented; or we might say, they do have reality with or without this discursive regime. But with the advent of this regime, we can't deny that something about them changed rather dramatically. We would recognize this change if we remember, for instance, the fact that there was no term or concept equivalent to "religion" anywhere else in the world, and that it was only as a result of their encounter with the West—which wasn't all that friendly—that the rest of the world came to forge a new word; they had to scramble to calibrate their own discourse and come up with a translation so that they could finally institute a new policy, say, on "freedom of religion." Imagine the challenge![15] Or we might recall that "Hinduism," "Buddhism," and all those "isms" were neologisms no older than the 19th century and these were concepts utterly unknown to anyone, including the ancestors a few generations back of those very people who now call themselves Hindus, Sikhs, and so on. Or you can also discern this transformation in the difference in the ways in which Europeans wrote about the variety of religions before and after the Enlightenment. Before, books on "religions of the world" were always about the diversity of rites, customs, and ceremonies—to put it in contemporary terms, they were about cultural technologies; those devices variously available in different locations and to different peoples, so that they can get things done, in their social production and reproduction. But as of the late nineteenth century religion has become a matter of belief systems.

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[15] There have been a number or studies in the recent decades among the historians of religions to study this process taking place in various non-Western locations, in colonial India, in the Islamic domains, in East Asia, for example. There is a major conference planned on this topic at Hofstra University, "The Politics of Religion-Making" (www.hofstra.edu/CampusL/Culture/Culture_Religion_Making.cfm).

The challenge of studying religion, I think, is that we need to attend to both these levels—or I should say, we need to look at the friction and the interface between them. I mean, on the one had, the level of practice on the ground, if you will, as social technologies, and on the other hand, the level of discourse that developed after the Enlightenment, which itself is very much a part of our social technology today. This discourse on religion has done a lot of work—in creating the regime where we have something like "separate but equal" religions.

So, I'm not challenging your postulate in the sense that I'm not saying religion is just about that second level. But if we are talking about the history of religions, we need to attend to the messy interrelation between these two levels.

TdD: I agree—*if* we are talking about the history of religion, which is not my field and which I think is not really at issue here in this debate. By the way, my own opinions on the history of religion—a layman's opinions, obviously—are entirely shaped by what Marcel Gauchet wrote in *Le désenchantement du monde*, a book that has influenced me a lot.[16] Gauchet paradoxically sees the history of the great world religions as the development of a process that gradually challenges the religious and ultimately does away with it. The three main stages in this process are: the emergence of the State, the advent of monotheism, and the inner movement of Christianity, which Gauchet unhesitatingly proclaims to be the "religion of the exit from religion". Gauchet's views clearly entail an anthropological and thus trans-historical and cross-cultural conception of the religious phenomenon. The more primitive the religion, the purer the phenomenon. Now, Tomoko, in respect to your post-Enlightenment production of a supposedly a-historical and in fact retroactive notion of the religious, I see your point: Gauchet and myself walking in his footsteps might be victims of a typical post-Enlightenment prejudice. However, I think it is very difficult, and also counter-productive, to renounce all anthropological notion of the religious. I find it more fruitful to run the risk of essentialism, given that Gauchet has

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[16] Marcel Gauchet, *Le désenchantement du monde, Une histoire politique de la religion* (Paris: Gallimard, 1985) ; translation : *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, tr. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

provided us with the means of not being stuck with supposedly eternal and thus unchangeable essences. The essence of religion, according to Gauchet, is a kind of pact with nature, whereby people consent to a cosmic order shot through with supernatural forces beyond their control, in exchange for a stable place in this cosmos, guaranteed by the perpetuation of the social order willed by the ancestors. It is clear that it's been a long while since we stopped living in compliance with this pact. It is also clear that the longing for such a pact has recently made a spectacular and ominous come-back, in the shape of religious fundamentalisms of all sorts: Christian, Islamic, Jewish, even Hindu. This is why I find Gauchet's pact useful as a sort of infra-level to your first and second levels: it allows us to see that religion *is* after all some sort of belief system, without for all that essentializing the notion of religious belief.

TM: I'm saying that is something like an after-effect of the second, discursive level.

KJ: The idea of religion-as-belief comes out of a specific discourse on religion. This connects a little bit with what Gregg was saying: we can locate belief in different ways, and it is important not to decide that belief is merely a psychic matter. If I may illustrate this with a personal anecdote: I was once on a flight, and my usual vegetarian meal arrived, and the man sitting beside me—an Indian man—said, "You don't look like a vegetarian." I don't know what that meant! But then he asked me an interesting question: "Are you a vegetarian by choice or by conviction?" I had no idea what that meant either. I think what he was saying was, Did you choose? Was it a secular choice, or a religious matter? *Conviction,* here, means not having a choice. In this case, it fits very well, because my vegetarianism is just the way I was brought up. For me, meat is not food. I would rather starve. It is something that happens at the level of the body, not really at the level of conscious belief, or some abstract mental process.

TdD: Just to help you out: there's a remark by Wittgenstein somewhere: conviction is, after all, mostly habit.

DM: The history of Christianity is of two minds on belief. And it's much older than Hegel. The history of violent debates during the first several centuries and beyond regarding what was to be orthodox and what heterodox tended very strongly to push matters into a sharp distinction of right belief versus wrong, into formal prescriptions or creeds. But it was not just a matter of saying something. What you said meant where you stood in the arena of

political and social affiliation. Moreover, practices always embodied the religion as much as creeds. The word 'orthodox' meant "right teaching," but teaching pertained to the practice of baptism, communion, worship, ritual, art, and building no less than to the abstract doctrines. The singular emphasis on belief as assent a prescribed content in our day owes much more to modern Fundamentalism.

GB: From a psychoanalytic standpoint, belief arises as a factor of both mind and body. And belief arises at the place where nature and culture overlap. The development of belief in the individual is matter of sensations. Our belief in the world arises through touch—by touching and being touched.

JK: Right.

GB: Because one's beliefs arise through contact with the world, one is not the origin of one's own emotions. We are not the origins of our beliefs. Psychoanalytic theory understands belief as a function of civilization. The problem of how an organism takes up residence in civilization is an urgent problem in psychoanalysis.

KJ: So it's not a matter of the individual, but the individual in society, and in a realm of practice—the ethical realm.

JE: Our reading at the moment is a blending of Wittgenstein—I think that idea is in *On Certainty*—and some strands in psychoanalysis, which is itself interesting given the wide distances between those texts.[17] But it's especially interesting that we're putting both to use in an account of belief as partly immune both to volition and to individuality—a position that I would think that you, Tomoko, would want to situate in a certain history, rather than take as a starting point.

TM: Yes, but perhaps even more important to note is that, when we speak of religion as belief, or "belief systems," for the most part we are not really guided by anything so interesting as Wittgenstein or Freud—or Thierry, or Boris for that matter!—but rather, I find that belief is routinely reduced to do something far less subtle, something pedestrian and funky: say, some sort of exotic cosmology, a slightly outlandish world view, or a certain

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[17] Wittgenstein, *On Certainty,* edited by G.E.M. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (New York: Harper and Row, 1972).

type of mind-set, or closed-mindedness. This is really not analytically helpful. It's a far cry from the resources available from the tremendous archive of the Western intellectual tradition—like Kant, Wittgenstein, and Freud, I mean—which we have no choice but to mine.

BG: We are speaking of Enlightenment, but it's an old question, where the *light* of Enlightenment comes from. It is also a Hegelian question: he was very skeptical of the idea that the Enlightenment itself brings the light into the world: the light was already there, because it was a product of Christianity. But if you look to Heidegger, you find the same idea, but in an abstract form: the light must be always already there, so that we are able to see something in this light, and judge it. We are not sources of the light. So when we are speaking about visibility, about art, the central question for me is this: What is the medium? What brings light, and shows us things? From this perspective, we can see it is not personal belief, and not subjectivity itself.

In considering and making art, we are involved in certain kinds of practices, which have a strongly impersonal level: they are actually based on the impersonal. For me, the place of religion is within that impersonal. Whatever our personal conviction or subjective attitude, what is decisive is how our practice is structured *beyond* our control. Our subjective control—the possibility of controlling the world, our judgments, our convictions, our beliefs—is, as we have said, very limited. It is this very limitation that opens the way to any religious genealogy: it makes genealogy possible.

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JE: I would like to intervene here, because I think the subject of our conversation is turning, I think inevitably, from the enumeration of historical genealogies to a doubt about those genealogies impelled by concern about the terms that make them possible. Let us turn, then, to the second of our topics for today, the work we are asking certain fundamental concepts to do, and the ways our genealogies depend on certain understandings of those concepts. There are a number of possibilities. Tomoko, you began by talking about the concept of religion. We haven't said much about art, although we will, I hope, in the afternoon. Belief, and the historical constructions of the idea of belief, are certainly central.

One way into this question might be to ask about the differing uses to which our five genealogies put the concept of *history.* It could be argued, for example, that the psychological and psychoanalytic model functions as a non-historical model, in that it understands periodization or influence differently, and because its own historical ground would be restricted to the last hundred years, from Freud onward.

TdD: Psychoanalytic genealogies are easily historicized, since they run "from Freud onward," as you just said. Which is why I do not see Gregg's intervention as a-historical, or as cutting itself off from historical approaches at all. What he said about the involuntary nature of belief is crucial. I would like to join in the conversation about belief and introduce a distinction, which I think is important, between belief and faith. Gregg said we inherit our beliefs, we are not our beliefs' creators: we are born into the beliefs of others. I agree. Now what is belief? People believe in ghosts or in magic or in the signs of the Zodiac or in the actual virginity of the Virgin Mary, and what not? Belief in that sense is superstition, delusion and false consciousness. As Gregg said, you are born into belief, into the beliefs of whatever tribe you belong to. But you are not born into faith. Faith is an act: you make an act of faith. And I am convinced that the act of faith is not inherently religious at all. It is an ethical act. Whereas when I believe I surrender my freedom of thought to conform to the rites and customs of other people, when I make an act of faith I yield to other people's freedom without surrendering mine in the slightest. Blaise Pascal was right to see the act of faith as a wager: "I have faith in you" means: "I bet that you will make good use of your freedom, go ahead." Faith, faithfulness, fidelity, confidence, all these words derive from the same Latin root: *fides*. To have faith is by necessity to have faith *in* someone else, whether that someone is a person or a god. Take for example (by no means an example taken at random) my faith in my spouse's fidelity. Fidelity is faithfulness, so my faith is faith in faith. Reflexive faith, you might say. There is nothing religious in this act of faith, yet one religion—and not by chance, the one Gauchet called the religion of the exit from religion—was born out of precisely *this* act of faith. Allow me to give you a non-believer's reading of the mystery of God's incarnation, a reading that marvels equally about the mystery (I dare not utter the word "re-enchantment") but that shifts the story from religious belief to ethical act. As the story goes, Joseph has not yet slept with Mary, and yet she is pregnant. Any normal man would say, "Bitch! You

slept with someone else!" But Joseph believes her. It takes quite a bit of faith in faithfulness, doesn't it, to conclude that if the Virgin is pregnant, there must be a God out there who has had a hand in this. Joseph's belief in God is no longer inherited superstition; it is second to his act of faith in the faithfulness of his fiancée, itself the result of his love for her.

DM: So faith is not faith unless it is a leap with a significant risk of failure. Mary might have turned out to be a tramp, after all—that was the risk Joseph took. But then why not regard belief as an encounter with a divine other?

TdD: For me, belief is superstition, false consciousness, although not in the Hegelian sense. People believe in ghosts and phantoms: that is superstition. I want to distinguish belief as superstition from belief as faith. In my little vocabulary, I distinguish belief from faith, and I think the Christian religion makes that distinction. As Gregg said, you are born into belief, into the beliefs of whatever tribe you belong to. But faith is an act: you make an act of faith. My theory of faith is that it is an ethical act of the surrender to the freedom of others. Therefore it is not inherently religious at all.

Now faith, faithfulness, confidence, and other such words are all the same, so that to have faith it by necessity to have faith *in* someone else, whether that someone is a person or a god. Take for example my faith in my spouse's fidelity. Fidelity is faithfulness, so my faith is a faith in faith. This is crucial to the question of religion, because it bears, for example, on how Christ was born. The Virgin was pregnant and Joseph believed her: that is the mystery, because any normal man would have said, Bitch! You slept with someone else! But as the story goes, Joseph has not yet slept with Mary, and yet she is pregnant. So it takes quite a bit of faith to conclude that if she is pregnant, God must have had a hand in it. That is a fantastic act of faith if I ever saw one: Joseph's act of faith in the faithfulness of his fiancée. A whole new religion is born out of that act of faith. Hence faith is surrender to the other: it is the *I believe you.*

Now, can this be universalized? Can I address not just one person, the one I love, but everyone? That is how modernity rephrases the religious issue, as an ethical issue—because every religion has an ethics inside itself. Before, you had ethics disguised as religion. Now we can have *bare ethics.* But can it be universalized? —that's the big question.

