Channeling the Symbols of Divine Radiation: An Ethnographic Analysis of the Functions of Sacred Materials in Superetism

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Culture and Performance

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Professor Allen Fraleigh Roberts, Chair

Despite mounting interest in the lives of objects across a broad swathe of academic disciplines, researchers often reduce the complex mediating role of religious materials among human and divine beings to categorical, social constructions. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the United States, Mexico, and Nigeria over a period of five years, this thesis explores the divine and agentive functions of sacred objects pertaining to the Los Angeles-based Holy Superet Light Church. Since the passing of the movement’s founder in 1957, Superet sacred objects have adopted Her role as mediator between humanity and God. As indexical representations for God’s Light, Superetists consider the movement’s religious materials to possess remedial qualities that transcend human agency. Ultimately, this project
prioritizes an emic, collaborative perspective in exploring how members of the Holy Superet Light Church access spiritual and physical healing through an immersive, long-term interaction with the religion’s material culture.
The thesis of Degenhart Maria Grey Brown is approved.

Anurima Banerji
David Delgado Shorter
Allen Fraleigh Roberts, Committee Chair

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Introduction

The Holy Superet Light Church (HSLC) is an international religious movement founded by Dr. Josephine De Croix Trust (1873-1957) in Los Angeles, California in 1927. Today, Superet branches exist in countries including the United States, Mexico, India, Ghana, and Nigeria. Dr. Trust, who is affectionately referred to as Mother Trust by Her followers, created the Superet Light Church based on spiritual teachings that She received from a divine entity She named Father/Mother God and Its medium, Jesus Christ. Mother Trust claimed to have rediscovered Christ’s healing abilities due to a gift She had to see the Light, Vibrations, and Auras of Christ's words in the New Testament. Mother Trust attributed Her ability to perceive these Auras, and to heal people with them, to Her close relationship with Christ, who referred to Her as His "little sister" (Flores and Leslie 2016: 16). Mother Trust received the tenets of Superetism (or “Superet Laws”) directly from Christ through personal revelation, and described the doctrine as that which Christ transmitted to His disciples as part of their instruction in the Gospel two thousand years ago. As Christ’s

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1 Membership has sharply declined in the U.S. since the movement’s founder’s death in 1957. During the movement’s peak popularity from the 1920s to the 1940s, American Superetists numbered in the thousands. Based on the church’s estimates, there are less than one-hundred members in the U.S. today. American Superetists are concentrated in two branches, the Mother Church in Los Angeles, the First Superet Branch of Washington D.C. The First Superet Branch of Mexico City counts forty members across Mexico. By contrast, Nigerian branches number in the hundreds and their members in the low thousands. Nigeria is home to the highest concentration of Superetists worldwide.

2 On the behest of the Superet Church, I have capitalized all pronouns in referring to sacred persons such as Mother Trust, Jesus Christ, and God Superet. I have also capitalized words such as “Aura,” “Light,” “Vibration,” and “Sense,” since the Church associates these words with the agency of God.
personal religion, Superetism focuses on helping individuals attract and absorb the Light of God as a means of physical and spiritual preparation for transcendent reincarnation. In addition to finding the healing properties of Christ’s words, Mother Trust also discovered that the Holy Ghost is the Mother of Jesus Christ, and that together with the Heavenly Father, or “Father God,” the Holy Ghost, or “Mother God,” forms the entity known as God Superet, or “Father/Mother God.” Mother Trust found the word “SUPERET” as a young woman during Her Studies of Light in the Book of Revelation (Trust 1938: 3). Because of Mother Trust’s discoveries, Superetists, or baptized Church members, do not see their religion as existing within the rubric of mainstream Christianity.

Mother Trust used an array of artistic and literary materials to frame Superetism as a scientific method geared towards achieving spiritual enlightenment. Today, the movement’s material culture continues to play a significant role in the lives of Her followers in regard to the transmission of Superet doctrine. Following anthropologist Sherry Turkle’s observation that, “we live our lives in the middle of things. Material culture carries emotions and ideas of startling intensity. Yet only recently have objects begun to receive the attention they deserve” (Turkle 2007: 6), this project seeks to

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3 “SUPER” meaning God, and “ET” meaning light (pers. comm. 2014).

4 Despite focusing primarily on material religion, I was not able to print images of Superet objects or reproduce Superet images in this text because their use and distribution is tightly regulated by the Church. Only members of the Church can own Superet icons or reproductions of such. Ministers explain that, owing to their power, icons must only be encountered within Superet spaces, such as churches, or members’ homes, to avoid their misuse and/or any harm that may befall the uninitiated viewer. Photography is also prohibited on Church grounds.
understand how the sacred materials of an American new religious movement operate as agentive mediators between humanity and the divine.

As technologies of healing, demarcations of sacred space, educational tools, and indexical stand-ins for God’s Light, Superetists consider the movement’s religious materials to possess divine power that transcends human agency. Over a period of five years, I conducted various ethnographic research projects with Superet churches in the United States, Mexico, and Nigeria, exploring the intersections among divine entities and human beings as mediated through religious objects. Of particular interest to this project has been the functions through which Superet sacred objects have kept the movement alive since Mother Trust’s passing in 1957. As such, this project examines what constitutes Superet sacred materials: why they are important; how sacred materials channel divine power; how sacred materials affect the worshippers who interact with them; what effect sacred materials have on the spaces these objects inhabit; and how sacred materials have kept the Superet movement alive in the physical absence of a unifying leader.

In discussing sociological translation, Michel Callon and Bruno Latour (1988) suggested that in conducting research the sociologist should pursue an “agnostic observation” by dispelling the possibilities of absolutes at the onset of their project. In so doing, the researcher should explain conflicting viewpoints and arguments in the language being used by those with whom s/he is working. In other words, whatever Interlocutors are saying is happening should not
require a translation into academic terms, lest their realities be
distorted (Kien 2016). In conducting the present study, I have
maintained an openness to the realities of Superetism through a
similar kind of agnostic observation. Using Superetist epistemologies,
I focus particular attention on how Superetists generate meaning in
their lives by internalizing Church doctrine, and by regularly
interacting with sacred objects. I believe that working through
Superet realities with the movement’s own epistemologies is vital to
avoiding the ambiguities and limitations of the academic “biocultural
black box” (Csordas 1994: 3) that continually neglects, alters, or
erases the agency of divine and/or other-than-human entities.

In studying the doctrine and material culture of the Holy Superet
Light Church, I have sought a collaborative association with
Superetists that goes beyond academic critical detachment to better
understand how divine forces shape the everyday lives of Superetists.
Ultimately, this project seeks to contribute to the study of religion
in exploring how deific entities operate in the every-day lives of
human worshippers. As such, this inquiry is primarily focused on how
non-Cartesian and non-Euclidian realities manifest themselves to
humans through sacred objects. My study also touches on the important
themes of gender, religious, and immigrant histories in the U.S., as
well as the politics of missionary work abroad, and the positive and
negative effects of such work on local populations. Studying new
religious movements such as Superetism remains important despite its
diminished popularity in the U.S. mostly because it has continued to
spread in other countries where local epistemologies often fit with
the tenets of Superetism to create meaningful narratives and realities for members.

Despite mounting interest in objects and material culture across a broad swathe of academic disciplines, researchers continually secularize the mediating role material culture plays between human and divine entities.\(^5\) This project seeks to understand how the sacred materials of an American new religious movement operate as agentive mediators between humanity and the divine from the member’s perspective. In reaching across disparate fields of intellectual inquiry (Superet philosophy, energy healing studies, religious studies, material culture studies, cultural anthropology, and aesthetic philosophy) I have striven to highlight the epistemic rationality of Superetism. By putting interpreting the Superet worldview in conversation with non-Superetist, academic voices I seek to demonstrate the complexity and importance of the movement’s material culture. In so doing, I proffer an emic interpretation of the very real and agentive roles that God and the non-physical “spirit-self” play in Superetist lifeways as a means of breaking with the mistranslations and alterations of non-Cartesian worldviews often perpetuated by the academic study of religion.\(^6\)

\(^5\) See, for example, posthumanism, material culture studies, new materialisms, the ontological turn, speculative realism, and anthropology of art. And more specifically, Mary Nooter Roberts and Susan Vogel’s “Does an Object Have a Life?” (In Exhibitionism: Museums and African Art, Mary Nooter Roberts and Susan Vogel; 1994, New York: Museum for African Art, pp 36-55, 124-127).

\(^6\) See for example, Marx (1843), Frazer (1890), Durkheim (1912), Freud (1913) Malinowski (1922) Berger (1969), Smart (1972), Chidester and Linenthal (1995), Firth (1996), and Tremlin (2006). For contemporary theories of religion that remain grounded in
Project History

I began working with Los Angeles based Superetists in the spring of 2014 as part of a broader project that sought to trace the cultural-religious demographic of Los Angeles through the city’s unique religious movements. In the first quarter of the 20th century, Los Angeles and its environs experienced an explosion in the establishment of new religious and spiritual movements that significantly altered the county’s Protestant and Catholic status quo, changing what Angelinos considered viable Christian doctrines and leaders (Flory 2012). Many of the Mother Trust’s most successful religious leader contemporaries were single women who espoused unorthodox views on religion and spirituality. The social and architectural influence of such religious ministers as Agnes Sanford (Inner Healing Movement), Mary Baker Eddy (Christian Science), and Aimee Semple McPherson (Foursquare Church), is still felt in Los Angeles today. At the onset of this project, I was interested in how positivist explanatory frameworks, see Cognitive Theory, Rational Choice Theory, Sensitivity Theory, and the Theory of Religious Economy.