TM: I would like to align your exposition on belief and Boris's discussion on "opinions," though I realize they are different projects.[18] It seems possible to collate what Thierry calls an act of faith—as in, Joseph's pronouncement to Mary: "I believe you"—and what Boris describes as the state of the absence of opinion. If these moments epitomize religion in some way, then I think we have here not one but two instances that seem to be suggesting an alternative conception of religion, alternative to what I've been calling the reduction of religion to belief.[19] Boris, you describe religion as the space where you check your opinions at the door, so that it is a zero degree of the freedom of opinion.[20] Now, I suppose it's possible to read this as saying that you have a zero degree of freedom in religion because your opinion has already been chosen, chosen *for you,* perhaps. But you seem to recommend another reading—and this is the one I'm finding most intriguing—it's zero degree because opinions absolutely don't matter. And in this reading "religion" would be precisely the space where whatever is done happens not because you've given assent to this or that measured opinion or to a particular view on how things are. Rather, things go on in religion for altogether different reasons, or perhaps for no plausibly explainable reason at all. That's where I see a connection to Thierry's notion of "act of faith." In both instances, I see you each bringing religion in a very different direction, different from where I think people ordinarily bring whenever they claim that religion is a matter of belief; the more ordinary idea being that religion is something that provides a certain structured world view, which you feel you have the right to hold (at least where there is freedom of religion) and in light of which you feel you can explain and justify what you do and how you do it. Well, if religion is a zero degree, out goes all that.

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[18] In the Starting Points essay reprinted in this book—Eds.

[19] It's not that I think the cognitive aspect, or convictions, or emotional attachment to certain ideas, etc. are not important; it's the simple-mindedness and the hopeless muddle that this reduction usually lead to that I find irksome, because it preempts any serious attempt at analysis—TM.

[20] In the Starting Points essay, in this volume—Eds.

Of course, it might seem frightening to think that religion could be such a state of total absence of measured opinions; but it's also possible to conceive of this space as ludic—and I would recommend entertaining this possibility. That's how Lévi-Strauss saw totemism.[21] He criticized those theorists who assumed that those primitive practices they found in Australia were stemming from a particular kind of belief system; and he criticized them for failing to recognize that what they saw in fact were so many operations of cultural technology—not a system of rules and constraints, but an ingenious set of tools, with a lot of room for play.[22] I find this compelling. Totemism understood in this way—I mean, not when it is construed as a primitive belief system—seems to me a good example of how religion works.

KJ: We have been linking belief to some kind of ethical or civic responsibility—to a community. But Thierry, how does that sense of community map onto the notion of the intersubjective in the Kantian aesthetic?

TdD: On the one hand, you have belief as habit, as in the Wittgenstein joke I mentioned a few minutes ago. On the other hand, you have faith, which I see as an ethical act. So we have religion (superstition) on one side and ethics on the other; where does the aesthetic come in? Where does Kant come in? And where does the sense of community come in? That's how I understand your question, which is triple, really. I'll give you a tentative answer: it seems to me that the first modern secular formulation of a universally addressed act of faith was the aesthetic judgment in Kant's sense. Imagine I put a rose here on the table, and say, "What a beautiful rose." Gregg and I are discussing the rose, and he says, "You're crazy, that's the ugliest rose I've ever seen." We would disagree, but Kant's understanding of the situation would be that we are both right in claiming the other *should*

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[21] *Le Totémisme aujourd'hui* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1962), in English as *Totemism,* translated by Rodney Needham (Boston: Beacon, 1963).

[22] This is articulated at length in the companion volume, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1962), in English as *The Savage Mind* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1966).

agree. What matters, Kajri, is indeed community: a community of two, at this point. By claiming that Gregg should agree even though he and I actually disagree, I grant him the faculty of agreeing. I declare that I have faith in his judgment, in spite of its discrepancy with mine. He does the same with me; and we both generalize to all of us. The community of two Gregg and I are struggling to establish is universalizable *de jure* (not *de facto*), because when we use sentences such as "This is beautiful (or ugly)", we are not just talking to each other. Such sentences bear an indeterminate and therefore universal address. So, what Gregg and I claim, in talking in this way, is that humanity as a whole is capable of forming a community based on… what? On actual universal agreement? Certainly not: disagreement is the rule. On potential agreement, then? Gregg and I do not feel the same about *this* rose, but perhaps *another* rose will prompt us to be in affective communion with each other… Kant's answer is: don't dream of that! Even if another rose reconciles you both, don't delude yourselves in hoping that the rest of humanity will join you! What Gregg and I claim, Kant would say, is that humanity as a whole is capable of forming a community based on the mere *idea* that all humans are endowed with the capacity of agreeing by dint of feeling. Kant's great discovery is to have understood better that anyone before or after him that aesthetic judgments have something to do with the building of community—not a real community, however, but a merely transcendental community—as signifying the possibility for humankind to live in peace. If beauty and art have that role, then they *seem* indeed to have appropriated a role that has been traditionally attributed to religion (I put the emphasis on *seem*).

GB: When Thierry and I both contemplate the rose together, are we feeling the same thing? Or, are we feeling two different things at the same time? What guarantees our judgments about the rose? We must consider the role of belief. Understanding belief is one of the most urgent concerns we face today. What is the substance and nature of belief? How is it binding to community? I think Durkheim established how early forms of religion are the origins of society. For Durkheim, concepts of the abyss, and the existential nature of religion come much later in history than the founding religious laws and the religious regulations of social relations. But belief—and this is why I go back to psychology—has to do with what is shared, with the intersubjective moment. Belief in the world, belief in one's place in the world , belief in the existence of others, all this comes into existence

through an encounter with the Other. One's continuing and habitual contact with the world gives rise to belief. Belief, as Thierry has said, is a probability, and you have to look at Hume, not Kant, for that. The philosopher Davie Hume taught us how belief arises through the experience of observable repetition in the world. Consider this: the sun might rise tomorrow, but we can't prove it. Scientific observations can predict it, but there is no *guarantee* that the sun may rise tomorrow. Our belief in tomorrow's sunrise is based on habit. The *guarantee* is an issue of belief.

TdD: We have to look at Hume in order to understand what belief is, but we might have to look at Kant in order to understand what faith is. The sun *will* rise tomorrow, if only out of habit. Such beliefs do not found a community, certainly not in the religious sense. On the contrary; think of the Aztecs: their community was founded on the premise that the sun would *not* rise tomorrow unless we fed it the hearts of our enemies. I like Kant so much, and I think he is such a superior philosopher when compared to Hume (even though Hume awakened Kant from his dogmatic slumber) because he pushed skepticism so much further without ever lapsing into defeatism or nihilism. Gregg, are we feeling the same thing, you and I, in front of the rose? In my example, no, we disagree. Are we capable of feeling the same thing? Are we capable of agreeing (universally, that is)? Notwithstanding his relativism, Hume assumes that we are. There is at bottom a good-natured human being underlying Hume's essay. Kant, by contrast, is aware that human nature includes radical evil. He does not wish *sensus communis*—what you called the intersubjective moment—into existence. *Sensus communis* is a mere idea. If this is so, belief in the intersubjective moment will not do; to retain hope in humanity requires an act of faith.

GB: So, it's important to back up and look at the structure and nature of belief in order to understand that belief is the background against which this very conversation occurs. We have to believe in order to perform the most basic acts. Think of all the things I must believe without question, all the assumptions I must make, so that I can navigate the twenty feet between here and the exit. That, if you think about it, is astonishing in and of itself. The very presumption of it – me, you, the floor, the door, all of it!

Consider this: In O'Hare airport the same public announcement is repeatedly delivered over the public address system, "The Department of Homeland Security has elevated the terror threat level to Orange." (Or something close to that.) What kind of command is

Orange? I think this is one of the most compelling aesthetic questions of our moment. What is Orange supposed to enlist? How do you perform Orange?

JE: Wonderful. Well, we have to stop in order to leave time for questions. I've been listening to the way this conversation has been going, from large genealogies to more tentative or contentious ones, and from there into these very fundamental questions, which basic terms I think is the only way forward—the only way to underwrite a shared conversation between religion and art. Based on the texts we have been reading, our conversations yesterday [in preparation for the panel], and again this morning, it seems there is no way to do serious work on the question while at the same time discussing the particulars of contemporary art: but I promise everyone, we'll get to that this afternoon. For now, the floor is open for questions.

Peter Heltzel [*Question from the audience*]: Hi: I'm Peter Heltzel, from the New York Theological Seminary. I wonder how you can relate the re-enchantment that's current in film and fiction to the collective struggle for justice in a time of global crisis. One starting point in film is Tolkein's *Lord of the Rings,* and there's also C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* and even the Harry Potter phenomenon as an entry into the medieval imagination. But in a more modern, digital idiom there's *Star Wars* and even *Fight Club*—they can all be understood as emblems of re-enchantment. And yet global warming is the worst it's ever been, and we're in an age of fundamentalisms and violence. How artists and activists work together, given that the solutions proposed in *Fight Club*—going into bars and beating one another up, or blowing up the financial district—just can't work?

BG: I would stress that religion has its foundational function, historically, as Thierry described it: it gives some guarantees, and creates a *sensus communis.* At the same time, it also provides a chance to split from the community, to be individual, to be alone, and at the same time to act in the society. It's a Kierkegaardian impulse, and it also affords the possibility of transcendence, without any guarantees or security, and without any *sensus communis* or community—even, or especially, a universal community. This is an impulse with an old and strong tradition, and re-activating it would give a kind of inner certainty and opportunity to the individual. The problem is so much greater than the individual—incommensurably so—but at the same time it *is* individual. Certain religious traditions

teach that there is a possibility for individual transcendence of every kind of communal form of existence. I have already mentioned Kierkegaard, but I would also remind you of Nietzsche, Bataille, Caillois – all of them believed that an individual has a chance to discover in itself a dimension that transcends every kind of community, of society. To a certain degree this dimension was opened already by Plato. The individual is here not simply a part of society – it is more than that.

WD: One thing we haven't talked about, an element among many elements of the many religions, as Tomoko says, is irrational hope. That is one of the subjects of these art forms, these films, that you're talking about. On the one hand, there is a flight to other people's religions, out of Judaism, out of Christianity, out of Islam, and into artist's religions—the "world of Narnia," the "world of Tolkien," and so forth. (Those are not, actually, specifically religious worlds, although they are heavily Christianized.) Then there's the flight to Hinduism, the flight to Buddhism, and the interest in yoga in North America—they can be understood as attempts to transcend one's own religion in order to have *someone else's* hope, in place of our own rather dashed hopes.

Bryan Markovitz [*Question from the audience*]: The discussion this morning began with an examination of art in religion as objects received by an audience. Fortunately, that object-centric perspective was stalled by the discussion of faith and belief, and some fundamental aspects of the definitions of religion itself. Now that we have talked about religion in these terms, I would like to return to the discussion of art by connecting art practice with another fundamental element of religion, that of ritual. I am speaking here in terms of ritual as an ongoing act of faith, and not simply a symbol of faith received in an object. For example, ritual often serves to re-enact historic events as a way to examine the validity of shared values or the ethics of a group. I believe that secularized contemporary art often functions as a ritual practice detached from religious faith and used to re-examine values and ethics. In the afternoon, I'd like to talk about how ritual, and re-enactment in particular, connects to contemporary art. For example, do we see aspects of ritual in the work of artists who archive the past to examine the validity of historical narratives, such as in the film work of Stan Douglas or performances by The Wooster Group? But more generally, beyond that example, I wonder if you could talk about ritual from this perspective.

TM: There is a strong tradition in the study of religion to describe the form of ritual as a reenactment of the past, as well as an army of critics taking issues with this school of thought.[23] If I were to choose some names within our living memory, probably Mircea Eliade should stand as a monument to the ritual-as-enactment theory; on the other side, Jonathan Z. Smith has made a tremendous contribution to the field while critiquing the Eliadean position.[24] All this is to say that, well, ritual, too, is a contested notion, just as much as the belief business that we thought we've just left behind. In fact, it's the same debate. My point here is merely informational, though I'm tagging my usual plea not to foreclose the discussion at the outset by going along with a certain notion of ritual that seems to come naturally to mind. I think this is a safe and reasonable working assumption: Nothing about religion is natural; everything is historical.

BM: Yes, it is true that re-enactment is just one of the many possible functions of ritual. Ritual is also present in celebrations, rites of passage and in ceremonies that connect religious faith to familial and societal events of life and death. However, this expansion of the term supports my belief that ritual and art share a great deal of unexplored territory, and it also prompts another question of potentially greater significance. I was attracted to the subject of this panel discussion because I believe there are many aspects of religious experience that art practice serves in a secular culture. Art is carried out as a serious way to engage questions of values and ethics where religion no longer operates. For many, this form of

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[23] One of the best places to start reviewing this voluminous literature is Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[24] Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History,* translated by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954); *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion,* translated by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959). Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

artistic ritual is what prevents art from being entirely consumed by commodity culture. At the same time, there are societies where art practice is limited or suppressed by the authority of fundamentalist religions. In those cases, ritual is much more strictly defined. Ritual seems to be an activity that crosses divisions of religion, politics, art and everyday life. Can a clearer examination of how ritual functions help us to better understand the often violent differences that have come to divide secular and fundamentalist societies?