7 The extent to which Mother Trust was aware of the tenets of Theosophy, Hinduism, or Buddhism (all of which share similarities with Superetism) is unclear. Whenever I brought up the glaring similarities between Superetism and Theosophy, for example, Superetists were quick to dismiss these as meaningless conflations on my part. However, a few Superetists with whom I have spoken in Mexico City have informed me that not only was Mother Trust aware of other similar, contemporaneous religious systems (such as Theosophy and Christian Science) but that for a period in the first quarter of the 20th century, new religious movement leaders were holding meetings in Downtown Los Angeles theaters to discuss forming a new Los Angeles-based religion. Mother Trust apparently stopped attending these repartees when She noticed that Jesus
religious movements such as Theosophy, Superetism, and Christian Science continued to exist, and often thrive, in the 21st century; and what this said about Los Angeles’ religious demographic more generally. However, realizing the magnitude of the endeavor, I soon began working exclusively on the history and tenets of Superetism, as well as the lived experience of its few remaining members.

My introduction to Superetism came not long after I moved to Los Angeles in September, 2009. The L.A. based “Superet Mother Church” was located directly behind my godfather’s house in Westlake/MacArthur Park, where I was staying when I first arrived. I distinctly recall being enthralled by the large multi-colored neon heart adorning the church-house spire, which shone in perpetuity above my godfather’s front yard. I attended Sunday service once or twice between 2010 and 2013 out of curiosity, but it was not until 2014, while designing a research project for an advanced field methods course as an anthropology undergraduate at UCLA, that I began working with Superetists on how the Church’s doctrine and religious materials shaped their lives. For reasons I explain below, as a current UCLA graduate student, my focus has largely shifted to the ontological functions of material religion within Superetism.

Christ was not figuring prominently in discussions. Upon leaving, She apparently remarked that these individuals “did not have the Light with them” (pers. comm. 2018).
In 2014, at the onset of this project, I set out to write an ethnography on the lived experience of Los Angeles-based Superetists. However, many followers were reticent to talk with me about their experiences in the Church because they felt that the information I sought was contained in the movement’s literature, and that I should, therefore, engage these texts for answers. When I insisted that I was not interested simply in the Superet doctrine as Mother Trust delineated it, but also on the lived experiences of contemporary Superetists, various members explained to me that if they shared Mother Trust’s teachings with me their bodies would pollute the doctrine, potentially causing me and my readers harm. The premise of bodily pollution in Superetism is built around a mistrust of the human experience in relation to the divine omniscience that Superetists seek through Mother Trust’s teachings. Mother Trust categorized human corporality and psychology as prone to ego-centered, animalistic instincts that often impede individuals from attaining unity with God. As a means of transcending the blockages that humans create in their daily lives, and attaining rapprochement with God, the Superet Laws emphasize a suppression of an individual’s will and personal desires. By telling me, an unbaptized and, therefore, unprotected individual, about their personal experiences in Superetism, members were not only usurping Mother Trust by taking Her place as teacher, they were corrupting Her teachings by infusing these with their own human impurities. Superetists consider the doctrine brought to them by Jesus Christ and Mother Trust to be extremely powerful. Any deviation or corruption of the doctrine by initiated persons (by talking about the
doctrine with non-baptized members, for example) can alter the lessons, making them dangerous to all involved.

The human experience of Superetists that I was interested in studying was precisely what members were attempting to transcend as part of the practice of Superetism. Superetists consider their human existence the result of sins committed in their past-life, therefore, explaining Superetism through the “spiritually low” human body is impossible to do without removing the healing component of the teaching, or worse still, changing the teaching so much that it becomes dangerous to others. Throughout this project, Superetists repeatedly referenced Mother Trust’s books or lectures in answering my questions to ensure that that they themselves were not speaking, but instead acting as a vehicle through which Mother Trust could speak. Subsequently, my persistent interest in the experience of members was treated as confusion on my part. As per the ministers’ recommendations, quoting Mother Trust directly, and repeatedly asking Her permission while conducting this project has been crucial to ensuring that both I and the non-Superetist reader are not harmed by the corrupted vibrations necessarily created by a non-Superetist-authored text. As an example of the continued authority Mother Trusts’, Superetists often responded to my questions about the movement’s doctrine with phrases such as, “Mother Trust gives...”, or “Mother Trust states in X book...”, before quoting Her directly.  

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8 As an example of the sanctity of Mother Trust’s texts, many of the papers I have written on the Church have been considered semi-sacrosanct given that I quoted Her directly. Although I have not found much information on the complicity of
Becoming increasingly aware of Superetists’ discomfort in discussing their personal experiences, I shifted my focus towards the sacred materials and locales of Superetism, and why these are so important to the movement’s members.

Today, Superetists with whom I have developed the deepest relationships are primarily ministers. In controlling the reproduction and distribution of Superet objects, as well as the general maintenance of Mother Trust’s possessions, ministers tend to know more about the function and history of Superet sacred materials than non-ministers. In working closely with Superetist ministers, I have ensured, to the best of my abilities, that Mother Trust’s teachings were not misinterpreted and/or misrepresented in this paper. Superetists in Mexico City and Los Angeles have looked at this very document and revised or redacted information that was privileged, personal, or inaccurate. The most trying complexities I encountered while conducting this project were manifest in the fact that since Mother Trust’s passing, Superetists themselves have had to interpret Her teachings and directions as found in the archive of materials that She left behind. Therefore, the understanding and application of Superet doctrine, and the extent to which Superetists were open to anthropologists or independent researchers in creating semi-divine texts by default of quoting sacred entities (cf. Harry G. West’s Ethnographic Sorcery, for example), this dynamic has often put me in awkward positions vis-à-vis my role in the Church (see Part Five).
discuss this with me, often varied from branch to branch and minister to minister. Again, I sought to resolve this by incorporating as many Superetist points of view as possible in researching the movement.⁹

Interlocutors and Geographic Locations

Sisters Sonia and Esther Flores and Brother Jaime Flores have been my primary Interlocutors throughout this project. All three are siblings and senior Superet ministers. Sister Sonia grew up Catholic in Mexico City but converted to the Superet Light Church at the age of ten when her family moved to Los Angeles. She has now been a member of the Church for forty-three years and a minister for thirty years. Her sisters, Esther and Lourdes, are also members, both of whom have been ministers for over thirty years. Sister Sonia’s brother, Brother Jaime, moved to Los Angeles in his early twenties pursuing a career as a diplomat. He joined the Church a short time after arriving and decided to become a minister soon after. Brother Jaime opened the Mexico City branch with his wife Sister Yolanda in 1977, where they continue to be head ministers. Sisters Sonia, Lourdes, and Esther are three of the most senior ministers at the Los Angeles Mother Church. Even though I have spoken to dozens of Superetists over the past three years, Sisters Esther and Sonia, and Brother Jaime have been

⁹ In many ways this paper represents a logical conclusion to my work with the Holy Superet Light Church. Given the more esoteric information I have learned thus far, ministers have recently suggested that in order for me to continue this project, while maintaining a cordial relationship with Superetists (and Mother Trust), I should become a baptized member and write about my own experiences in the Church; as one member explained, “you are not going to know until you put it into practice.” While I deeply appreciate the invitation to become a member, this is not a position I feel I could adopt with sincerity. As much as I cherish my friendships with Superetists, there are many Superet tenets that I personally could not uphold.
instrumental in patiently helping me understand both the complex nature of Superet doctrine and its manifestation in the Church’s sacred objects. Over the past five years, I have provided the Church with drafts of every paper I have written so that members may edit them before completion. This editing process has usually been quite rigorous, with up to five different members reading the same paper and providing clarification and redactions. This collaborative effort has been crucial in helping me accommodate Superetists voices, while also eliminating confusion and inaccuracies on my part.

In June of 2017, I travelled through central and southern Nigeria for twenty days with two missionaries—Brother Jaime Flores, the officiating minister of the Mexico City branch, and Brother Emmanuel Gabriel, the officiating minister at the second Abuja branch. Brother Jaime had travelled to Nigeria to visit new branches, meet new members, inquire as to what ministers needed, resolve disputes between branches, and distribute sacred materials. Brother Gabriel had helped Brother Jaime navigate the country on his first visit in 1992, and had remained his travel companion ever since. My goal was to conduct ethnographic fieldwork focused on the local level politics of Nigerian Superetism in the broadest sense. I was particularly interested in how a small, relatively unknown religious movement operated in Nigeria, how it attracted followers, and how the worldview of Superetism manifested itself in Nigeria as opposed to in Mexico and the U.S.

During the twenty-one days of travel, Brother Jaime, Brother Gabriel, and I ("Brother Brown, a student of the Superet Science") visited three churches a day on average to distribute Superet
materials such as books, icons, pins, and altar banners. As part of my interest in the functions of Superet religious objects, I became particularly cognizant of the increasingly apparent networks of meaning, identity, legitimacy, and sanctity that sacred Superet objects created between the U.S., Mexico, and Nigeria. In pursuing this phenomenon, I have visited the Mexico City branch to document how Superet books are translated and reproduced, but also, to understand how Mother Trust’s belongings are used as relics to sanctify the branch. During these visits, I stayed at the Mexico City branch with Brother Jaime, Sister Yolanda, Sister Dale, and a few other visiting Superetists. In Los Angeles, I stop by the Mother Church once or twice a month to visit the members or attend an Aura Lecture.

Research Methodology

According to senior ministers, I am the first non-affiliated researcher to work with the Superet Light Church on a long-term basis. The fact that Superetism had not been studied before created an interesting dynamic between myself and the movement’s members. As a first-time researcher working on a fairly esoteric religious movement without formal affiliation, I often considered the responsibilities of my project in terms of how to convey the tenets of Superetism while bridging theoretical contextualization and Superet ideas of truth. In

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10 Superetists consider “relics” to be any materials that Mother Trust came into physical contact with during Her lifetime. The “relic” designation applies particularly to the personal belongings that She used on a daily basis over long periods of time. Examples include Her hairbrush, Her Bible, Her pencil and eraser, and the pillow She knelt on while working.
order to do so, I developed an often improvisatory ethnographic methodology alongside Superetists that prioritized Superet ontology and epistemology while allowing for academic interpretation. This approach allowed me to maintain a friendly rapport with Superetists, and access to otherwise restricted information, by allowing the Church a large degree of say as to what I could and could not cover.

The primary methods I have employed while conducting this research project include structured, recorded single/multiple person interviews; unstructured, recorded single/multiple interviews; recorded informal conversations; and participant observation (including attending Sunday service and lectures, taking part in ritual exercises, and attending Church lunches and informal gatherings). I have also spent many hours taking inventory of church objects; mapping religious spaces; making field drawings of altars and other non-photographable locales; making recordings of ceremonies; photographing sacred objects and spaces (if and when permitted); reading Church texts; and discussing Mother Trust’s teachings with members.

In order to best describe the various esoteric aspects of the Superet Light movement’s doctrine, I have developed a theoretical matrix composed of a range of disparate analytical frameworks rather than two or three complementary ones. Primarily, I have tried to give precedence to the movement’s own cosmology and philosophy when discussing the tenets and operating principles of the Church. Accordingly, I used non-Superet academic theories as tools to think through or complement Superet doctrine rather than to structure and
translate Superetism through a specific academic lens. The academic frameworks I have used are those of religious studies, material culture studies, visual studies, memory studies, critical ethnography, and cultural anthropology.

Literature Review

Very few academic researchers have written about the Superet Light Church, and none in any depth. Superetists generate most information about the movement through three Church-sanctioned websites. The first website to be established is run by the Washington D.C. branch (http://www.superetlightchurch.com/); the second by the Mexico City branch (https://www.superet.org/); and the third, and most recent, by the Los Angeles Mother Church (http://www.superetlightdoctrine.org/).

Below I list the extent of non-Superetist academic research on the Church:

Religious scholar Gordon J. Melton has a small entry on Superetism in his Encyclopedia of American Religions (1978) and Encyclopedia of Occultism and Parapsychology (1996). These cursory entries provide biographic information on the movement, such as, when the Church was founded, by whom, and what the core beliefs of the movement are. Melton culled most of this information from Mother Trust’s books, as cited in both encyclopedias. When I brought up Melton’s work in 2015, Superetists were confused as to why their religion should appear in a book about “occultism and parapsychology.”
Superetists do not see themselves or their practices through the lens of occultism or parapsychology.

Marshall E. Nunn mentions the Church by name in a brief 1980 article surveying Californian cultural phenomena. As an example of the style of Nunn’s article, entitled “California Periodicals: Vitality and Imagination in the Golden State,” I quote Nunn, “religious cults abound in California, especially in Southern California. This area has long provided the spiritual climate necessary for the birth and growth of such exotic religious phenomena as Vedanta, the Superet Light Church, or Aimee Semple McPherson” (1980: 75). The pejorative and obfuscating “cult” moniker is one that Superetists have continued to reject since the movement’s foundation in 1927. Nunn’s use of “cult” as self-evident descriptor is particularly unfortunate given that he couches the term in such nebulous concepts as Southern California’s “spiritual climate” and its effect on “exotic religious phenomena.” More important still, Nunn does not define the term “cult,” or explain how it applies to Superetism.

Anthropologist Rosalind I. J. Hackett touched on the presence of Superetism in west Africa in her survey of religious movements in Calabar, Nigeria. Hackett provides cursory, biographic information on the Church in both a 1986 article titled “The Spiritual Sciences in Africa” and her 1988 book, Religion in Calabar: The Religious Life and History of a Nigerian Town. Apart from the modest data from her ethnographic fieldwork, I believe most of this information comes from Melton’s Encyclopedia of American Religions, as per Hackett’s citations. Hackett describes Superetism in Nigeria as a “psychic
church” (Hackett 1988: 111). Superetists in the U.S., Mexico, and Nigeria with whom I have spoken found the term “psychic church” to be a gross misunderstanding of Mother Trust’s teachings.

More recently, religious studies scholar Afe Adogame touched on the Superet Light Church in discussing new religious movements in Nigeria, in a 2010 article titled “How God became a Nigerian: Religious Impulse and the Unfolding of a Nation.” As per his citations, it seems that Adogame acquired his information on Superetism from Hackett’s previous research in Nigeria. As such, Adogame describes Superetism as belonging to a class of religions that he terms “spiritual science movements” (Adogame 2010: 485), a term that has little significance to Superetists. Adogame describes spiritual science movements as,

extremely heterogeneous groupings distinguished by their quest for spiritual knowledge and power, higher states of consciousness and direct religious experience, as well as the use of procedures, techniques, and practices that draw upon hidden or concealed forces in order to manipulate the course of events (Hackett 1987). Some are eclectic in nature, drawing upon Western esotericism, Eastern spirituality, and indigenous traditions. Groups primarily drawing on Western esoteric traditions are the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), the Aetherius Society, the Institute of Religious Science, and the Superet Light Mission (485-486).

Despite some similarities between Superetism and other “Western esoteric traditions,” Superetists I have worked with do not associate their religion with Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, Christian Science, the Aetherius Society, or the Institute of Religious Science. Moreover, Superetists are not on a quest for power, nor do they employ “practices that draw upon hidden or concealed forces in
order to manipulate the course of events.” More accurately, Superetists are concerned with spiritual enlightenment through the transcendence of human consciousness.

I have discussed these academic contributions partly to demonstrate what I find to be an issue of disregard and exoticism in relation to Superetism, but partly also to demonstrate how little attention is often paid to the cosmological frameworks of smaller religious movements generally, despite the fact that millions of people continue to find existential solace in them. Apart from the above-listed sources, and a few non-Superet websites (www.laacollective.org, www.shipoffools.com), any extensive, exogenous information on Superetism is largely non-existent.

**Project Outline**

In Part One, I introduce myself, explained how I became interested in the Superet Light Church, and trace how my research with the movement has progressed over the past five years. In Part Two, a short biography of Mother Trust permits a tracing of how She came to establish the Superet Light Church. In this section, key tenets of Superetism are presented before delving into a more detailed exegesis in Parts Four, Five, and Six. In Part Three, I explore the most important factor of the Superet Light religion, health and healing. In order to do so, I detail the complex and protracted concepts of health and healing as they are defined and pursued in the Superet Church. I look at the structures of health as well as the interventions the Church offers its members, to argue that healing is a long-term,
immersive process that heavily informs the experiential frameworks of Superetism. In Part Four, distinct types of Superet sacred objects and motifs are discussed to demonstrate how, as products of acheiropoiesis, such agentive materials help Superetists absorb God’s “Light Vibrations” in the physical absence of Mother Trust. I argued that the movement’s archive of religious materials was, and is still, used by Superetists as a dynamic pharmacological aid in the pursuance of physical and spiritual health. Part Five considers how Superetists use sacred materials to create new spaces as the Church expands across Latin America and west Africa. Part Five argues that sacred materials in Nigeria are solidified as “singular things” that help to legitimize Superetism while linking the country through an “artefactual network” to Mexico City and Los Angeles as part of the “Light Chain” of “Superet Brotherhood.” In Part Six, I look at the kinds of “new” religious objects Superetists have added to the archive of Superet materials since Mother Trust’s death. Specifically, Part Six focuses on how Superetists have created and combined new mnemonic materials to ensure the guidance of Mother Trust in Her physical absence. In Part Seven, I conclude by framing the archive of Superet materials as a repository of evocative objects—a term coined by Sherry Turkle—to summarize how Superetists use these materials in the pursuance of spiritual enlightenment. In Part Seven a critique of how religions

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11 Acheiropoiesis: from the Byzantine Greek, αχειροποίητα, “made without hand.” Acheiropoiesis refers to the action of creating Acheiropoïeta (plural). Acheiropoïeta traditionally refer to Christian icons said to have come into existence miraculously; either created by divinities, or created by humans and divinities together. For further discussion see Hans Belting’s La vraie image: Croire aux images?
have been historically studied in academia is developed with reference to Peter Berger’s idea of “methodological atheism” and its continued effects on religion-oriented research.
Part 1: Mother Trust and Superet Light

From Josephine Gronlund to Mother Trust

Mother Trust was born Josephine Francisca Gronlund on Thursday, April 10th, 1873 to a Polish mother and Swedish father. Mother Trust’s exact place of birth is unknown. For decades Superetists assumed Mother Trust was born in a village in Poland based on her own autobiographical accounts. However, while researching Superet lectures for an as-of-yet unpublished biography of Mother Trust, Sister Dale Leslie noticed that Mother Trust mentioned a cholera outbreak on one of her trips to the U.S. Using this information, Sister Dale looked at all the ships coming from Europe to the U.S. within a ten year window that had experienced cholera outbreaks during the voyage. Sister Dale subsequently found an ocean liner passenger list in an Ellis Island archive for a passenger ship called the S.S. Normannia, which sailed from Hamburg, Germany to New York in 1892 and had been quarantined off Ellis Island due to a Cholera outbreak. To her surprise, a nineteen year old Josephine Gronlund was listed as a passenger on the S.S. Normannia’s manifest. With this information, Sister Dale was able to track Mother Trust’s baptismal record to Berlin, Germany. The record

The following biographical information was compiled by Sister Dale Leslie for an as-of-yet unpublished biography on Mother Trust titled Mother God’s Messenger. This section would not have been possible without the years of labor that Sister Dale dedicated to tracing Mother Trust’s life through multiple international archives. Sisters Dale and Yolanda compiled the biographical information on which this section relies over a period of ten years through intense archival research across Europe, the U.S., and the Middle East. I am eternally grateful for their permission to use information.
stated Josefine Gronlund was baptized on June 3rd, 1873, but did not provide a birthplace. Mother Trust’s Los Angeles death certificate states She was born in Paris.

Very little is known of Mother Trust’s parents. According to Mother Trust’s biographical accounts, her parents were aristocratic and wealthy. Her father owned various tobacco stores across Europe. Apart from this scant information, only their death certificates have been located. Mother Trust’s mother, Bronislawa, died of consumption in Berlin, Germany, on January 26th, 1883 at the age of thirty-four. She was survived by three children, Natalie, Josephine and their infant brother who died just six weeks after his mother (Leslie 2018: 25). Adolph Gronlund, Mother Trust’s father, died of unknown causes on October 18, 1899, at the Hedwig Hospital in Berlin, when he was fifty-five years old (ibid. 30).