JE: It's interesting to me that there is so little useful literature that bridges ritual, as it is understood in the study of religions, to ritual as it is theorized in the visual arts, especially in performance and—although this is your expertise—theater. The literature in the visual arts seems largely independent of anthropological literature, except for a few common touchstones—Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, James Clifford.

BG: A couple of years ago, I was lecturing in Israel, also in the Palestinian Territories. I had chosen the topic of art and religion in the time of war. In Tel Aviv and in Ramallah, I was asked the same question: "When great art will come to us? We are waiting for a new Goya, a new Picasso—the Picasso of *Guernica.* We are waiting for great art that will show to us and to the world our own suffering under the conditions of war and terror." I was stunned by that because for many years now, the world has been inundated by photo and video images from Israel and Palestine. That is, in fact, already great art, but it is overlooked in a strange way, precisely by the people living in the war zones, out of a false notion of what constitutes art. These powerful images, which have had so much influence on our generation, are regarded as not being art. They are associated instead with television and video games. That is why I am interested in the subject of video: it is an enormous body of image-making, driven by political and religious ideas. The propaganda and documentary videos constitute a kind of new, modern ritual, a kind of repetition in which concepts of ritual come alive.

Frank Piatek [*Question from the audience*]: I wonder if I could bring up a notion of Mircea Eliade's, "the camouflage of religion": the idea that various secular practices carry on or project religious or sacred or mythic gestures and meanings in disguised form?[25]

I am also wondering, in relation to systems of belief (which I am suggesting exist in both the world of religion and the spiritual, but also, in disguised form, in the secular materialist and rational dynamics of the art world system), if this notion of Eliade's might be helpful in addressing the unanswered "Why?" that existed at the head of the title of Jim's lecture last night ("Why Religion and Contemporary Art Are Incompatible"). I am wondering if this notion of camouflage might not be helpful in uncovering some of the dynamic of those figures and authorities who assume the role of taste makers, who define the art world system, who determine what is allowed and what is not, what is perceived as real and what is not, and who also define and literally name the nature of the time in which we live and work. What delicious power it must be, to proclaim a new historical epoch, or the ending of another, and to set new and restrictive aporias and prohibitions. Could we not perhaps see in this dynamic a collective enterprise that is deeply engaged in a clash with other myths? (I use the idea of "myth" in the Eliadean sense, not as "false story," but as deeply hidden and meaningful dynamics that are not necessarily what they appear.)

DM: I think that's great, and I'd like to endorse it. It seems to be behind Clark's apparently prescriptive statement that there is a set of rules, and it seems that some people know what they are, can speak with confidence about them, and the rest of us are scratching our heads. I still find Clark's position disappointing. Jim, sometimes when you talk it sounds like you're saying religion and contemporary art *cannot* be linked, axiomatically, whereas

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[25] Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries: The Encounter between Contemporary Faiths and Archaic Realities* (New York: Harper and Row, 195), especially the chapter "Myths of The Modern World," pp. 23–38, and "Religious Symbols and Modern Man's Anxieties," pp. 231-45, and also *Myth and Reality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), especially the chapter "Survivals and Camouflages of Myths," pp. 162–93.

Clark seems to be saying even if they could, they shouldn't. It's a kind of prescriptive distinction. From my point of view, doing ethnography, the study of lived religion, and visual piety, all that seems silly. I'm not working on fine art, mostly. If I want to know what people do with their images, I just go ask them, and I watch them. I see what they do, in their homes, churches, or synagogues, or in the streets, and then I compile descriptions of their practices.

So popular religious practices are one thing, but I wonder if we might take some of these discussions of belief and practice and apply them to fine art practice. In relation to your question, Frank, a sociological framing of the question could be very helpful.

FP: I think that approach may be useful in order to open up questions that seem to be sealed.

JE: Frank, you had a nice phrase yesterday: you said that for you the artworld seems to be comprised of a "system of refusals."

WD: In relation to Eliade, part of the idea is that religious concepts re-emerge in systems where they are not allowed. This is what Jim Scott called the "arts of resistance."[26] Camouflage allows religious ideas to be presented as non-religious ideas, sometimes with bad effects—you see it for example in the political arena in our country. But I think we can also see this in the art world, where it is possible to get around these perceived refusals by presenting work as something other than what it is. Sometimes these meanings are deeply submerged, and concealed even from the person who *has* the ideas. This is also connected to ritual, because these can be things that are done over and over, and once upon a time in the genealogy of these acts there could have been a religious purpose, which is no longer perceived as such. So I think this is a fruitful way of entering into these submerged elements of art practice.

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[26] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1990; *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, Conn., and London: Yale University Press, 1985.

JE: Unconscious religion, I called it.[27]

Lisa Wainwright [*Question from the audience*]: I am wondering about issues of gender in relation to the subject at hand, and in particular how this discussion may intersect with the renewed interest in first-wave feminism that we're seeing on both coasts.[28] How does your interest in re-enchantment, Jim, and everyone's interests, bear on an earlier moment when many feminist artists deliberately took up similar questions? Indeed, if modernism was predominantly a male enterprise, perhaps that's why religion faded out as permissible content. If the practice of women in the arts has often taken up the subject of religion, what do we see when we employ their feminist lens on the topic?

GB: I'm a male feminist. The future of feminism, as well as many other liberation movements seems to be in question now. You see this in a wide range of art today: people producing art from images of past protests, like Sam Durant or Mary Kelly. Mary Kelly's most recent works, restaging images of past feminist protests is particularly relevant to the discussion here. There is a willful effort to return to the problems of representing past liberation struggles. This occurs at a time when it doesn't seem possible to stage a credible opposition to the current war in Iraq.

With regard to gender, we learn much about volition, conviction, and belief from transgender theory. Current theories of gender distinguish between gender and sex. Biological gender is not identical with one's performed, embodied gender identity. Current theories make distinctions between feminine and female, between masculine and

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[27] This is developed in Elkins, *Strange Place of Religion in Contemporary Art,* the chapter called "Joel's Story Explained: Unconscious Religion."

[28] In the first months of 2007 alone, Connie Butler organized "Wack! Art and the Feminist Revolution" at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007; there was MoMA's two-day symposium (January 26-27, 2007) "The Feminist Future," organized by Deborah Wye; and "Global Feminisms," curated by Linda Nochlin.

male. They also question heteronormative ideas about the link between gender and sexuality. All these are enormously useful and powerful ideas coming out of gender studies and queer theory. Current discussions coming out of transgender studies have re-energized feminist practices and they have great influence in contemporary art. I can give only one example here, the group LTTR. They identify as a gender queer and feminist group. LTTR produces a journal. They organize screenings and performance events. All their various efforts explore what it means to be a feminist now in view of transgender politics.

TdD: I wouldn't dare qualify myself as a male feminist—it's not up to me to say that—but I would add just one thing. The Christian religion, the one I was referring to with my Joseph and Mary story, harmed the cause of women and especially women artists tremendously. There is an implied art theory within the Christian religion, and it casts women in the role of the medium, depriving them of the possibility of being in the role of the author.[29] This is a political question with huge implications for art theory; it concerns the articulation of art and *this* particular religion, not religion at large.

JE: Thank you everyone: we start again at two o'clock.

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Welcome back everyone. What an interesting, tumultuous conversation that was this morning. Talking about it over lunch, it occurred to me that the ways our historical models became at once more abstract and interdependent, and then the way we turned to conceptual issues—especially belief—was very promising. Our development of belief and faith, in particular, seem to be the only way a real bridge can be constructed between the discourses—the self-descriptions—of religion and contemporary art.

But now we need to turn to contemporary art, and I have in mind a different kind of conversation, in which we might try a provisional survey of the principal metaphors that

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[29] Thierry du Dove, "Silver and Exact," in *Sylvie Eyberg/Valérie Mannaerts*, exhibition catalogue of the Belgian Pavilion at the 2003 Venice Biennale (Brussels: Yves Gevaert, 2003).

organize the relation between religious or spiritual issues and specific art practices. Not the specific occasions—the scandals, the ostensively religious artists—but the tropes that help make sense of those occasions. We have several already in play: *camouflage* came up at the end of the morning session: it can be used to describe a covert practice, which presents itself as non-religious. (And as Wendy pointed out, such practices can be entirely honest, and the religious content uncognized.) Frank also mentioned refusals and resistance—the persistent holding-at-arm's-length of art practices that seem beyond the pale. I'm suggesting metaphors, rather than occasions, because it stands more of a chance of surveying the field, and because a listing of metaphors can function in a nonjudgmental manner: we don't need to decide the relation between a perceived "structure of refusals" and the truth as it seems from the side doing the refusing.

I'll start out with an example. Here at the School of the Art Institute, we offer a degree in visual studies, which is a field that advertises itself, here and elsewhere, as a place to go to study the entire visual world, beyond the attention art history traditionally pays to fine art, and to painting, sculpture, and architecture. There are many difficulties with that image.[30] One that pertains to our subject here is the way that visual studies describes religious practices and religious meaning. This is nicely marked by the fact that since the *October* "Visual Studies Questionnaire" in 1996, visual studies has had a problematic relation with anthropology: the *October* statement associated visual studies with anthropology, but visual studies scholars in my experience don't generally perceive themselves as anthropologists, or even as borrowing from anthropology.[31] The general result of this triangulation of art history, visual studies, and anthropology, has so far been a general lack of coincidence between visual studies' claim to study the world of visuality outside fine art—which would necessarily include a great deal of religious work—and visual studies' interest in an anthropological, or sociological, approach, which would enable it to bridge

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[30] Elkins, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2005) explores the disjunctions between visual studies' self-descriptions and the scholarship it produces.

[31] "Visual Culture Questionnaire," *October* 77 (summer 1996).

religion and art practices in a way significantly different from art history.[32] David, this goes back to a couple of comments you made in the morning about the study of images outside of the fine arts.

DM: Well, visual studies is not so much an object-centered discourse that wants to root spirituality (or whatever sacred quality one might have in mind) in an object. It is concerned with a visual field in which the object participates, but is not the only actor. The object, in this sense, is engaged by viewers, by values, by histories, and that makes it possible to produce a taxonomy of different ways of seeing—different gazes, to take that term temporarily out of its ordinary context in film theory and feminist criticism.[33] This may not be of interest to scholars of contemporary art, but the value of an approach that is less object-centered than practice-centered is that it lets us understand the worlds, the life-worlds in which images function: the ways they gather meaning and participate in different social occasions. For the subject of religion, and perhaps also the production of art, that can be very important: the sacred is created as a social process, an effect of engagement. This seems to me very promising, so I welcome an ethnological, anthropological approach. It seems to me that visual studies takes very little interest in religion—a fact that I haven't been able to fully understand. It may parallel the absence of religion and contemporary art, so maybe we can think about these along parallel lines.

JE: I would say that the near-absence of religion as a subject in visual studies is directly related to visual studies' ongoing commitment to the discourse of fine art and the avant-garde. You have put the difference in methodologies very well: the object as instance of meaning, as distinguished from the object as center of practices. It is a gulf that has not yet been bridged.

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[32] There are significant exceptions, such as James Herbert's *Our Distance from God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

[33] For a discussion of the gaze in the study of religion, see David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

DM: This issue, in general, can perhaps illuminate some of the anxiety or pain that some people have in dealing with religion and fine art. It is a pain that I don't really understand. I'd like to learn about this pain. [*Laughter.*] It's not that I want to promote religion in art: I want to understand it. It marks life-worlds that are not mine, and they can be fascinating.

KJ: I think an anthropological view can be useful in addressing this issue, in part because it can help train an ethnographic gaze on the West itself. I know that many of your concerns turn to Christianity, but for me, situated elsewhere, there are differing issues. I look at popular religious imagery, at printed images of Hindu gods and goddesses sold in the Indian bazaar. From a Western point of view they may seem like kitsch, but I don't think they are, because it's a matter of [what David, borrowing from John Berger, calls] the ways of seeing. The images are connected to commercial practices in India, and to actual economies of circulation, value, and meaning, which are not those of fine art or contemporary art. From that point of view, I see that the Western tradition has gotten itself into some terrible trouble by privatizing the sacred. Any kind of public expression of religious affect is deeply uncomfortable. It's kind of taboo. It's embarrassing. We see this in public monuments everywhere. Why is public art so bad?

JE: This is also a problem in teaching, when you have an art student who is dealing with religious or spiritual content. One of the many moments of what Frank calls the structure of refusals is the feeling that it would be inappropriate for the teacher to articulate such meanings.

KJ: This maps on to the problem of why religion sits so uncomfortably with art. Religion becomes embarrassing, confessional, sentimental.

JE: The dogma is that one can't communicate these inner states. The feelings and the discourse are imbricated: the shame, or embarrassment, also nourishes a dogma of interiority.[34]

Taylor Worley: In other words, it goes against what Jürgen Habermas calls the "inner logic" of the practice of artists and art critics in modernity.[35] In his essay "Modernity—An

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[34] Here Wayne Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1974), is still an excellent resource.

Incomplete Project," Habermas gives us that description of the segregated cultural domains of science, morality and art, which seems to imply within it what we have termed these 'systems of refusal.' He views 'inner logic' as that which dictates that art should concern itself with aesthetic questions and other issues, religious or spiritual questions for instance, are simply beyond the pale.

GB: What we feel and how we embody our feelings must be discussed in view of current developments in media and technology. Today, we are subject to an unprecedented conflict between cognition and stimuli; our technological world has intensified sensations in ways that some of us celebrate and some of us loathe; emotion has been elevated to the status of a commodity under late capitalism. All of these things complicate our discussion of emotions. We are sold lifestyles and packages of emotions daily; we purchase emotions. The iPod is a good example of that: it's a self-stimulating device, a mood elevator, on a continuum with anti-depressive drugs. (I've been on both, and I'm not speaking against either.) The iPod is very much part of how we cope, protect ourselves from a cacophonous auditory environment that impinges on us. It intrudes into our thoughts, everywhere we go. Our very interiority is in jeopardy, both theoretically and practically. It's threatened by the ways that our emotions are rendered a matter of public affect. What do we feel now? How do we feel it? How do we represent it? These are all questions that must be answered in view of a general set of conditions – the current modes of production.

JE: I would agree with that, actually, but I take religion as an exemplary case, in the art world, of a discourse that is under a lot of pressure. It cannot easily emerge into the discourse of art pedagogy or visual culture.

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[35] See Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity—An Incomplete Project," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, edited by Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1999) 3-15, quotation on p. 12, and further developments in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

GB: As an artist, I don't feel that. There is religious content in all of my work, in every video. In my book, *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous,* I talk about belief, non-belief, and my struggles with it.[36] I do not experience this prohibition that you are talking about.

JE: That is an interesting perspective. I do not think it would represent the position of many people here today—most of them have registered for this event on account of an interest in the troubled relation of contemporary art and religion, if not in the "structure of refusals" or any specific model of that relation. Speaking for myself, I see the difficulty of bringing the two discourses together as one of the most pressing problems in art discourse. So I wonder if you could say a little more about the contexts in which you find this freedom.

GB: I can't imagine the two discourses standing apart. I think one of the most powerful works of art in the twentieth century was Arnold Schönberg's opera *Moses and Aaron*. That opera poses the central problem of twentieth century aesthetics—Which is more powerful, the image or the idea? Schönberg's opera draws that question out of the biblical story of the golden calf and makes it the central problem of aesthetics in the modern world.

JE: In considering these confluences and disjunctions of art practices, visual studies, anthropology, sociology, ethnography, and art history, it's also important to consider the effect of judging a given object as art.

TdD: Right. I was struck, not to say shocked, by what Boris said this morning about the Palestinians expecting a new Goya or a new Picasso, in other words, hoping that an artist of today would produce a work that addresses their ordeal while being on the level of the *Disasters of War* or *Guernica*. Boris said they had a false notion of art. Did I hear right? For Pete's sake, what would be the right notion of art if *Guernica* doesn't qualify? And who are you, Boris, to dare say that the Palestinians don't get the notion of art right? Did I actually hear you *regret* that the flow of video images submerging us from war zones is not seen as *art*?

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[36] *The AIDS Crisis Is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986-2003* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2003).

BG: I differentiate between the terrorist act itself and the production and presentation of the videos documenting this act of violence. I don't think they coincide, really.

TdD: Of course they don't coincide. Video doesn't kill. I did not say 9/11 is reducible to its image. But the image is part of 9/11, not merely its representation. Actually it was an essential element in the terrorists' strategy.

BG: I also do not think the act of destruction is a work of art in itself. The videos are works of art. The cameramen are the artists, not the terrorists.

TdD: I disagree. I find it both more challenging for the intellect and more faithful to the facts to see the terrorists, or their master planner, as the artists. Seeing things this way has the great advantage of radically severing the artistic or the beautiful from the morally or religiously good. There is no more a priori connection, à la Plato or à la Plotinus, between the two. We are forced to think the connection anew and to make it depend on our judgment as to whether something—anything, and that includes deeds proceeding from radical evil—is art or not. Seeing things this way also entails an ironic critique of the terrorists' fundamentalist motivations, because it makes the Islamist ban on images backfire. Now the terrorists appear blasphemous by their own standards.

JE: I'd like to introduce a work of art in a more conventional sense: Thomas Ruff's large, high-resolution Chromogenic prints of the Twin Towers, taken from small JPEGs posted on the internet.[37] The images are in grids of about 100 pixels, ten by ten, where each pixel is represented on the print by a large number of resampled pixels. The effect is a little like looking through a wall of glass bricks, and a little like cubism. At the Association of Art Historians' conference in Belfast, the photographs were the subject of a paper by Rachel Wells. In the discussion afterward, part of the debate concerned what made Ruff's images

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[37] He altered the JPEGs by changing "their pixel structure," enlarging them, and changing the color "slightly." The meaning of the first of those alterations isn't clear, but it seems from the context that he meant resampling. Interview, conducted by Vicki Goldberg, June 2005, www.thebrooklynrail.org/arts/june05/ruff.html, accessed April 2007. I thank Rachel Wells of the Courtauld Institute of Art for bringing these to my attention—JE.

acceptable as art—and part of the answer was their aesthetization, their ever-so-slight reference to formalist modernism and cubism. Transcendence, if not overt religion, are lightly camouflaged as fine art, giving them access to a certain portion of the art market.

TdD: Awful! Such aesthetization disqualifies the artist to begin with. (I'm making a moral judgment here, not an aesthetic one.)

JE: In the last few minutes, our examples have been refusals and camouflage: the refusal of the artists you encountered in Israel, Boris, to see an unexpected form of transcendence; the camouflage of transcendence in Ruff's photographs.

Smuggling is a related metaphor. Let me introduce this with an example. Tomoko, I'd like to read your essay on the history of the idea of the fetish as an incisive critique of an account of surrealism expounded in the book *Formless: A User's Guide* and elsewhere.[38] In that book as "base materiality"—a refusal of transcendence, a concentration on hypostasis and material substance—is taken as a crucial strategy of surrealism. In the authors' version of Bataille, the insistence on the absence of transcendence, on incarnation without revelation or redemption, is a kind of inverted anti-Christian epistemology which is, in the end, the only possible form in which transcendence can still be thought. Tomoko, I know your essay isn't aimed at *Formless,* but you completely undermine that account by showing how the very same ideas were projected in the late nineteenth century as parts of a problematic account of religion. (One in which the fetish was excluded from the history of religious practices.) For me, the poststructuralist interest in "base materiality" is an instance of smuggling: religious ideas are taken into art theory through what the authors perceive as a non- or ant-religious context (Bataille's criticism): but in fact, those same ideas are part of a longer history of refusals of the religious.

TM: It's interesting that, of all the neologisms that Europeans came up with to describe outlandish religions of the so-called savages, "fetishism" seems to have acquired a life of

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[38] See the Starting Points essays in this book. Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1997), [ ].

its own, so, it's still with us.[39] What would we do without it? My impression is that those 20th-century writers and artists who utilized the concept in their practice—including Bataille—were almost entirely oblivious to its history in the previous centuries. The dynamic of the fetish discourse is largely unconscious, I think, and all the more powerful because of that. It's as if we ourselves have been possessed by this idea—the very word and concept that was invented to name and describe the lowest and the basest kind of religion, or proto-religion, really. So, "smuggling" sounds to me a bit too intentional—as if they were aware of what they were doing when they were brandishing this idea of fetish.

But I guess you are right about seeing in fetishism an interesting moment where art and religion intersect inadvertently. I mean, to the extent that art-making involves materiality at some elemental level (including the digital media), it makes sense that it should immediately attach itself to the idea of fetishism, because this was an idea conjured up to refer to the type of religion that was reduced to sheer materiality; zero degree of spirituality. But then, this conjuring occurred in the first place because of the presumption that religion has to do with spirituality, and because of the refusal to consider religion as an essentially material practice. (Religious rituals don't have to be thought of as a material enactment of an idea, or a belief; but that's been the predominant assumption.) So I think what "fetishism" is smuggling in is in fact something more specific: religion's anxiety about material things. That has a long history before the 19th century, of course, as the problem of idolatry.

JE: Yes, and there is a developed discourse of idolatry, iconoclasm, iconophilia, and "iconoclash."[40] The fetish is especially interesting because in the twentieth century, it has

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[39] "Totemism" and "animism" also have had interesting discursive histories but are not nearly as prevalent and viable as fetishism today—TM.

[40] "Visual Culture: First Draft," review of *Iconoclash!,* edited by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, in *Art Journal* 62 no. 3 (2003): 104–107. See also the forthcoming book by

been a way of bringing back a kind of religious discourse, with the severe restriction that the condition of its appearance is its unambiguously non-religious status. The fetish is the zero degree of discourse that then comes to include idols and idolatry, problems of representation and the unrepresentable, and so forth.

GB: I wonder about the notions of camouflage and smuggling discussed before. They're vaguely paranoid. Talk about smuggling and camouflage gets everyone searching for hidden religious content. The idea that artists hide content as matter of choice is a problem. It creates the illusion that the artist is completely aware of his or her intentions.

JE: You don't have to believe in volitional control to say that artists can worry about how to orient their work, in practical terms, in order to get good critiques or reviews.

GB: I'm an artist and I take issue with the contention that there is some kind of ban on religious art. I do not see that operating in the contemporary art world. I'll give you an example of a very prominent and visible work of art generated in response to the events of 9/11. I'm thinking about Paul Chan's contribution to the most recent Whitney Museum Biennial, a video installation titled *1st ~~Light~~*. It received a lot of attention and I think it is a religious work of art. How is it religious? Well, it recalls the history of religious art in a number of ways. The video installation is simple and solemn. An animation loop is projected onto the floor. The projection makes a trapezoid shape on the floor of the room. The installation and the projection draw people into the act of staring, of paying deep attention. It elicits a kind of meditation. *1st ~~Light~~* produces many affects associated with some forms of religious observance. To stare at the projected images, the viewer has to stand, head bowed, eyes cast downward, for a long time. Walking into the room, before one can even look at the projection on the floor, one first encounters others, standing as if they are mourning at a funeral.

The figure of the cross is a key element of the projected animation in *1st ~~Light~~*. Is it a cross? Actually, it's a line drawing of a telephone pole placed prominently within the frame. All around this cross-like figure, line drawings of common objects -- like cell

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Joseph Koerner, *Last Experiences of Painting*, in the series *Theories of Modernism and Postmodernism in the Visual Arts,* vol. 4 (New York: Routledge, 2008).

phones, automobiles and eye glasses -- float in and out of the frame, in all directions. There is no one direction of gravity. Drawings of human figures also drop through the projected field. The placement of the telephone pole is an ambiguous gesture. It's a provocative gesture. *1st ~~Light~~* begs the question – What is a religious work of art today? *1st ~~Light~~* is a profoundly religious work precisely because it invites the viewer to imagine the religious dimensions of our everyday experience, NOW, at a time when the everyday is fraught with mourning, loss, fear, and anger. The installation does not propose or endorse any particular interpretation of current events, nor does it guarantee any particular explanation of history. It does all this at a time when religious fundamentalist factions, in our country and elsewhere, are competing for political power.

JE: Two questions could be put to that account. One is that Chan's artwork is unusual. It was not statistically the norm even within the Biennial context, or biennale culture. The other question would have to do with what happens "outside" the biennale culture, "outside" work that circulates in the international art market. There is the larger world of ordinary art production, art schools, art students, where the problems we are discussing, and the metaphors of smuggling and refusals are absolutely commonplace. They are at work throughout this School. And beyond academic art production, there is the ocean of religious works made for other contexts, which can appear kitschy, schmaltzy, saccharine, old-fashioned, and conservative—and in those contexts, when the work encounters art world institutions, it experiences "structures of refusal."

You can look at this problem statistically: the Biennial is a tiny sample, the international art world a larger sample, the sum total of art students and graduates a much larger sample, and the sum total of contemporary art production vastly larger.

GB: I am relating to these questions as a practitioner—I make art and I write. I'm also Jewish. When I go to a Passover Seder, I can appreciate a beautiful handcrafted seder plate. I can go to a number of Jewish Museums in the world and admire beautiful seder plates. I don't expect to see a seder plate hanging next to an Ellsworth Kelly in the Art Institute anytime soon. Why?