Josephine Gronlund acquired the last name Trust from Henry Trust, a young German inventor whom She married on August 10th, 1913 in New Jersey (ibid. 48). The couple developed a patent for a potato-peeling machine granted by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) on May 15th, 1917. Mother Trust signed this document as the primary inventor. According to the USPTO, Henry and Josephine had several patents for different kinds of food processing machinery (ibid. 49). It remains unclear whether or not the Trusts made a living from their inventions. However, in Her recorded lectures, Mother Trust mentions having a one-and-half acre farm where the couple planted potatoes to experiment and perfect the peeling mechanism. From 1913 to 1921 Mother Trust worked as a professional inventor and lecturer in and around New York.
Through such avocations, Mother Trust appears to have developed the scientific diction with which She would later describe Superetism.

Henry Trust died of unknown causes in New Jersey in February 1921 at the age of thirty-seven. Mother Trust reminisced on this time in Her life in one of Her popular lectures, “then when all was wiped away, when I lost my husband - the comforts of a nice home and car and many things - I said, ’Father Thy Will be done. Now I will go to work again and help the poor and needy’” (ibid. 50). Shortly after Henry died, Mother Trust began working for a hat maker during the day and volunteering for Jerry McAuley’s Water Street Mission at night. In 1872, McAuley established the world’s first “rescue mission” - “where the drunkard was more welcome than the sober man, the thief preferred to the honest man, the harlot favored over the beautiful woman” (Pittman 1994: 80). According to Mother Trust’s own testimony given in a recorded lecture, She healed thousands of addicted and mentally ill people seeking refuge at the Water Street Mission in the first half of the 1920s. During this time, Mother Trust moved to Manhattan’s Hotel Grenoble across from Carnegie Hall where She worked as an occasional guest lecturer on atoms, Auras, and Her discoveries of Christ’s Light in the New Testament (Leslie 2018: 52). Even though the Doctrine of Superetism is largely heteronormative, Mother Trust’s teachings markedly broke with the conventional frameworks of Christian patriarchal thought at the time (Trust 1949: 31). Mother Trust

13 Mother Trust’s going to “work again with the poor and needy” is a reference to the volunteer work that She did in New York missions after She recovered from Tuberculosis in the late 1800s (see Part Three).
reported being jeered when lecturing on the Light of atoms and the nature of God as a dual-gendered entity, particularly by male audience members. Mother Trust’s study of the Light Vibrations of Christ that she began developing in the early 1920s would eventually become the Superet Atom Aura Science (S.A.A.S.), the bedrock of Superetism. Apart from illustrating the symbols She saw emanating from Christ’s words, Mother Trust would also study the auras of stars and planets from the roof of the Flatiron Building (ibid: 50).

Mother Trust reported that a few years later, God told Her to leave New York for Los Angeles. Despite Her reticence to leave, Christ instructed Mother Trust that Her spiritual Light work was needed in Los Angeles. In Mother God’s Messenger, Sister Dale explains,

> Our Beloved Mother Trust had now experienced both sides of how life was for people who had nothing and those that had plenty. All that She has learned and earned these past years that Jesus prepared her, would go with Her now. She had passed Her Tests and was ready, holding all She learned within Her Heart.¹⁴ Jesus Christ’s Religion will now be brought out in the place God Superet has chosen as She journeys to California to fulfill Her True Destiny and Purpose for the world – holding and channeling the Superet Light to manifest to souls that are ready and waiting and for all of us in the future (Ibid. 55).

In Her autobiography, Miracle Woman’s Secret, Mother Trust recounted that Jesus Christ told Her there was a direct entrance to “The Pit” in Hollywood and that She should go to Los Angeles and “work on” this entrance by sending vibrations to “close it up.”¹⁵ Upon arriving in

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¹⁴ The line “all that She learned” refers to Jesus Christ instructing Mother Trust in Superet doctrine, including healing, blessing, Aura reading, and Vibration work.

¹⁵ In a 2017 written exchange, Brother Jaime explained to me what the Pit was. Here is his transcript: “The Pit is hell, and there are many pits, where spirits go if they have no Light and haven’t overcome the body sins. For instance, Mother Trust mentioned
L.A. in 1923, Mother Trust lectured in downtown’s “Brack Shop” tearooms and theaters, as well as at private residences across the city. In 1926, She bought a small church house from the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles for $25,000, with $1000 down. The Holy Superet Light Church She would found on the property was chartered June 10th, 1927. Later that year, Mother Trust copyrighted and distributed the first of Her Superet books, SUPERET 1926. On July 13th, 1949, the Superet Church held the grand opening of the Superet Auditorium, and on August 26, 1951, the Church opened the Superet Light Prayer Garden. At the height of its popularity in the 1940s, the Holy Superet Light Church had thousands of members across the U.S.

Mother Trust died at the Holy Superet Light Church, in Los Angeles, on October 27, 1957, at the age of eighty-four. Sister Dale explains that after a lifetime of healing the sick and absorbing their conditions, Mother Trust’s body eventually gave out.

It all began in December 1955, when Her Body was overcome with all the sicknesses She had taken over. This great load was pressed onto Her Being, beginning with a fall in this month of December and She carried the burden for a period of 22 months until Her Passing on October 27, 1957. She did not have Her Privacy any longer, but was being taken care of by others not from Her Sphere. She had to now remain in the lower spheres every day, for all those months, and

there is an entrance to the pit in Hollywood. Spirits that have not earned the Light go to different pits matching the condition of their auras when they die. Most of the spirits that come to these pits and want to do better are sent to spiritual hospitals to be helped so they can reincarnate and have another opportunity to earn the Light. More details can be found throughout the Superet Books (Bible Mystery, page 172—Revelation Chapter 11:7 and Chapter 20:3) and recorded Aura Lectures and Sermons given by the Aura Scientist, Dr. Trust.”
suffer not just in Her physical Being, but Her Senses had to endure everyday situations going on around her. She was not able to be alone with Jesus in the higher Spheres...Just before Mother Trust passed on in Her Apartment, Sister Lou placed three roses in Her Hand to protect Her Vibration from some members that wanted to touch Mother Trust (ibid: 103-104).

According to Brother Jaime, one of the most important reasons why God sent Mother Trust to Earth was so that She could “bring out Mother God to humanity.” In a recent written exchange, he explained that “Mother Trust’s Soul was divine and She was sent to this earth by Mother God as Her daughter, chosen to bring the Light again to this planet in heralding Mother God to the world. Jesus came first, and now Her. She has stated that She never has to come back to this Planet again as Her Work was complete” (pers. comm. 2019).

Superet Light Cosmology

Superetists worship a divine dyadic entity comprised of Mother God (Holy Ghost) and Father God (Divine Father), who in unison are known as The Sacred Purple Heart of Father/Mother God Superet. The doctrine of Superetism, as “brought out” by Mother Trust, is aimed at teaching individuals how to harness the Light of the Purple Heart of God, often referred to as Jesus Christ, in order to transcend the human plane of existence at death. In Her texts and lectures, Mother Trust often describes Father/Mother God through the language of electrical polarity. Mother God is the eternal female, negative electrical pole; and Father God the eternal male, positive electrical pole. Together, Father and Mother God complete the circuit of creation. During our first interview, Sister Sonia told me that Father
and Mother God are “like a battery: positive and negative. Father is the creator of the material and Mother is the creator of the immaterial. Father is the seed and Mother is the light that germinates it” (pers. comm. 2014). Superetists attribute Father/Mother God with the creation of Jesus Christ, also known as the “Radium of God’s Soul” (Mother Trust 1952:40), or Superet Light. As the “Light of the World,” and the “Word of God made flesh” (Trust 1938: 8), Christ is the intermediary between God and Mother Trust. Christ embodies the highly radioactive Superet Light of God and delivers it to Mother Trust on Earth. Jesus Christ is also the vehicle through which Superetists interact with the Divine, for He “turns prayers into radio-active Light waves enabling them to reach God” (ibid: 8)\(^{16}\).

Mother Trust was the bridge between the divine and human worlds; She received Christ-as-Light, filtered the Light, and distributed it to humanity through Her teachings, blessings, and healings. The apotheosis of Superet doctrine is the corporeal accumulation of Light Vibrations through Mother Trust’s teachings in order to create a “Light Atom” in one’s soul. The development of a “Light Atom” by internalizing Superet doctrine during one’s life permits the worshipper’s soul to transcend Earth-bound existence at death. As a means of absorbing Light Vibrations and finding closeness to God, 

\(^{16}\) Superetists explain that Mother Trust was God’s singular emissary to humanity because, as Christ before Her, She was a divinity in human form rather than a human chosen by God.
Mother Trust encouraged Her followers to “empty themselves of self” by relinquishing human traits such as sex, pride, jealousy, and greed.  

A vital part of Superetism is the Superet Atom Aura Science (S.A.A.S.). Mother Trust started the S.A.A.S. in the 1920s as a rigorous study of the vibrations emanating from Christ’s Words in the New Testament. Even as a young girl, Mother Trust noticed that Christ’s words each had a unique, living radiance in which specific teachings were coded through colors and symbols. As a young woman, Mother Trust named these emanations “Auras” and dedicated her life to studying them. At the onset of Her Aura studies, Mother Trust noticed the knowledge God revealed to Her was lacking in the revelations of other Christian denominations. According to Mother Trust, the teachings of modern Christian faiths were the result of Christianity’s metamorphosis over two millennia; while the Superet doctrine, by contrast, was Christ’s personal religion that He followed and taught His disciples during His life.