For the past hundred years, the avant-garde has interrogated how contexts, interests, and habits lay claim to works of art. I think *that* inquiry remains an urgent and worthwhile endeavor. BUT, that is not what's going here. Jim, you repeatedly return to a

conspiratorial narrative. Basically, you're blaming Clement Greenberg for a ban on Christian iconography in fine art galleries! And I disagree. That ban does not exist!

TdD: I think there are very good reasons for prohibiting Christian iconography in the gallery—unless, of course, we are talking about things on the level of, say, Gerhard Richter's remakes of Titian's *Annunciation*.

GB: Well, you should make that argument then.

TdD: As Kajri said, public displays of affect are embarrassing, especially in regard to artworks. Several of us agreed that the issue of faith is crucial to our discussion, so pardon me if I come back to that. As far as I know, and in regard to Christianity (the only religion with which I have had close contact), faith has to be proclaimed. One proclaims one's faith, which is why faith is an act; St. Paul insisted on that. The act of faith is public, and so is a work of art; it is a publicly declared aesthetic gesture, or act. As I have argued this morning, this aesthetic act is also an act of faith, a declaration of confidence in the viewer's taste. So, in case of religious art, we have a religious and a lay act of faith embedded or enmeshed in one another, and it's up to the viewer's aesthetic judgment to disentangle them. This brings me to the reason why I think many of us have problems with overt religious iconography. The aesthetic judgment that I am expected to make approves of the work, on the basis of my response to the work's public declaration. The work is, as it were, asking: "Do you approve of me aesthetically?"—and I am answering, "Yes (or No, or More or less, etc.)." But if the work also declares an act of faith *in* religion, if it is calling on religious affects confused with aesthetic quality, then I am bound to approve of its religious content by the same token. That can be profoundly annoying. I feel I am hostage to someone else's belief system.

There is no problem as long as I am looking at a work of art from a period where I sense the immanence of religious meaning to the work's purpose, so that the collective approval of the individual act of faith expressed in the work is somehow sensible, perceptible. For example: I go to Venice, and I look at a Bellini painting, and it is obvious that Bellini must have been a deeply religious person to paint the Madonna the way he did. When I listen to Bach, who is perhaps my favorite composer, it is clear that only a person with a profound religious belief would have been able to compose such music. When dealing with Bach and Bellini, *their* faith is part of *my* aesthetic pleasure. I can recognize the faith,

and it resonates in me, even though I am not a believer, because Bach and Bellini were embedded in a society that shared their faith. What I mean is that authenticity in religious art hinges, even at the collective level, on the difference between belief as cultural habit and common superstition, on the one hand, and shared *individual* faith as true religious fervor, on the other. Such authenticity is not available to contemporary artists, and it's not the artist's fault, it's not my fault, it's nobody's fault: it's that we no longer live in a society that is united by a collective, shared faith. Therefore every expression of religious affects inevitably sounds fake.

DM: You assume that the present world is as uniformly non-believing as Bach's was a uniformly Christian world. But both assumptions are wrong. His world was violently split between Protestants and Catholics, Jews and Muslims. And if polling is accurate, our world today has more believers by far than non-believers. Perhaps only 5% of Americans do not believe in a deity, according to recent surveys.

JE: Thierry, could you include Paul Chan's work?

TdD: I haven't seen that work. But when you were telling that story, Gregg, I thought: Wow, what extremes we have to go to in order to make a religious-aesthetic experience plausible again! Do we need a 9/11 each time we want a true, authentic, religious experience from art? Mourning, and mourning collectively, were the key words in your story. Wherever a community of mourners is assembled—and with 9/11 it extended worldwide—the conditions of what we might call, for lack of a better word, religious aesthetic experience, are restored. I only hope that the people who do not believe in God are not banned from that community of mourners, as I am afraid was implied by George W. Bush's insane crusade.

BG: I spoke this morning about the visually non-identifiable level of religious meaning in art, but there is also art with identifiable religious iconography: for example Douglas Gordon, Maurizio Cattelan, Andres Serrano. For me, these works are, actually, religious ones. I disagree that they embody a critique of religion: they are blasphemies, but blasphemy is a religious act. (That is in Bataille, Bakhtin, and others, who theorized blasphemic rituals as parts of the religious tradition.) In that sense, I would not say that we don't have identifiable religious iconography in contemporary art. The only difficulty is that it is now thought necessary that artists use specific blasphemic artistic devices to present such

iconography—but if those devices are applied, it is perfectly possible to use religious iconography in the contemporary art context.

JE: For me, it would be a question of those devices: they can be very obvious (for instance when an anti-religious gesture attracts media attention) and also extremely complex. Cattelan, for example, has become very proficient at producing smokescreens of mutually conflicting, often evasive statements—as witness the mass of press statements, books, and magazines around the Fourth Berlin Biennial for Contemporary Art.[41] I'm not saying misdirection has any particular relation to aesthetic or non-aesthetic content: I'm noting how complex the "devices" can sometimes become.

Taylor Worley: I think you're right, Boris, regarding religious "content." I don't think smuggling is a particularly good metaphor, because the 'device of critique' as you say, is really the only option available to artists that allow for religious meaning as a component of their practice. I mean, Georges Rouault could not feature in this conversation, but Douglas Gordon or Andres Serrano fit well within it.

In this scenario, artists that allow for religious meaning rely for the most part on a specific use personal narrative.[42] But this use of personal narrative for religious content actually comes to resemble something more like the exercise of identity politics rather than a simple endorsement or criticism of religion. And successful artists, and not just 'religious' artists, are the ones who can maintain a hierarchy in their practice, in which the aesthetic

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[41] These are helpfully archived under "Press" on www.berlinbiennale.de. I thank Sarah Hromack for drawing my attention to the site.

[42] Here, we could name several artists that employ personal narrative as a feature in their work that on some level becomes a vehicle for either positive or negative religious meaning. In addition to those named by Boris, I would argue this for artists like Francis Bacon, Joseph Beuys, Robert Gober, Kiki Smith, and Chris Ofili. See another interesting list given in John Alan Farmer, "The Reception of Christian Devotional Art," *Art Journal* 57 no. 1 (Spring 1998): 64-76—TW.

developments or innovations remain the primary concern of the work, and the use of personal narrative or identity politics is maintained on a secondary level. I think this is one of the main reasons that the work of Félix González-Torres has remained so preeminent in the decade since his death. The purity of his conceptual gestures is what actually guarantees his aspirations to live on in his work. And the biographical content of his art further solidifies his legacy beyond that.

And I agree with you, Thierry, that we don't live in a world of simple relations between art and religion anymore. In bringing religious elements into a work, an artist also has to, must incorporate a sense of self-critique and irony. That irony should also manifest a level of respect and freedom for the other.

TdD: Or use blasphemy as camouflage. Andres Serrano, for example, uses blasphemy as camouflage, but it is transparent camouflage. I have hated the work from the very first time I saw the images, because I recognize the Christian who wants to convert me. In regard to what you describe as opening a space for the freedom of the other, I think Serrano's morgue pictures do the exact opposite. They are unethical because he photographed anonymous, family-less bodies that no one will claim. No one can speak for the dignity of those dead people or protest on their behalf. And the viewer is taken hostage, too. Serrano perhaps thinks he can launch a Council of Trent on his own, but all he has achieved to my eyes is to have hijacked everyone's freedom with aestheticized images disguised as Baroque painting. For me the work is despicable both on the aesthetic level and the ethical level.

TW: I also have problems with his morgue photos, but I think you give him too much credit when it comes to trying to elicit converts with the *Piss Christ*. Obviously, the work alienates both sides, and I haven't come across any sympathetic readings of it from the Christian perspective. If we take it in its more didactic sense, which I think you imply, then I think it is directed more at discourse of identity formation within his own religious context and not to a broader audience. In other words, it could be aimed at releasing Christians from a certain image worship rather than recruiting new worshippers.

JE: These examples are unsuccessful smugglings, in the sense that we can easily occupy critical positions that demonstrate the rift between aesthetic and religious meaning.

TdD: Serrano has a lot of success! He plays the perverse game of "Head I win, tail you lose." He caters to the cynical art world that grins at the blasphemy in his *Piss Christ*, all the while telling the people who are genuinely shocked that he has produced a contemporary, redeeming and truthful representation of Christ's humiliation on the cross.

KJ: Thierry, this characterization of religion as a matter of faith, as a declaration of faith, is very Western. It speaks to your interest in Christianity as the last religion before the exit from religion.[43] Because if you have to declare faith, you are already in doubt. I contrast this with a lot of Hindu practices, or perhaps the kinds of religious practices that Tomoko is talking about, which seem superfluous or ornamental, and would not need to declare themselves. A lot of Hindu music, poetry, and dance is about the *enjoyment* of the divine. It's about saying, Oh, that is the divine, and there it is! —it's a kind of performative reaffirmation. That's where rituals come in, because they are about constantly reaffirming the divine through performance.

DM: Thierry, I like your idea about Christianity and its cultural situation, and Kajri, I agree that faith as a proclamation is very much a part of the Christian world. It is important to keep a global perspective on our reflections. But returning to self-critical, post-Kierkegaardian Christianity: there doubt and paradox are not signs, at least in the world of belief, of the slow ebbing and death of the religion. They are the signs of its possible renewal, its survival in the modern world. You can't just believe innocently anymore: you must enfold any act of faith with search, with self-criticism and potentially severe doubt. You must risk giving up belief. That is the way a lot of the more interesting theologians talk. Faith is not a matter of simple certainties. It's not about the affirmation of propositions that one holds to be true. Doubt is at the heart of it.

I am trying to think of artists who take *that* seriously. Is there art being produced that could satisfy the criteria of gallery art, that is serious, interesting, hard-hitting, and also engaged in these practices of doubt?

JE: For me, that opens the question of writers like Mark C. Taylor, and more broadly Jean-Luc Marion, Jack Caputo, and others. Taylor, for example, has written on Anselm Kiefer, so

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[43] See the Starting Points essay in this book—Eds.

there are artists who would answer to that configuration of post-theology and contemporary practice.[44] That kind of scholarship succeeds in adequately modeling only a very small fraction of contemporary art production, and it tends to focus on works whose articulation of the erasure or absence of God involves strategies (such as blur, darkness, abysses and voids, smearing and spilling, and the insignia of negative theology, kabbalah, German mysticism, or alchemy) seem disproportionately easy in relation to the very serious theological issues they are taken to embody.

TW: Along these lines, I think of the influence of Michel de Certeau and his impact on the development of 'Relational Aesthetics.'[45] This is another small faction within the broader world of contemporary art, but de Certeau's efforts at identifying live options for religious sociality have effected a good deal of thought more generally about the social interstice of post-industrial life, particularly in the writings of Nicolas Bourriaud. And these concerns are the mantle of relational aesthetics practitioners today.

JE: So far, we have been mentioning uncommon art practices—well-known examples, internationally famous artists. Let's say art practices are a spectrum. On one end is the high-energy ultra-violet, which in this model stands for the few works that achieve the most concerted critical attention and, often, highest market value. Thierry, Gregg, and I have each adduced examples. The other end is the diffuse, low-energy infrared, which here denotes the many practices of art-making outside the art world, including the popular

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[44] Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

[45] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life. [Vol. 1]*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), "How is Christianity Thinkable Today?" in *The Postmodern God: A Theological Reader*, edited by Graham Ward (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 142-55. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics,* Translated by Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods. (Dijon-Quetigny, France: les presses du réel, 2002).

religious imagery David and Kajri study. In that range, works may be judged very differently, and practices can be very inclusive.

Before we run out of time, I want to introduce some mid-range colors: common practices in art schools and in the dispersed communities of working artists, which together vastly outnumber the number of artists who participate in the international art market. They are in turn outnumbered by the many ways of making art that do not engage the art world.

Two colors, then: performance art and some video that is strongly body-centered, and depends on embodied, often multisensory experiences, is often taken as a locus of the spiritual or even the religious in contemporary art practice.[46] David's essay is among several that make this kind of connection.[47]

Another color—another place where religious or spiritual values have been assigned to art practices—is the whole re-reading of twentieth-century painting, especially abstraction, as a fundamentally spiritual undertaking, whose spiritual content has been submerged in much postwar criticism. In that realm, the exhibition *The Spiritual in Art* is a touchstone, a rare moment in which spirituality inherent in the practices of abstraction was acknowledged by the academy.[48] The proposal that painters like Rothko and Newman

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[46] See *Representations of Pain,* edited by Maria Pia Di Bella and James Elkins, forthcoming, for perspectives on this connection by Kristin Ringelberg, Helge Meyer, Valentin Groebner, Sharon Sliwinski, and others.

[47] David Morgan, "Visuality and the Question of God in Contemporary Art," *Material Religion* 3 no. 1 (2007): 135–43, quotation on p. 142; see the final section, which speaks of "pain and radical embodiment."