Mother Trust’s study and categorization of the knowledge projected in the auras of Christ’s words led Her to establish the S.A.A.S, the foundation upon which Superetism was built. The S.A.A.S consists of an array of physical and spiritual exercises aimed at purifying the soul in order to harness the Superet Light dispersed by the Sacred Purple Heart of God. The S.A.A.S works to rid the human Aura of “elementals,” or the residue of sin, so that Superet Light can

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17 Members can engage in sex to procreate only. However, even engaging in sex to procreate is seen as an extremely polluting activity. Ministers must refrain from all types of physical intimacy.
pass through the Aura and provide all of its physical and spiritual benefits to the individual unhindered. A person can only transcend the cycle of karmic reincarnation and attain divine existence with a clean aura and a Light Atom. If a person is negligent in pursuing the tenets of Superetism (of which the S.A.A.S. is one) “black atoms,” or “elementals,” will collect in their aura and prevent the Divine Light from entering their body. Apart from inhibiting spiritual transcendence, this negligence is also the primary cause of human sickness. ¹⁸

¹⁸ The scientific language through which Mother Trust framed Superet doctrine merits a study unto itself. One could argue that Mother Trust employed terms such as “atoms,” “elementals,” “particles,” and “vibrations” to give Superetism a particular prestige amongst other new religious movements of the time. As a woman attempting to bridge the gap between science and religion in early twentieth-century-America, Mother Trust might have needed to make Superetism “legible” through the respected cadence of the hard sciences. In recounting Her Carnegie Hall lectures in Her recorded services, Mother Trust remembered being publicly laughed at and ridiculed by the primarily male audience because “they could not understand” the importance of Her arguments. As demonstrated in Her Wonder Books, Mother Trust was fascinated by the work of Marie Curie and the burgeoning study of radioactivity in general. As a case in point, when the U.S. dropped the Atomic bombs on Japan during World War Two, Mother Trust described the incident as a terrible thing, while noting the significance of the fact that the world had finally seen the Light of God in its pure form.
**Part 2: Health and Healing in Superetism**

The eyes of vulgar wills cannot suffer the rays of divinity—Melissus of Samos.

In 1889, a sixteen-year-old Josephine Francisca Gronlund with advanced tuberculosis began a period of convalescence at the Adirondack Cottage Sanitarium in Saranac Lake, New York. Soon after her arrival, Josephine overheard her doctors discussing her condition as terminal and estimating that she had two weeks to live. That night, unable to sleep and suffering a great deal, Josephine prayed to Jesus Christ to let her die. Soon after retiring to bed, a radiant Light shone onto her chest from a corner of her room, and a resounding voice spoke, saying, "you shall live and bring out my Light teaching."

The next day Josephine was no longer coughing or feverish, and insisted that her doctors examine her again. After various tests showing no signs of the disease, the sanitarium staff declared Josephine cured, and released her a few days later.

Superetists often frame the story recounted above as the cosmogony of Superetism. As a testament to the birth of the semi-divine "Miracle Woman," the story focuses on the moment Mother Trust was reborn as the medium of God’s Light. As Superetists tell the story today, in rescuing her from the brink of death, Christ endowed Mother Trust with powerful healing abilities, heralding her as His human counterpart, and tasking her with bringing out His teachings through the doctrine of Superetism. Reborn as a semi-divine being, Josephine performed thousands of "Miracle Healings" under the guidance of Christ.
by channeling the same divine Light that saved Her. Through these healings, Josephine Gronlund would become known as the “Miracle Woman” in New York, and later “Mother Trust” to Her followers in Los Angeles.

The Tripartite Self

The continued, processual embodiment of Superet doctrine is fundamental to healing, for states of physical and spiritual health are both hard to attain and capriciously impermanent for human beings. Healing in Superetism means constantly striving to mitigate one’s will, while existing in a highly spiritually polluting environment. This “environment,” referred to by Superetists as the “human condition of existence” (often abbreviated to the “human condition”), comprises planet Earth, which Superetists understand as being “exceptionally spiritually low”, and the biological human body, which is easily and repeatedly corrupted by base “animal desires” and temptations. Mother Trust taught that humans must reincarnate through thousands of realms of existence before attaining a state of unanimity with God. Of these karmic realms, Earth is the lowest realm before the Pit, for Earth is the only planet to have murdered Jesus Christ.

During early interviews, ministers constantly reminded me that keeping one’s Light Atom free of elementals is extremely difficult because of how insidiously the human condition dictates much of our lives as human beings. The human condition constructs humanity’s existence by informing our wants and desires. Humans are, therefore, trapped on this planet and forced to continuously reincarnate on Earth until they find the Light of God through Superetism. Mother Trust
taught Her followers that She had brought them the Doctrine of Superetism to help them individually develop the “Light Atom” (or “Light Spark”) that would help them reincarnate to a higher spiritual plane at death. Souls that have not developed a Light Atom during their time on Earth continuously reincarnate until they become Superetists, at which point they develop a Light Atom and reincarnate on a spiritually higher plane. The cycle through which Superetists “pay their karmic debts” is known as the “Law of Compensation.” According to Brother Jaime, the Law of Compensation is part of God’s plan to ensure that all humans reach complete immersion with the Superet Light of God in their own time. Even though Superetism is a missionary religion, Superetists contend that those who are drawn to the movement, and stay in it, have been chosen by God based on their advanced spiritual development as attained through multiple cycles of karmic reincarnation. Therefore, developing a Light Atom by strictly adhering to Mother Trust’s teachings is the apotheosis of Superetism.

The divine “domain of person” (Csordas 1994: 23) in Superetism exists in three distinct categories; Superet Light emitter (Father/Mother God), Superet Light (Jesus Christ), and Superet Light receiver (humanity). Mother Trust acts as the medium through which Light Vibration (the Superet Light of God) reaches humanity from Father/Mother God. Father/Mother God, Jesus Christ, and Mother Trust comprise the Superet pantheon. The human domain of person is a complex, concentric system made up of the physical body, the spirit, and the Soul. For convenience, I have termed this system the “tripartite-self.” The physical body is the vessel of the spirit and
constitutes the system of cells, tissues, and organs that make-up the biological human body. The spirit carries one’s past karma and gives life to the body. The spirit is also responsible for creating and maintaining the human Aura, which is an extension of the spirit that contours the human body. The soul is the most sacred part of the human organism. As, “the image of God in us,” the soul becomes the Light Atom when one “lives in obedience to the Superet Laws.” According to Brother Jaime, the Light Atom is the “passport to leave this Earth sphere,” it lives on after physical death and is either reincarnated into a higher vibrational existence or returned to planet Earth by God Superet. All three of these elements work in tandem within the human body (pers. comm. 2015).

The Purple Heart of father/Mother God sends Light Vibrations to Earth through their son Jesus Christ to help humans transcend terrestrial existence. Commonly referred to as the “Radium of God,” Superetists understand Jesus Christ to be the physical incarnation of the “Purple Light of God,” or “Light Vibration.” In Her physical form, Mother Trust acted as humanity’s receptor for Superet Light. Mother Trust received Light Vibrations from Father/Mother God, filtered them so as to be safe for humanity, and transmitted them to humans through Her healings and teachings. As the last remnants of Mother Trust’s physical life on Earth, and as powerful receptors of God’s Light, Mother Trust’s, books, artwork, Miracle Pictures, and personal belongings have been crucial to contemporary Superetists in preserving the Superet religion since Her death in 1957.
Maintaining physical and spiritual health in Superetism is a lifelong process of purging polluting entities known as “black atoms” or “elementals” from one’s tripartite-self. Elementals are created in all sections of the tripartite-self when an individual sins by “putting their will before God’s.” Superetists most often characterize the human will as inherently hedonistic, illustrating its flaws through such characteristics as vanity, lust, jealousy, hatred, greed, and resentment. When enough elementals have collected in the human body, pathologies begin to manifest. Light Vibrations, on the other hand, are attracted through daily prayer, constant communion with religious materials, and strict abstinence from pleasure-driven, “self-serving” attitudes such as lust, wrath, greed, and envy. “Living in Light Vibration” by strictly adhering to Superet Laws brings the supplicant closer to God by eradicating elementals in the individual’s aura and facilitating the entry of Light into their body. According to Brother Jaime, “[The Superet Laws tell us] how to change each sense into Light Vibrations [with] Jesus’ teaching, which must be applied to bring Light to your Soul by keeping yourself in obedience to these Laws. The spirit now has to bring forth, through the Superet Light Science Laws, its Light” (Flores: 2019).

A failure to stay in the Light of God results in a recalcitrant accumulation of elementals that often causes physical health issues in this lifetime, and spiritual ones that linger into the next. Consequently, a Superetist’s quality of life is predicated on how well one mitigates the effects of past-life actions by living in accordance
with Superet Laws. Superetists who may be chronically ill, or otherwise experiencing none of the “immediate” physical and spiritual changes promised to them by the Church, argue that they are paying off infractions from past lives. Past-life infractions are often conceived as remnant elementals or “blockages” that must be worked off in this lifetime through Superet doctrine to allow the Light of God to enter one’s body and heal the individual. Humans who have lived “in obeisance to flesh desires,” and have, as a result, accumulated a deleterious number of elementals over multiple lifetimes, may reincarnate as sick Souls in the Pit.

Effective healing in Superetism, then, is predicated on how receptive a Superetist makes their body to the healing Light Vibrations of God. Mother Trust designed Superetism as a “science” for “healing out of” a desire and temptation-centered lifestyles through complete immersion in doctrinal practice. This process of transformation is undertaken in earnest before a member has become baptized through the “12 Lesson Home Course.” The “12 Lesson Home Course” engenders a powerful spiritual and corporeal modification in the student: a process that embodies the idea that “the self is dismantled in the face of the divine other and reconstituted by the experience of conversion” (Morgan 1998: 77). The Course introduces the initiate to the Superet Laws and prepares them to become a “Light Bearer” through the effective reception of Light Vibrations. The 12 Lesson Home Course is an in-depth, twelve-week study that focuses on the primary tenets of Superet Doctrine and the Superet Atom Aura Science.
Before beginning the course, the student must read the “Light Library,” which consists of ten “Wonder Books” written by Mother Trust to prepare the student’s body for the lessons they will receive in the coming twelve weeks. During the course, students are instructed for an hour a week and tested on what they have learned from the Light Library to ensure that they have correctly understood Mother Trust’s teachings and are capable of applying them in their everyday lives. After completing the “12 Lesson Home Course,” one becomes an “Aura Instructor.” The baptized Aura Instructor must read three more “Ministry Books” in order to petition to become a Superet minister. In order to take the ministry course, the Aura Instructor must live in accordance with Superet tenets of physical and spiritual purity for one year. Sexual abstinence is of particular importance during this time. Because one cannot be baptized before the completion of this course, the 12 Lesson Home Course instructs the initiate in both the basic operating principles of the Church, and what will be required of them as an active member of the Church. Once people have completed the course and want to become members of the Church, they are baptized at their local branch and declared “Light Bearers.”