[48] *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890-1985,* edited by Maurice Tuchman (New York: Abbeville, 1985).

need to be taken at their word, and considered in terms of their anxieties about transcendence, has a strong life in art schools, if not in universities.[49]

My proposal here, initially, is just that we cannot do justice to our question unless we also work in the gap between internationally viable contemporary art and the many forms of art-making that operate outside the art world. In between are practices that represent, I think, the majority of people here today. There is a big middle ground, within the art world, of average practices, whose conflicts and possibilities differ from the ones we've been considering.

GB: For some reason I feel compelled to explain why I think that art can change the world. I do not believe that art feeds people, or that art ends AIDS, but I do believe that the job of art is to return the viewer to herself or himself estranged – feeling strange and feeling the world as a strange unfamiliar place. This is an inherited modernist ideal. I accept it. That is why I would argue for the autonomy of art. I am deeply invested in creating a space where the significance of my encounter with the work of art is not guaranteed; where I am forced upon myself, both at the level of pleasure and danger; where I'm pushed to confront myself as weird *to* myself. That experience is enormously valuable. I cannot really account for this, except perhaps through psychoanalysis. I often think about my own development as an artist. Somehow at a very young age the aesthetic experience I just described became the most meaningful thing to me. I decided to make it my job.

While I understand that I am a postmodern subject -- I have dismissed high and low, I go to the movies *and* I go to the museum, I'm interested in raiding the sensibilities of all kinds of music, from opera to punk -- still I remain deeply committed to protecting this one area of practice where there are no guarantees, where I confront myself as strange and singular. Regarding art, I am not interested in sharing a common taste with another. I prefer that the object presents itself as a uniquely novel fact. I do not want to share a taste with the viewer standing next to me, as if we're in a courtroom of taste. I want to be radically thrust upon my very own engagement with what I am facing.

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[49] This is documented in the case of Rothko in my *Pictures and Tears: A History of People Who Have Cried in Front of Paintings* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

The market effectively forecloses the possibility of this kind of enjoyment. That makes me despair. I understand that my desires follow a trajectory of the avant-garde, and I have lost my faith in the avant-garde.

[Applause.]

TdD: Pardon me, Gregg, for not joining the applause.

GB: That's okay, I want to be alone. [*Like Marlene Dietrich*] I vant to be ah lawn.

TdD: What you just said, and the tone in which you said it, made me think that if someone—an anthropologist, let's say, from outer space—were to come and get the tape of our conversation, and cut it from its context, he or she would have heard you preaching.

[Applause.]

What you said about art was tantamount to the foundation of a new religion, and I am a bit wary of that.

To return to points made by Kajri and Jim: when I deal with art that comes from a culture where faith or belief seems to be still functioning, I don't have the wincing reaction I have to Andres Serrano, for example, or Bill Viola. Viola is always calling on you to approve of his religious experience. You have to bathe in the same baptismal water as him, and that's enough to make me say, Yee!

JE: It is religiosity.

TdD: Exactly. I have nothing against religion, but everything against religiosity.

TdD: I must admit that I am a lot less critical vis-à-vis religiosity in art (with the kitschy and the schmaltzy that Jim said go with it) when I deal with non-Christian art. Indian art, or the little I know of it, is a case in point. Bhupen Khakhar and Vivan Sundaram are painters that touch me, because they never hold me hostage. My aesthetic judgment is mysteriously separated from the judgment that approves of the (perhaps feigned) religiosity emanating from their work. I do not have to be a born-again Hindu, whatever that might be, in order to experience the work in this way.

JE: I see Khakhar as entirely of his time and place, with no special authenticity beyond the mixture of 1980s Indian and Western neoexpressionist influences.[50] I haven't personally had any experience of contemporary practices I could take to work in that way.[51] But I take the point about the *possibility* of such an experience, which I would understand as a condition of contemporary art.

TdD: We have not yet talked about modern art that is overtly religious and has been commissioned as such. The best examples are done by non-believers. Matisse's *Chapelle de Vence* is one of the finest examples of religious art in the modernist idiom. And yet Matisse was a non-believer. Le Corbusier's chapel in Ronchamp would be another example. He came from a Protestant family, and was himself a non-believer. And yet he made a Catholic chapel that provides you with an elated aesthetic *and* spiritual experience. Closer to us, the only example I have in mind is Jean-Pierre Raynaud, who made stained glass windows for a Cistercian abbey in the south of France.[52] It is very convincing work.

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[50] In this I am agreeing with Geeta Kapur's account of Indian modernism, and its difference from Western modernisms, as in her "Bhupen Khakhar," in *Bhupen Khakhar,* retrospective exh. cat. (Madrid: Museo Nacional, Centro de Arte, Reina Sofia, 2002)—JE.

[51] This argument is given in "Naïfs, Faux-Naïfs, Faux Faux-Naïfs, Would-Be-Faux-Naïfs: There is No such Thing as Outsider Art," in *Inner Worlds Outside,* exh. cat., edited by John Thompson (Dublin: Irish Museum of Modern Art, 2006), 71–79.

[52] In Noirlac, completed in 1975. See for example *Les Reynaud de Renaud,* edited by Gilbert Perlein (Nice: MAMAC Nice, 2006).

By contrast, Manessier, who did lots of stained glass and was a pronounced Christian, produced bad art.[53]

JE: Why was it bad? Because of his lack of doubt? Manessier was in many ways a typical ecclesiastical artist of the kind I describe as "watered-down modernism": his forms, and not only in his stained glass, are a simplified cubism. It seems there should be a way to link that observation to your judgment.

TdD: Perhaps Manessier was bad because he so badly wanted to infuse his cubism with the extra spirituality that he thought our time needed. And the contrivance shows.

JE: This is a pessimistic message for those artists here today, who feel themselves to be religious, and want to create religious art—

TdD: Yes, of course—

JE: The moral would be: find a source of doubt, become an unbeliever, and then come back and make art!

GB: And only have certain feelings! I think this is interesting—it's a pedagogical moment. Thierry, why did my enthusiasm immediately become the principle by which your dis-identification and-or the ruling exclusion of the utterance?

I don't understand. I'm willing to unpack this in a totally disinterested way. I am willing to go through it: I was feeling a little agitated, as if something I wanted to be represented needed to be represented… it's an idea that excites me, it's kind of like the iPod, it's erotic, it's moving toward an increase, even if it is narcissistic it doesn't matter, because it has effects, it still registers socially because it has affects and effects on the audience, there was applause… and yet there's something uneasy about applause. I was uneasy about the applause, although of course I enjoyed it—

TdD: You called for it!

GB: I called for it, yes. The issue is ambivalence.

TdD: Right. Be reassured, you will fortunately never become a good televangelist.

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[53] Alfred Manessier (1911-1993), who made stained glass windows in Saint-Sépulcre, Abbeville, France, and other churches. See, for example, Hélène Claveyrolas, *Les vitraux d'Alfred Manessier dans les édifices historiques* (Grignan: Complicités, 2006).

GB: I am not trying to. What I am trying to do is talk about this issue of ambivalence, and also something that was an urgent concern of Jim's talk last night: the issue of passion and its relation to religiosity—

JE: Or sincerity and religious meaning—

GB: What happens to a student who *has* a passionate relation to her or his own work? What happens when passion and enthusiasm arise during school sponsored critiques? Often, the very enjoyment of a work, or a concept, is immediately flagged as suspicious. At best, enthusiasm is often viewed as self-delusion. At worst, it's criticized as mindless and therefore dangerous. Can the experience of art be embodied as enthusiastic enjoyment? Critique is not a process intended to kill the object and move on to the next. Unfortunately, too often, that is what passes for critique in the academic art world.

TdD: Gregg, I agree about critiques. I'll give you a quick answer on the subject of enthusiasm. I identify with Kant, who is generally extremely skeptical vis-à-vis enthusiasm and aligns it with *Schwärmerei*—one of his words for superstition. But there is one instance (in the *Conflict of the Faculties*) where he speaks of the enthusiasm certain people felt for the French Revolution and, while not participating in it, seems ready to share it at a remove, so to speak. He noticed that some people who had no class interest in the Revolution, for instance aristocrats, were enthusiastically endorsing the Revolution nevertheless. He saw a sign of progress in the fact that people, who would have every material interest in fighting in the camp of the counter-revolutionaries, would support the Revolution. I'm interested in that particular brand of enthusiasm: you don't quite share it, and you keep at a distance, yet you endorse it as a sign—not as a proof—that some hope is possible somewhere. The minute you think enthusiasm is proof, then religiosity enters in, and with it *Schwärmerei*. Then I feel I have to part company with the crowd.

JE: Gregg, I wonder if you could say something about exactly what prompted your astonishing speech. Now, in light of this conversation on passion (what I would call sincerity) and enthusiasm, I wonder if it was because the two "colors" I mentioned are rife with compromises and halfway measures? (Because just now, you responded when Thierry and I were talking about religious artists, skepticism, and doubt.) Or was it more because the two "colors" are practices that do not, perhaps, always aspire to the self-alienation you

describe? I'm asking in order to situate your enthusiasm with the conversation we were having at the time.

GB: I don't know why I was moved to say what I said. In my own work, I am rethinking an inherited opposition between thinking and feeling. I am asking myself, how does sensation play a mediating role between thinking and feeling; how are affects produced? To think about these questions, I have to stretch my limits. I must open myself up to different lines of thought, different intellectual histories. I feel trapped by antinomies: to believe or not to believe. To endorse or reject. As I said before, I am much more interested in the structure of belief. I'm interested in how beliefs change. It's actually very difficult to hold on to some beliefs. And yet, there are some beliefs that refuse to die. What are the mechanisms of that? Regarding enthusiasm and passion, I can't endorse or reject these emotions. They're just facts. They arise as facts. How do they arise and what unfolds from them? Those are the questions.

BG: Installation art is interesting in this regard. It is not about individual objects, but the sacralization of a certain space. It is an interesting medium, because it has to do with the marking of a void space as an art space: everything that is inside the space automatically becomes art. That is absolutely different from the traditional way of dealing with art as the sum of certain objects. Of course the antecedents of installation art are temples and churches, where lines are also drawn between sacred space and secular space.

To a certain extent, one can say that installation art is the leading art of our time, and it is only conceivable as an outgrowth of those older traditions.

JE: Installation art, understood in that way, could be added to our list of refusals. There is the alternate historical model, which sees installation as developing from constructivist and surrealist installations, from minimalism, and from the white cube—

BG: I do not mean this in terms of institutional sacralization, but only in terms of installation art itself, which can be done anywhere, in museums or outside them. Every object that goes inside the installation becomes an auratic object, an art object.

This is for me also a way of rethinking Benjamin, and his theory of aura. Installation is actually a reversal of reproduction, and a reversal of the ordinary mode in which art objects travel and are distributed. Benjamin believed that when art works start to travel or to be reproduced they loose their aura of originality. Benjamin uses *aura*—and aura is a

kind of sacral dimension of the things —as a name for the topological inscription of an artwork into *here* and *now*. But that means that every installation re-creates an aura of originality precisely because it installs things – gives them topologically defined here and now. So installation can do something mysterious, quasi-religious, making an original out of a copy.

JE: Benjamin's aura, the revived aesthetics of the fragment, and the postmodern sublime are good examples of concepts that function in the art world as camouflaged religious terms. This pertains to the humanities in general, where the postmodern sublime has a history of functioning as a placeholder for otherwise unacceptable discourse about religion.[54]

DM: Benjamin's aura is the effulgence of an object's power, the luminous manifestation of its reality as a source of something compelling. That is clearly a religious or sacred idea, and works of art might be said to descend from sacred objects enthroned for veneration, such as relics of a saint's body displayed in reliquaries on altars. What Boris says about installation tweaks sacrality in an important way, pulling aside the curtain and letting viewers of art see how spaces are constructed, dismantled, reconceived. But I don't mean to imply that this treatment of space is only disenchanting. To the contrary, the magic

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[54] This is thematized in Thomas Weiskel's excellent *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (Baltimore MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976). Other texts, such as Neil Hertz, *The End of the Line: Essays on Psychoanalysis and the Sublime* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), and Peter De Bolla, *The Discourse of the Sublime: Readings in History, Aesthetics, and the Subject* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1989), treat varieties of the postmodern sublime as products of discursive fields, abstracting—but, I would argue, not avoiding—the religious valence of the term. A starting point in this discourse is Jean-François Lyotard, "The Sublime and the Avant-Garde," translated by Lisa Liebmann, *Artforum* 22 (April 1984): 36-43—JE.

remains even if the space is not charged with a religious duty. The magic consists of the transformation, the deft metamorphosis that the artist pulls off.

JE: What I meant a moment ago, Boris, was not that your history of installation art would be refused by an institutional critique: I meant that a history that taps into sacred practices would be refused by accounts like Rosalind Krauss's. For her, installation is an unfortunate moment in the postmodern exploration of media: it's a misunderstanding of the possibilities of media, and the ways they can be questioned, and so it's a secular question.[55] I am, myself, very sympathetic to your history of installation art.[56]

BG: Krauss's account is based on a misconception. She believes that installation is an *assemblage* of different objects in a space. For her, it is an exhibition that proclaims itself as an individual artwork. She overlooks the fact that the space itself becomes the medium. She asks, Where is the medium of installation art? —and she doesn't see it, so she concludes that there is no medium, and therefore that the installation art is not good.