The Aura

At the age of four, Mother Trust began noticing “ethereal brilliances” emanating from every person, animal, and object She encountered. These vibrating patterns of light, that She later named “Auras,” differed greatly in “color, consistency, and intensity” depending on the object emitting them. In humans, for example, the
quality appeared as a series of large ovoid rings that contoured the individual’s body. Mother Trust described these rings as often having "tiny black ink spots" (elementals) at their centers and large dark or multicolored streams of light pouring from them. In some cases, these streams were so long as to “trail behind people for entire city blocks” (Mother Trust 1949: 22). In Her early twenties, Mother Trust developed a methodological study aimed at categorizing and interpreting the Auras She perceived. Mother Trust named this study the Superet Atom Aura Science (S.A.A.S.). A major incentive of this endeavor, and a foundation of the Superet Religion, was Mother Trust’s fascination with the particularly complex Auras emanating from the words of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Through the S.A.A.S Mother Trust proclaimed that there are two types of Auras, the mechanistic or “natural” Aura that all things in the universe possess, and the divine, “Spiritual” Aura that only humans possess. Mother Trust credited the creation of the “natural” Aura to Father God and the “Spiritual” Aura to Mother God. In this sense, Father/Mother God comprise the eternal “Dynamo” (Trust 1952: 30) responsible for the creation of the material and the spiritual aspects of the universe.

A central tenet of the S.A.A.S. states that every being and object in the Universe has a natural Aura because all matter is created by Father God. In contrast, only humans have a Spiritual Aura, as endowed by Mother Trust. Regarding the natural Aura, Mother Trust wrote,

> It holds a visible and an invisible light. It is a subtle invisible emanation from a substance such as the aroma of flowers or the odor of blood, or emanating from an
electrified body and forming a mass surrounding it called motion of the air caused by electric repulsion as seen when the air near a charged metallic point is set in motion - a sensation as of a light vapor or cold air rising from the trunk or limbs toward the head, which is then called an aura or a halo light which is seen on the Pictures of Jesus Christ.

We do not consider the aura of things or the human aura as a phenomenon or miracle - for this would also be said of forms and features - because the aura is just as much a part of the person as the face is. Let us take the Aurora Borealis as a practical proof of the aura of this planet. We can then easily, by deduction, arrive at the conclusion that where there is a storage of magnetism, there must be an aura emanating from it; so we humans have an outer and an inner aura emanating from us.

We know that all things that possess magnetism have an aura, and nothing can have magnetism without an atom in atmosphere outside and inside in the human forms, animals and living things. Most things have very little magnetism, so the aura of them is very slight - hardly worth noticing (Mother Trust 1952: 2-3).

In contrast, Mother Trust explained that the Human Aura was made of "an electrical atmosphere of the physical, mental and spiritual vibrations produced by the motions and energy...though the Twelve Senses" (Trust 1938: 41). The Human Aura, as Mother Trust saw it, is the "garment" of the human soul. She wrote extensively on the human Aura during Her lifetime, describing it as more dynamic in appearance and complex in shape than the natural aura due to the fact that it reflects the eternal struggle of the Divine and the animal within the human body.

Now, the Outer Aura shows the mental, physical, and spiritual, but the Inner Aura is the Light of the living soul. Many souls are not born yet in human bodies, but are only animal souls. But so many think they are living souls because of the action of their spiritual ego. Those people are self-deceiving by their mental construction and interpretation of their spiritual development. This is revealed in their Auras. The colors show in yellow, brown, grey, intermingled with red and green (Trust 1938: 40).
Mother Trust held that the Divine aspect present in the human Aura is a projection of the “Light Atom” or “Spark of God” instilled in all humans by Mother God. As the living projection of a person’s habits and desires, the human Aura is as unique to each individual as a fingerprint. Mother Trust studied the vibrancy and clarity of the Light Atom in the Auras of those She treated as a means of prognosticating and diagnosing their physical and spiritual ills. She taught that a clean human Aura, reflecting the “openness” of a person to God’s Light Vibrations, should resemble a rainbow in form and consistency with the Light Atom clearly visible and unobstructed by elementals.

Mother Trust used Light Vibrations to heal Her patients by acting as a medium between Father/Mother God and humanity. In his book, The Energy Healing Experiments, author Gary Schwartz demonstrates that practitioners of Johrei, Reiki, Christian Science, and Sufi healing “believe they are not generating the energy per se but rather they are serving as a receiver, channel, or antenna for the energy” (Schwartz 2008: 129, emphasis in original). Similar to practitioners of Johrei, Reiki, Christian Science, and Sufi healing, Superetists contend that healing energy (Light Vibrations) is intelligent, universal, and generated by an eternal “Source;” and that Mother Trust was thus able to channel this energy as a means of healing. Since Her passing in 1957, Superet healing has changed, placing more responsibility on the individual Superetist to remain receptive to the Light of God by ensuring, through the methodical recitation of prayers and interaction with sacred objects, that their Auras are not overtaken by elementals.
A constant reflexivity as to the condition of one’s Aura is particularly crucial to Superet healing today.

As a chrysalis-like membrane that contours the human body, the Aura is the first point of contact between human beings and the Superet Light of God. If one’s Aura is “clouded” with elementals, the Light of God will not be able to fully penetrate the “sick” Aura and enter the person’s body, thereby starving the soul of Superet Light. Maintaining a healthy Aura is particularly significant to Superetists because Mother Trust taught that the human Aura is not simply a projection of “the treasure you have inside you,” or a “garment” that must be nourished for protection from the outside world; but a blueprint of one’s life that will “read” by the Divine at one’s death (Trust 1938:4). As such, She warned, “on the Judgement day we do not talk, but our Aura around the soul—its only garment—spiritually speaks...Talk is nothing for hereafter, but only facts” (Mother Trust 1952: 90). The number of elementals in an individual’s Aura at the time of death determines whether that person will go to the Pit to then reincarnate on Earth once more, or leave this planet for one of a higher spiritual vibration (ibid. 23).

The Twelve Senses

During one of our first interviews, Brother Jaime said Mother Trust revealed that God equipped humans with twelve, rather than five, senses.

Jesus spoke of the twelve tribes of Israel, but Mother Trust discovered that what he was referring to were actually the Twelve Senses that every human being has.
These senses create either light or darkness...Mother Trust’s teachings help us clean out the darkness from our Senses that we have created not just in this lifetime but in past incarnations—it is a teaching of soul purification, a system for studying the self and of self-discovery (pers. comm. 2015).

The Twelve Senses are divided into four groups that connect the concentric sections of the tripartite self. These groups are, the “physical” senses: eyes, ears, nose, mouth, heart, and sex; the “mental” senses: mind and will; the “spiritual” senses: spirit and aura; and the “soul” senses: soul and soul heart-consciousness. Even though each Sense performs specific functions on an individual level, the Twelve Senses should ideally work in conjunction with one another to foster and maintain Light Vibrations in the tripartite-self. Most pathologies are thought to result from the malfunction or corruption of an individual Sense based on the particular sin a person has committed. Mother Trust explained in *Light of the World*,

> Some of us ask, ‘How do we know that God loves us, going through so much suffering and tribulation?’ Remember, we are not innocent, we have made our suffering. God has given us five physical proofs...the five senses and seven physical senses but you are not aware that they are from God as you only use them to serve self. These are God’s physical and spiritual gifts to you, but by using them selfishly you do not acknowledge the Giver. You are using them only at a Small proportion of their power” (Trust 1938: 9).

Superetists contend that pathologies that develop in the eyes and mouth are often attributed to conscious or unconscious jealousy because one sees the person of whom one is jealous and speaks badly of them. Depending on an individual’s disposition, and how committed they are to being a Light Bearer, the individual functions of the Twelve
Senses either contribute to a clear body and spirit by working in tandem obedience to God, or to the blooming of elementals by operating separately. As such, Superetists have often described the movement’s doctrine as a means of bringing the Twelve Senses “into balance,” so they may more effectively work to gain Light Vibrations. Because an independent Sense can become corrupted by self-centered thought or action (creating a specific strain of elemental), Superetists are taught to understand how their Twelve Senses function and what kind of thoughts or actions are likely to their Senses to malfunction.

As Light Bearers, Church members work to avoid spiritual and physical sicknesses by keeping their Twelve Senses clear of elementals through an array of ritual exercises. In order to mitigate the buildup of elementals, Ministers train members in the regular cleansing of their Twelve Senses through an array of exercises such as the completion of the Aura Chart (see below), and the recitation of daily prayers. After a member has developed a personal sensitivity to how their Twelve Senses react to conscious and unconscious thoughts and actions through the regular completion of the Aura Chart, they s/he to recognize how to attract and nurture positive spiritual qualities, while avoiding and neutralizing negative ones.

The “Spark of God” or “Light Atom” resides in the Soul Sense, making it the most important of the Twelve Senses. The existence of this sacred Spark in the human body is what simultaneously defines us as human (animals and objects do not have it), while bonding us with the Divine. The most crucial tenet of Superetism is ensuring that nothing interferes with the Light connection between the individual's
Soul Sense and the Light from the Superet Purple Heart of God. Because planet Earth is understood extremely “spiritually low” and the human body as inherently profane, any “clouding” of the Soul Sense with elementals risks severing the fragile “Light Cord” connecting God and the human body. According to Superet doctrine, non-Superetists are caught in a cycle of reincarnation because they continue (often inadvertently) to sever the Light Cord binding their Souls to God. Brother Jaime elaborated on the role of the Soul Sense in maintaining a connection to God, “Mother Trust taught Her congregation that one must be particularly attentive to the Soul Sense as this Sense is in most cases covered with ‘black clouds’ [elementals], which must be constantly removed if one wishes to avoid misfortune and attain spiritual health” (pers. comm. 2016). If the Soul Sense is kept clean through the regular completion of the Aura Chart, Light can flow unimpaired into the Superetist, strengthening the Light Cord and developing the Light Atom.

Because the tripartite-self is constituted of the Twelve Senses, every decision a Superetist makes effects and is affected by the Twelve Senses. If, for example, a person routinely engages in sex, drinking, or drugs (deemed as hedonistic, “flesh-oriented” behavior by Superetists), the Senses through which these behaviors are enacted will become cluttered with elementals, leading to the potential development of physical pathologies. A cognizance of how one is misusing of the Twelve Senses, helps to meaningfully explain seemingly arbitrary acts of misfortune or bad health throughout one’s life. One minister in Los Angeles asserted that, “most of us, throughout our
lives, have created dark atoms, which brings us what many call bad
luck or sickness, poverty and other material or spiritual hardships”
(pers. comm., 2015). Superetists begin the healing process by making
the Senses “aware of each of other” in developing the Light Atom,
The start [to healing] is made with the heart to be willing; and the feeling travels to the mind and builds an Atom with that feeling. And the mind begins to unite and opens a way to the will, eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and the senses’ center, to those feelings’ energy with light vibrations. Willingness starts. You begin to feel happiness. All twelve senses must be made to vibrate in tandem and harmony with each other in order to earn light; “you cannot say ‘my house is clean’ when only one room is clean (Mother Trust 1951: 39).
The most effective way in which to recognize and care for one’s Twelve Senses is through a vital healing practice called the Aura Chart.

The Aura Chart

*Strength comes as you repent*—Brother Jaime Flores, Superet Minister.
The Aura Chart is a practical form of pronominal structure based on the deeply personal communion between Superetist and God. As Brother Jaime explained, “there is no other way to clean out the Senses but through confession, repentance, and remorse. Making of the Aura Chart helps you become aware of what is within your Aura” (pers. comm. 2016). One of the Aura Chart’s most important remedial aspects lies in its ability to familiarize the supplicant with their Aura. Since the human Aura is the literal projection of the condition of a person’s Twelve Senses (and, hence, their tripartite-self) understanding one’s Aura, and tracking its development through the Aura Chart is one of the most important domains of healing in
Superetism. By revealing the type of elementals one has built up in a given period, the Aura Chart works as a technological intervention allowing for the Superetists to “come out of the dark conditions they have created” (Mother Trust 1949: 61) by recognizing and eliminating the specific elementals they have generated in a given period of time. As such, the completion of the Aura Chart is both apotropaic and deeply reflexive. On one of my visits to the Mexico City branch, Brother Jaime explained to me that Mother Trust designed the Aura Chart as “the secret key to finding how to change base human atoms into Light Atoms in order to spiritualize the Aura.” As a form of healing, this “spiritualization” creates “the opportunity to connect our Auras to Jesus Christ’s Aura”—an important first step in developing a Light Atom (pers. comm. 2018).

The Aura Chart is an extremely private exercise designed to make a person completing the Chart conscious of the elementals s/he is creating, and where in the body these elementals are manifesting. The Aura Chart encourages the Superetist to reflect on the nature of their actions and thoughts during the period since completing their last Chart. The Aura Chart should be completed at minimum once a month in order for a baptized Superetist to take communion, but the majority of members will make an Aura Chart whenever they feel a need of proximity with God, during periods of tribulation, or when they have committed a particularly egregious sin.

Completion of the Aura Chart is as follows. Superetists write their infractions on a sheet of white paper in black ink. While reflecting on their infractions during that month, the supplicant says
a prayer while looking at an image of Christ upon which the Twelve Senses have been clearly demarcated. Once the infractions have been recalled, pondered, and inscribed, the suppliant burns the piece of paper while reciting a special prayer at a specific site on the Church compound or at their homes. After burning the paper, the month’s elementals are said to have been effectively removed from the suppliant’s Aura and Twelve Senses, allowing the Light of God to flow more freely into the Superetist. Incidentally, the process of creating and destroying the Aura Chart—of recognizing, atoning for, and moving beyond one’s sins—is the most powerful transmission point between God and Superetist. The completing of the Aura Chart is the “locus of efficacy” (Csordas 1994: 3), or specific instant in which healing occurs.

The concept of free will plays an important role in relation to the pollution of the Twelve Senses in the indulgence of personal “animalistic” pleasures. Actions and thoughts unrelated to the pursuit of soul consciousness such as sex, violence, jealousy, vanity, and hatred might not create misfortune or sickness, but guarantee that the offender will return to this planet after death to begin the healing process anew. Superetists, some of whom are medical practitioners themselves, have often told me that if a sick person is cured by a doctor or healer, the disease is likely to return because the “root” of the illness (the unchecked massing of elementals in the ailing person’s Twelve Senses) must be purged through the Aura Chart. Mother Trust designed the Aura Chart in communion with Christ to help the Superetist understand what each of the Twelve Senses is; what their
individual functions are; how they work in conjunction with each other; and how they react to the outside world to create negative elementals or positive Light Vibrations.

Habitual use of the Aura Chart is important to keeping one’s Senses clear of elementals because “prayers alone will not clean your sins” (Nigerian Minister, pers. comm. 2016). The Aura Chart is not only the most efficacious way to neutralize elementals; it also helps practitioners understand how to prevent polluting their Twelve Senses altogether. In this vein, a Superetist does not primarily complete their Aura Chart to avoid the consequences of a particular infraction of sin, but instead to understand how and why they may have committed the infraction in the first place.

The Aura Chart is, therefore, a deeply reflexive exercise of doctrinal embodiment that helps the supplicant become aware of how their thoughts and actions are contributing to their present Aural condition. In Her popular book Heal Thyself, Mother Trust explains that “to ‘heal thyself’ means: start with the Aura facts to know thyself first within. Not just your sickness, but what makes it, as it will vanish if you follow” (Mother Trust 1952: 17). In other words, the Aura Chart helps Superetists understand their bodies and impulses, further helping them to recognize and curtail certain behaviors that provoke the build-up of elementals. Unlike Catholic confession, the Aura Chart does not serve to simply clear a person of the consequences of sin. Instead, the Aura Chart is a tool that continuously helps Superetists understand themselves and how to navigate the human condition in such a way as to curtail the accumulation of elementals.
As such, the Aura Chart is simultaneously an apparatus that helps one clean their tripartite-self, and an interactive corporeal framework designed to guide adherents towards a closer relationship with God.

**Miracle Encounters and Public Testimonials**

Superet “Miracle Encounters” are characterized by the olfactory, visual, sonic, and extra-sensory manifestation of either benevolent being such as Father/Mother God, Mother Trust, Jesus Christ, and/or nefarious beings such as elementals and temptation given physical form. Akin to Rudolph Otto’s description of a supplicant’s stupor before the numinous “Wholly Other” (Otto 1923: 27), Miracle Encounters usually occur spontaneously in the form of vivid dreams, visions, smells, and sounds that may be jarring and disorienting, but which are most often described as “comforting” and “inspirational.” Almost every long-standing Superetist with whom I have spoken in the U.S., Mexico, and Nigeria has experienced multiple extra-sensory revelations of Divine origin. Ultimately, Miracle Encounters are testament that Superetists are becoming conscious of the positive or negative forces that surround them for the first time. This burgeoning ability is indisputable proof that one has satisfactorily embodied the Superet Laws, and as a result, has begun to heal “out of” the human condition.

Superetists often relate these experiences to their congregation as a “testimonial.” The public recounting of testimonials usually takes place in the church Auditorium on Tuesday nights at the SLC, and Thursday nights in other branches, when Superetist congregations all over the world convene to hear ministers recite Mother Trust’s
lectures as part of the S.A.A.S. lectures. Upon concluding the lecture, the presiding ministers ask the congregation if anyone would like to offer a testimonial for the week. In cases when testimonials are volunteered, these “healing transmissions” reveal interesting attributes about the implicit function of Superet religious experiences. There are noteworthy similarities, for example, between Superet Miracle Encounters and what William James famously delineated as “mystical experiences.” During his renowned Gifford Lectures of 1901–1902, James proposed “the mystical group” as a framework to better articulate what constitutes a religious or mystical experience. In “Lectures XVI and XVII,” James introduced the mystical group as

...four marks which, when an experience has them, may justify us in calling it mystical for the purpose of the present lectures...1. Ineffability... 2. Noetic Quality... 3. Transiency... 4. Passivity...These four characteristics are sufficient to mark out a group of states of consciousness peculiar enough to deserve a special name and to call for careful study. Let it then be called the mystical group (James 1982: 206–207).

Using the “mystical group” as a point of reference, I contend that, as “guiding revelations” in Superet healing, Miracle Encounters are also ineffable, noetic, transient, and pacifying.

Miracle Encounters are inherently ineffable. When recounted as testimonies, Miracle Encounters are often described through elaborate metaphors heavily gilded with what Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mills described as a “vocabulary of motives,” a coded language of specialized ritual meaning, to more easily convey the affective experience of the Divine manifest (quoted in Csordas 1994: 22). At times, members wept as they relived their experiences, reinforcing
James’ argument that mystical experiences are “more like states of feeling than like states of intellect” (James 1982: 206). These encounters are at times described as an affront to the senses, causing a deeply emotional state of existential contemplation not easily put into words. Much like James’ mystical experiences, Superet Miracle Encounters are also described as frustratingly transient or fleeting. These states occur and end suddenly, and “once faded, their quality can but imperfectly be reproduced in memory” (ibid: 207). However, the fundamental characteristics of the encounter are often profound and indelible, carried with the supplicant throughout his or Her lifetime as a guiding reference or token of contingency.