But the space—pure, Kantian space, if you will—*is* the medium, just as it is in churches and temples. The moving of objects from one installation to another, with all the strange processes of *Auratization, de-Auratization re-Auratization,* is a good example of enchantment, re-enchantment, disenchantment.

JE: I would like to start to bring our conversation to a close by returning to another possible sense of freedom. Gerhard Richter sent a monochrome gray painting, called *Gray,* to the exhibition *100 Artists See God,* and part of the statement he sent along with it contains this statement: "A monochrome gray painting, oil on canvas, in any common size, is

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[55] Krauss, *"A Voyage on the North Sea": Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999).

[56] A work in progress, *Thirty Modest Proposals for Curators,* is informed by a history of installation art—including Ilya Kabakov's—as sacralized practice.

simply the only possible representation/image of God."[57] It is significant he was willing to commit that to print, no matter what other dimensions *Gray* could be said to have. The history of monochromes embodies the distance between the metaphorics of constraint, refusal, camouflage, and smuggling, and the tropes of freedom and passion that Gregg has articulated. Monochromes have repeatedly been the dead ends of painting, and at the same time painting's most transcendent, hopeful moments. There is a well-developed secular literature on self-reference and self-referentiality, and an equally well-developed religious or spiritual literature on transcendence in paint, and its possibility or impossibility.

DM: Richter's position is not an atheism, but an agnosticism.

JE: Yes, but one well-balanced between agnosticism and another kind of opposite, a non-religious understanding of the same enterprise. At the monochrome the two discourses on abstraction are separated by a paper-thin divide.

TdD: Every painter in that tradition could have endorsed what Richter said about the gray monochrome. They are living in a period in which it is the only representation *left* of God. It is an instance of what the Fathers of the Church and the iconophile theorists called *kenosis:* the emptying of the medium so that incarnation can take place.

DM: This says little if anything about god, who remains unsaid, but much about the history of culture, ideas, and representation. *Kenosis* has serious possibilities. What happens after the death of god? The post-theology literature of the 1960s said, That's it, now we're on to post-Christian culture. In many ways the 'death of god' movement anticipated the 'end of art' that has been discussed in recent years by Danto and others.[58] The idea was that by

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[57] *100 Artists See God,* edited by John Baldessari and Meg Cranston (New York: Independent Curators International, 2004). This is brought out in Morgan's essay, "Visuality and the Question of God in Contemporary Art."

[58] Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966); Arthur C. Danto, "Narratives of the End of Art," in his *Encounters & Reflections: Art in the Historical Present* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1990), 331-45; Danto,

dying, really, finally dying, Jesus ended the distance between humanity and divinity. You'll recognize a Hegelian synthesis of opposites here, which some may regret, but the point was to take the death of god seriously, as a radically new metaphysical and ethical situation. It was a kind of philosophical millennialism—the horizon had changed because the conception of the divine had changed, even ended.

A comparable immediacy between life and art undergirds a great deal of performance and installation art, Fluxus, Happenings, Pop, and so on. Here's the thing: belief can be as sophisticated as art—this is something not many art world inhabitants seem prepared to recognize. They want to see faith only as reactionary, unreflective, authoritarian, and simplistic. That is why I think it is important to include doubt in our understanding of religion when approaching the study of art and religion.

TM: My concern is to alleviate the constraints on our discussion. And for that reason I wonder about the valorization of doubt. To backtrack a bit, something like a theology of doubt—here, I'm talking of a certain disposition or sentiment, rather than any doctrinal stance—the kind of theology of high seriousness was quite fashionable in the mid 20th century, and maybe we're still hangover from it. In any case, the consideration of religion from that standpoint is extremely constraining.

JE: I would agree, from the narrower standpoint of art theory, because the post-theological discourse by Taylor and others has had only a narrow range of application, and is arguably separate from the main streams of art writing.

DM: I have no interest in "valorizing doubt." No more than in valorizing belief or valorizing religious practices—or valorizing art, it's important to add. I am interested in accurately characterizing religious behavior in order to study it constructively. Thierry characterized faith very well when he pointed out it was an act, not merely an utterance or a propositional assertion. Belief as faith consists of more than an affirmation of a creedal declaration for the sake of certainty. If one examines what believers say and how they act, it becomes very clear that belief is not a sunny, naïve disposition untroubled by its own

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After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997).

internal contradictions. We will never get anywhere studying the relation of art and religion if we don't work with a more robust view of what belief is in practice—which means what believers actually do, not what intellectuals think they *ought* to do.

TM: I guess I am suggesting—pleading, really—that we shouldn't start with the assumption that religion—or for that matter, art, I guess—is always a matter of high seriousness, life-and-death question, salvation-or-damnation question. That's so narrow! Just because the question is big, that doesn't mean the conception of religion based on such an assumption is also broad. Far from it. A great deal of things people do, which we recognize as religious, won't fit into that. And if you manage to fit that in, then it's possible that you missed the whole point of that practice.

DM: That's a very good point. Belief needn't be limited to the agonistic. It also has very much to do with the mundane and prosaic, the virtually insignificant. No less important, to take Thierry's definition seriously and recognize the covenant in which two parties, neither of which is divine, are engaged in an ethical relation, we must expand the definition of religion to include the non-divine. The anthropologist Malcolm Ruel argued for this in his analysis of an African group that had no theological beliefs.[59]

TM: I would like to suggest that it's equally feasible and profitable to conceive of religious practice as a certain kind of redundancy—something superfluous, excessive, even ornamental. By the way, it's interesting that art-making, too, is often thought that way by many people. Maybe none of them are in this room. But why do we bristle at a mere mention of it when we are perfectly familiar with that line of thinking? In any case, when I suggest that we should entertain the possibility that religion or art has to do with redundancy or excess, this doesn't mean devaluing religion, or art. It doesn't make it dispensable either. I'm simply expressing my sympathy with what Lévi-Strauss has to say about totemism. For him, totemism—and, for me, religion—is a cultural technology. It's great that we have it. The redundancy comes from the sense of play that's necessarily involved in any such technology; where there is no play, there is no function.

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[59] Malcolm Ruel, *Belief, Ritual, and the Securing of Life: Reflexive Essays on a Bantu Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997).

You might say this is another assumption. Right, but it's a good antidote to the ruling assumption, which obviously comes from a particular theological and culturally dominant tradition. Let's not reduce religion at the outset to some preconceived, pre-critically constrained notion.

KJ: Yes, we are not constrained to the modes of faith and doubt that Christianity has set up for us. There are other modes of image-making and religiosity, and if we don't try to access those, then the religious right will just continue to do what it does. As thinkers and makers of art, we are constraining ourselves by thinking only within that particular Christian, Western morass, the kind of problem that has led us to that silly gray square.

KJ: If Gregg's passion and enthusiasm are a new religion, then I'm joining.

JE: But Gregg himself recognizes his ideals as inherited modernist ones, and he is infused with doubt about their articulation. I am much more pessimistic than you, Kajri, about the possibility of stepping outside the Judaeo-Christian framework: it informs the entire discourse of art itself. And Tomoko, I have to say I also doubt the possibility that religion can be rethought in the way you propose, although I understand perfectly that an historical study of uses of the concept of religion leads directly to the hope that discourse need not be so constrained.

KJ: But Jim, this is not a matter of optimism or pessimism: luckily for us, modern artists have *always* been in the business of exceeding the genealogies that have been handed down to them – indeed, in a sense this defines what they do! Here you're putting your finger on the contradictory impulses that inherently characterize modernist practice: the weight of tradition versus the radical imperative of incarnating the unimagined. Modernist art has been in the business of engaging with the materiality of objects, working in the sensuous, experiential register that Gregg spoke about, in a way that confounds the excessive spiritualization or digitalization of the image that stems from the Judaeo-Christian genealogy we've been continually harking back to here. It's also been in the business of tapping into other vital realms of image-practice that have been taking shape under rubrics other than that of art, and expanding its own arena of influence. I think the enabling thing about a conversation like this is to alert us as art makers and writers to the nature of our engagement with one specific post-Enlightenment, Judaeo-Christian genealogy, in the

hope that we might all find ways to trouble, if not refute it. Call it a kind of postmodernism, if you will, that hasn't been sufficiently articulated or explored.

TdD: Tomoko, I cannot go along with your parallel between art and religion as ornamental and superfluous things. That's too easy. Both have been around for such a long time… I hope some day humans will be able to do without religion, but I fear that if they do without art they'll stop being human.

JE: In graduate school, when I was studying as a painter, a teacher informed me that modernism was all about the impossibility of transcendence, and that all we could hope for was a description of our prison bars. Clearly that is itself a view taken within a secularism that I hope we have broken. But I do not think we have left it behind.

As moderator, I am taking my option of closing here, so that we have time for questions.

Susan Mulder [*Question from the audience*]: This goes to a brief statement that David Morgan made in the morning session, to do with interpretation. How do you feel about the validity of an interpretation of contemporary art informed by a religio-spiritual context? Take for example, Jeff Koons: his Michael Jackson with Bubbles, though not a religious work, is, to me, a satirical contemporary allegory of rabid (fan) idol worship, which refers back to the Old Testament and the Israelites' worship of the Golden Calf… Is there validity in that kind of interpretation?

JE: Well, art historians can accept all sorts of religious interpretations with equanimity, because they are part of the critical reception of the object. (Assuming your response is not wholly idiosyncratic—that it belongs to an interpretive community, and is responsive to a deeper past.)

SM: Maybe I should elaborate. Religious interpretations, not necessarily historically based, but in contemporary critique, are often treated dismissively or ignored, especially in the academic arena. These interpretations may be thought of as interesting but certainly not intellectual and they are often met with awkward silence, until someone can come up with some more acceptable interpretation based on contemporary theory. Why are spiritually-based responses so unacceptable?

JE: That's the $64,000 question. There is a complex structure of refusals—many of them. I think we have named about a dozen, arranged in three metaphors (camouflage, refusal,

smuggling), beginning with the strongly polarized epigrams I introduced at the beginning and ranging into more complex cases, such as Richter's statement.

From my point of view, one of the unresolved issues in our conversation is how much the discourse of modernism and postmodernism informs all discussions of artworks. Is that discourse avoidable? Some of us, like Kajri, would say it is, and others, like me and, for other reasons, Thierry, would say it isn't.[60]

DM: This is a matter of contexts. One of the things we were doing in the morning was trying to establish a context, a discursive community within which we cold agree or disagree with one another. In a church or other setting, you have a different community, with its own concerns, world view, sense of unity, knowledge, hierarchies. Interpretation always has a context. I guess your question is: Can we identify the boundaries of the community that leads us to make the statements we've made?

JE: Or, from my point of view: When any community sets out to address contemporary art in a serious manner, how independent it be of the discourses of modernism and postmodernism? David, I think this is the principal difference between us: I think that talk about art outside academies, galleries, museums, and art schools is conceptually dependent, often at several removes, on discourse inaugurated and developed in the academy, and ultimately even in a fairly small number of universities over the past hundred years. Your practice, your interests, are based on conversations where—so I

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[60] For defenses of this position, please see the texts *Master Narratives and Their Discontents,* with an introduction by Anna Arnar. *Theories of Modernism and Postmodernism in the Visual Arts,* vol. 1. (Cork, Ireland: University College Cork Press; New York: Routledge, 2005), and, for multicultural questions, [author] "Writing About Modernist Painting Outside Western Europe and North America," in *Compression vs. Expansion: Containing the World's Art,* edited by John Onians (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 188-214.

would say—those dependencies are not acknowledged. (They have, in that sense, an actual freedom.)

TW: I view this issue from a different, but mutually engaged perspective. I do not think artists working in religious contexts or communities *need* to submit themselves to the discourse of contemporary art. They are doing something different, with different purposes. *But* they have an opportunity to come to the critical discourse of contemporary art, and ask questions, and have their practices evaluated. If religious artists are concerned about being relevant in contemporary society, and being able to respond to a whole host of perspectives and opinions, then they are not going to want to pass up the opportunity to have their practice analyzed, critiqued, and refined.

It is also the case that more traditional, religious modes of interpretation (like the example you give) haven't done justice to a lot of modernist work or really accounted for the layers of significance within modern or contemporary art. Paul Tillich, for example, said some really outlandish things about modern art—he did a lot of smuggling in his theological existentialism.[61] So I would suggest that people who make theological interpretations take care to do a lot of work, and do justice to the art, investigating them more carefully. In this way, we can avoid running over work just to make illustrative points about it and hopefully engage with the work and inductively develop a line of thought that adds to or expands the prominent discourses already established.

JE: But what limits their care and accuracy? Is it possible to take the whole academic reception of, say, Koons, and import it into a religious discourse? From my point of view, the approaches may be immiscible, because the fundamental terms that give us art and modernism may not mix with the uses to which those terms may be put.

TW: Well, I think that's a very important issue. How much does the plurality of critical perspectives in contemporary art permit or exclude various 'ways of seeing?' I don't know, but religious 'ways of seeing' happen. And they happen in galleries and museums

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[61] See for example "Existentialist Aspects of Modern Art" pp. 90ff, "Authentic Religious Art" pp. 231ff in Paul Tillich, John and Jane Dillenberger, *On Art and Architecture,* (New York: Crossroads, 1987).

too. That much, in my estimation, will not change, despite the rigors of art theory, history and criticism.

I only hope to balance out those "ways of seeing" by calling religious thinkers to become more informed in their advocacy of those types of approaches. Not so that their discourses might someday surpass the influence of the art critics and historians, but in an effort to enhance the conversations that take place around art. I don't foresee any simple disentanglement of art and religion on the horizon, so I'm only interested in improving a dialogue between them.

Unidentified speaker [*Question from the audience*]: Can you please address Barnett Newman's *Stations of the Cross?* How does it fit into the issues you've been discussing?

TdD: Earlier, I was saying that the only convincing religious work in modernism was done by non-believers. In this case we have the best Christian art being done by someone in the Jewish tradition. I don't know whether Newman was a believer. I'd say he was a mystic, rather. He wasn't a practicing Jew, that, I know. And for him, Christ was the archetypical suffering man. The *Stations of the Cross* are religious in a humanistic sense.

JE: Well, Rothko had increasing doubts about his relation not only to Judaism but to God.[62]

TdD: In any case, *kenosis* is common to both Jewish and Christian traditions. The Jewish tradition would forbid images altogether, and the Christian tradition would produce images in such a way that absence becomes presence—that is, a Christian image tells you

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[62] *Pictures and Tears,* [ ]. It is pertinent here that the fourteen Rothko Chapel paintings were at one point conceived as Stations of the Cross, and were even to be given numbers. Later Rothko thought of putting the numbers on the *outside* of the building, so people inside wouldn't see them; and eventually all reference to the Stations was deleted. Newman's beliefs are difficult to assess, although his public persona, as a Jewish artist, is well documented (and provoked resistance at the time). For this information on Newman, I am indebted to Sarah Rich (Pennsylvania State University), who is preparing a study of the *Fourteen Stations of the Cross.* (Personal communication, April 2007.)

you're looking at what you cannot be looking at. God is infinite and invisible, and yet what you're looking at is a finite space, made visible. As Lyotard said, you cannot make the invisible visible, but you can make it visible *that there is an invisible.* A beautiful formulation that fits both Newman and Rothko, it seems to me.

JE: *Kenosis,* as you describe it, has resonance with Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit's writing on the Rothko Chapel in *The Art of Impoverishment*.[63] In other words, there are contexts for addressing religious issues without engaging specifically religious texts—while remaining, as Bersani and Dutoit say, "rigorously secular." Kenosis, the sublime, the erasure of self, the void… a number of concepts have been brought to bear on art like Newman's and Rothko's art without leaving what is taken as secular philosophy. There is a rich but ambiguous ground between the two extremes of (say) Greenberg's formalism and Newman's apocalyptic, eschatological rhetoric.

DM: I still don't understand why a work like the *Stations of the Cross* is an embarrassment.

JE: It's not an embarrassment to us; but it's "officially" an embarrassment that Newman understood himself in terms that fail to correspond to what any number of writers, from Greenberg to Bersani and even Thierry de Duve, may wish to say about him.

Gregg, as you know, coming out of the same milieu that produced *Art Since 1900,* there *are* strong attempts at prohibition and exclusion in the academic discourse on art. (This is not to say that Derrida, Lyotard, and others weren't deeply engaged with religious issues.)

There is also—this is a partly separable issue—the question of whose art world we're talking about. These difficulties do not affect the international art world, as much as they affect the ordinary production of art and its pedagogy—as I said earlier, speaking about the people who have come for this event.

GB: But there is no organized cabal. This is a conspiratorial fantasy. Each one of the authors of *Art Since 1900* deserves to be rigorously understood on their own terms. I'm sorry, but I bristle at the characterization of these positions as a unified position.

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[63] Leo Bersani and Ulysse Dutoit, *Art of Impoverishment, Beckett, Rothko, Resnais* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), especially 132–37.

JE: Absolutely, they and others have to be taken as individuals with their own trajectories. But it is tremendously important, I think, not to assume that their individuality means they are an unencompassably diverse or random set of people. I don't picture the exclusion of religious work—and again, I mean sincere religious work, especially when it represents major religions—from the artworld as a conspiracy. But that is not because there isn't a definable set of positions and judgments involved, or because are somehow acting deliberately, as conspirators: it's because non-religious discourse is deeply embedded in modernism, and has been long before *October.* Its history, as Tim Clark and others have shown, goes back to the late eighteenth century, to the generation of David in Clark's case, and to impressionism and post-impressionism. So this is not a conspiracy, but it is a very real situation, which reflects the concerns of many people here, which affects the pedagogy of students at the School and at other institutions in many other parts of the world, which continues to pose difficulties for the production and reception of art outside the international art world.

Alena Alexandrova [*Question from the audience*]: Can we think of any art that is entirely non-religious, that is free of any religious residue, trace, or reference? There are many concepts pertaining to religion in circulation today that are used to explain the status of contemporary art. This has to do with mediality of religion and not with something particularly spiritual.

There are also contemporary artists who include references to Christian iconography in their work. Is there not a space for art that would refer to religion, without being qualified as kitsch? I am thinking of Jan Fabre, or Berlinde de Bruyckere,[64] who refer to Christian

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[64] Berlinde De Bruyckere, *Eén*, exhibition catalogue with an Introduction by Harald Szeemann and Barbara Baert (Gli Ori: Prato, Italy, 2005).

iconography in a critical way; they are aware that that Christian images have iconoclasm built into them, as Koerner points out.[65]

JE: We need to qualify the identification of kitsch and sincere religious art. In the lecture yesterday, I was showing examples of religious art that are not engaged with art-world interests, and they appeared kitschy, sentimental, unironic. As David says, art-world criteria do not adequately address such work, although it is an open question whether sociological or cultural-studies accounts can substitute for fine art criteria when the work is considered—as it inevitably is—as art.[66] But there is an equally large body of religious work, which would include Fabre and de Bruyckere, which uses contemporary fine art strategies such as installation, video, and fiber art to address religious themes. Especially when that work is installed in churches and temples, it raises different questions: some—

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[65] Joseph Leo Koerner, "Icon as Iconoclash," in *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion and Art*, ed. by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT press, 2002).

[66] In that lecture, for example, I cited John Bell, who makes sentimental Christian e-cards, www.jrbell.com/index.html; Paul Myhill, who paints post-impressionist religious scenes, www.paulmyhill.com/petra.html; Felix Espinosa, who has a School of Paris tourist-art style and a style that reproduces vernacular popular religious imagery, www.methownet.com/felix/index.html.

here I'm not including your examples—can appear as conservative, ineffectual, or misplaced in relation to contemporary art concerns.[67]

TdD: Both Fabre and De Bruyckere are Flemish artists, deeply embedded in Catholicism, and its whole tradition of imagemaking.

Frank Piatek [*Question from the audience*]: I think we are trying to untangle and interpret these issues of religion or spirituality (and most probably forms of the psychological) in too narrow a framework, within the dominant order of the art world system. I think rather that the complexity of the issues warrants a virtual architecture of interpretation which would allow us better to sort out the layers of assertion, exclusion, bias and disavowal, deception(self or otherwise), displacement and counter-assertion that marks this discourse.

I tend to see the art world as an extremely contentious arena, a multidimensional force field of a kind of combat or game. In this context I have to energetically disagree with Gregg, where he questions or contests the idea here that there is a system of denial at play between multiple forces (although I agree that the issue is more complex than a simple binary opposition). He sees no conspiracy. Perhaps "conspiracy" is a word that is too consciously intentional, but some kind of collective dynamic is at work here.

I disagree with Greg on the basis of my own experience as an artist-practitioner who identifies with being a painter. I would like to put forward an issue about painting that I think is germane to our discussion: what I will call an instance of modern mythology in the art world system—the issue of the "death of painting," so often proclaimed in the 20th century. There's the embarrassing fact that painting refuses to die or never did die, or else its supposed corpse keeps coming back to life as vital as ever. This mythology is not

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[67] Among many examples: *Kan et figentrae baere oliven?,* exhibition in Copenhagen, 2003 (thanks to Mette Sandbye for bringing this to my attention); *Contemplations of the Spiritual,* exhibition in Glasgow, 2002 (?); *Faith,* edited by Jason Hyde (Hartford, CT: Real Art Ways, 2005), or www.realartways.org/visualarts.htm; *Five Artsts / Five Faiths,* exhibition in Chapel Hill, NC (www.ackland.org/art/exhibitions/faff/intro.html).

unlike the mythology of the "death of God," who somehow remains alive in innumerable forms of belief held by the majority of the people on the planet.

For me, ideas of the "death of painting," the proclamation of which comes from positions most often outside or against painting, is a good example of camouflaged religious or mythic thinking mobilized and projected by forces that share a collective critical set of opinions, world views and ideas of history. I experienced such a phenomenon in the earliest years of my art school education in the early 1960s. The message came from filmmakers and proto-conceptualists. I didn't believe the message, but the dynamic of projected restriction and denial by critical forces arrayed against what I was interested in, was inscribed in my knowledge base.

In 1964, as an unprepared, ignorant first year student, I found my way into a lecture at the Art Institute by Ad Reinhardt; it was one of his "Art As Art Dogma" lectures, and it ended with something like, "Art about art is the end of art, the end of art is not the end." At the time I had no perspective or frame of reference to process the message, but I was certainly awakened by it, and I have been aware of the whole genealogy of such aporetic proclamations since that time, and this awareness has sharpened my skepticism against the continued pattern of denials various forces in the art world project onto "other" areas, the main target being painting. But the point of this illustration is not painting, but how in the art world painting becomes the special target for a projected religio-mythic language of denial. Painting is like the world chaos monster that the hero attempts to slay in order to raise his or her own new world. But the embarrassingly ancient chaos monster refuses to die as it is supposed to do.

GB: I can't disagree with you if you say you felt that at the moment of the death of painting—

FP: No, Gregg, that is not what I meant at all! It wasn't my feeling that painting had died, but that others were projecting onto painting their own schema for their own reasons that had little to do with painting.

GB: I encountered "the death of painting" in the early 1980s (as a young painter in art school) when neo-expressionism dominated discussions in the art world and reinvigorated the art market. Julian Schnabel seemed to epitomize that moment. That work seemed to embody all the principles of Reaganism – a kind of thoughtless triumphalism committed exclusively to the interests of the wealthy.

I am pleased that paintings from the seventies is being reconsidered. Currently, there is a traveling exhibition considering abstract painting of the seventies that was eclipsed by neo-expressionism. That show is called *High Times, Hard Times*.[68] It looks at a whole generation of painters from the seventies who were dealing with interesting formal problems and questions about the status of painting in the modern world.

The "death of painting" that was much discussed in the eighties when I was a student -- the dismissal of painting in favor of critical and conceptual strategies-- was a response to political conditions. Painting seemed dead when so-called neo-expressionist painting looked like the state-sponsored art of Ronald Reagan.

FP: My death of painting moment was the 1960s. One of my formative moments was seeing Ad Reinhart deliver his "dogma" talk as a freshman. So there is another background. But I am aware of a whole rhythm, throughout the twentieth century, of times when painting was said to have died. So we can't have one single model. There is a deeper model.

Kimmy Noonen [*Question from the audience*]: I am young; I'm an active Protestant Christian, and also an artist. I have had to deal with the fact that religion and art often combat one another in their methods and focus. Perhaps Christianity, as well as all the major religions of the world, is no longer in an iconographic stage. There was a time and place for such methods of communication in art, but contemporary society has simply moved to a different level. Religion and art can mix if only the focus of the religious artists appears legitimate to the people of the world. Speaking on behalf of the socially oppressed, for and about those who cannot find justice, minorities and peoples who are perishing without concern from those of us with voices: there are many in the world without faith in God who concern themselves with these circumstances, but not many with faith who do. High art has long prided itself on not only portraying beauty, but accuracy to the time and nature of a place it is from. In that way, all artists are showing truth to their viewers, and

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[68] *High Times, Hard Times: New York Painting 1967-1975,* edited by Dawould Bey, Anna Chave, Robert Pincus-Witten, David Reed, and Katy Siegel (New York: Independent Curators, 2006).

all truth is God's truth. Until the people of faith can become relevant in the world at large, there will consistently be a tension between art and religion.

JE: Thank you for that: it is a good, open-ended note on which to conclude. We are out of time.