As James illustrates, “passivity” during the mystical experience describes a sudden abeyance or suppression of the supplicant’s will in the presence of the Numinous. Superetists experiencing a particularly powerful encounter have described feeling like a will-less, empty vessel, as well as being “grasped and held by a superior power” as per James’ description. The fleeting state of ego-less communion is the ideal-self realized in Superetism—the individual healed of the human condition and absorbed into the Light of God. Firsthand experience of “passivity,” as such, is fundamental for the revelatory quality through which knowledge is bestowed to the worshipper. Superetists learns through the noetic quality of the numinous experience where they stand as Light Bearers in reference to their animal bodies, their past lives, and their lurking unconscious desires. The noetic quality of the Miracle Encounter reveals all. As James elucidates,
Although so similar to states of feeling, mystical states seem to those who experience them to be also states of knowledge. They are states of insight into depths of truth unplumbed by the discursive intellect. They are illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance, all inarticulate though they remain; and as a rule they carry with them a curious sense of authority for after-time (ibid. 206).

The Miracle Encounter is deeply sought after by Superetists because it offers unrestricted knowledge of the idealized self and the Divine simultaneously. For Superetists with whom I have spoken, Miracle Encounters are important to both new and senior members. In having these Encounters for the first time, the new Superetist recognizes that through their diligence, their healing has begun. Miracle Encounters also offer senior Superetists unfettered access to themselves and to the Divine, giving them insight into their own development, and allowing them to heal more effectively. Ultimately, as “therapeutic imagery” Miracle Encounters constitute the “experiential resolution of a problem” (Csordas 1994: 75). Members interpret these experiences as points of reference in the complex process of Superet healing, and as such, confirm that healing is taking place. Miraculous Encounters are both “dispositions and tools” (Csordas 1994: 74) that allow the receiver to take direct action in mitigating their physical and spiritual wellbeing. The contents of a Miracle Encounter—whether positive as when hearing Mother Trust’s voice and smelling Her rose perfume while cleaning Her apartment, or negative, as expressed in terrifying visions of elementals manifest as large and aggressive black felines—guide the individual to either continue progressing as they are, or to change their lifestyles. In
other words, the revelatory nature of Miracle Encounters specifies exactly what aspect an individual should focus on in order to heal more effectively.

The collective act of sharing Miracle Stories itself constitutes a type of peer-to-peer healing. As an acknowledgement of the existence and power of God, publicly orated testimonies function as “transmission” (Otto 1923: 62) of numinous presence that awakens the Divine in the spirit of those present. As such, Miraculous Encounters have acquired significant importance within Superetism since Mother Trust’s passing. When She headed the Church, She would often heal Her followers by absorbing the elementals from their bodies into Her own. At other times, Mother Trust healed Her followers by reading their Auras and advising them on what actions to take based on what their Auras revealed. Today, in the absence of Mother Trust’s physical guidance, it has become considerably harder to know if one is healing effectively. Developing an affinity for perceiving divine signs on an individual level is, therefore, especially important for members today.

As discussed previously, Superetists understand their spiritual development through the revelations of their Aura Chart and the frequency and substance of miraculous encounters. The regular and timely completion of one’s Aura Chart creates a rationalizing paradigm that categorizes miraculous experiences into a guiding taxonomy. This taxonomy, in turn, contextualizes numinous revelations as primary indicators of one’s spiritual progress. Superetists often recount Miracle Encounters publicly as testimonials, confirming that the
Superet worldview is cemented and “operational” in the individual practitioner giving the testimonial. While Thomas Csordas prioritizes the human imagination as the primary agent in facilitating and navigating American Catholic charismatic healing, Superetists contend that the “ritual imagery” of divine healing is not a result of human cognitive mechanics, but an independent force benevolently intervening in the lived experience of the worshipper.

Miracle Encounters and their public recounting as testimonies provide a referential model that, by articulating the dynamics of the tripartite-self in its most idealized form (in absolute noesis with the God), meaningfully orient members within Superet cosmology. Subsequently, the “grounding” resulting from Miracle Encounters engenders “an explicit repertoire of empowerment” (Csordas 1994: 35) through which an individual finds the agency to embody Superet doctrine and heal themselves of elemental conditions.

Superet healing concerns an actively maintained state of grace engendered by the relinquishing of personal wants and desires, rather than a discrete system of ills and remedies in an allopathic sense. In her book, Ritual Healing in Suburban America, anthropologist Meredith McGuire describes “health” as an idealization of a kind of self, and “healing” as a part of the process by which “growth towards that ideal is achieved” (McGuire 1988: 244). In light of this definition, Superetists engage healing as a process through which the ideal self can be achieved. Accordingly, Superet healing creates of the human body an increasingly refined receptive technology that can more easily and intuitively “pick-up” Divine curative energy known as Light
Vibrations. Because healing is such a fundamental component of Superetism, members do not necessarily engage these religious healing modalities only when they become physically ill. For example, a Superetist’s day is usually segmented by regular and standardized prayer and constant communion with sacred objects informed through a set of abstinences designed to keep the tripartite-self clean. When a Superetist becomes physically ill, s/he will seek biomedical care.

Healing is the most fundamental aspect of Superetism because it effectuates the process through which a person embodies the Church’s doctrine, and breaks away from the constraints of the “human condition.” As one Superetist explained to me in Calabar, Nigeria, “life is a constant struggle against human nature” (pers. comm. 2017). Effective healing in Superetism requires a total surrender of one’s will to God. Healing grants supplicants the agency to physically and spiritually transform themselves in order to transcend this spiritually-low planet at death to fuse with the Superet Light of God. The exercises and materials Mother Trust created to help instruct her followers have gained particular prominence since extra-sensory or transcendental experiences are reportedly less frequent amongst contemporary Superetists than they were among first-generation members.

Throughout Her lifetime, Mother Trust often re-told the story of how She was healed by Christ that fateful night in 1893 not simply as a means of legitimizing the Superet movement, but also as a means of presenting an eminent example of what healing should resemble in Superetism. Through Her own direct experience with the divine, Mother
Trust presented Her followers an idealized example of what Superet healing is, and encouraged Her followers to internalize Her recounting of this experience by keeping the story with them as a guiding reference in their own healing. Once internalized by members, this story becomes an instructional act of healing, and as such is often recounted today in times of need. As above discussed, Superet healing is a long-term process of reflexive bodily alteration that promotes an extra-sensory affinity towards sacred phenomena. The goal of Superetism, as a religious doctrine, is to engender in its practitioners a negation of personal wants and desires so they may transcend their “human condition” towards complete spiritual unification with God.

Healing in the context of Superetism should be understood as synonymous with the embodiment of Superet praxis by baptized members. Superetists seek to transcend their “human condition” to attain what William James refers to as “the great mystic achievement,” a state in which “we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness” (James 1982: 227). In Superet healing the supplicant’s communion with the sacred is not simply one element of the therapeutic process; this communion is the therapeutic process. As such, Superetists do not frame the locus of therapeutic efficacy in the self but in an ever-fluctuating relationship between the self and God through what David Morgan has described as a “projection away from personal interest in a self-eclipsing gaze upon the effulgence of deity” (Morgan 1998: 77). The therapeutic negation of personal will is stabilized and regimented through such corporeal activities as the
Aura Chart, and daytime and evening prayers. Healing represents the fundment of Superet doctrine by establishing a direct route of access between the supplicant and God.

In the next section, healing is shown to be especially important in regard to the efficacy of the archive of Superet sacred objects. In Superetism, the sacred object is truly effective only when the person interacting with it has undergone personal change through baptism and adherence to the Superet Laws. In order to absorb the Light Vibrations emitted the Church’s sacred objects, the devotee must be in a constant state of preparedness by living according to the tenets of Superetism as delineated above.
Part 3: Sacred Objects and Church Décor as Vessels of Superet Light

The truly 'mysterious' object is beyond our apprehension and comprehension, not only because our knowledge has certain irremovable limits, but because in it we come upon something inherently 'wholly other,' whose kind and character are incommensurable with our own, and before which we therefore recoil in a wonder that strikes us chill and numb—(Rudolf Otto 1958: 28).

Naturally, I understood that people could not understand my work. It was not of this world—of any man-beliefs or man’s science and education. This was Light from Jesus proving his God’s Light with His words...and only through His Light Words, His Vibration Language which I studied, I learned and found the Vibration Alphabets which I teach in all my Superet books to my students—Mother Trust.

Mother Trust created and collected a vast corpus of religious material to help Her followers maintain a connection with the Light of God as they healed through Superet doctrine. As tools of spiritual enlightenment, Superet sacred materials create closeness to God through indexical symbols and thaumaturgical—that is, miracle-working—devotional aids that radiate Light Vibrations to members who live according to the Superet Laws. Constrained in four parts, these objects consist of thirty-one books written by Mother Trust delineating the central tenets and operating principles of the Superet movement; hundreds of charts, diagrams, drawings, collages, paintings, costumes, sculptures, codes, motifs, and symbols created and collected by Mother Trust to present and transmit Superet doctrine to Her followers; dozens of prints and paintings of Christ collected by Mother Trust to fill Superet churches with His Vibrations; twenty-one Superet Miracle Pictures, consisting of a series of black and white photographs of Mother Trust in which a “Christ manifestation” is present; and finally, Mother Trust’s personal belongings and apartment that
Superetists have venerated as relics since Mother Trust’s passing in 1957.

Today, the compendium of Superet materials functions as, (1) a canonical body of work that performs Mother Trust in the absence of a religious leader; (2) a lightning-rod that mediates Light Vibrations between divine and human domains, bringing healing energy to Earth; (3) a decorative indexical emblem, which demarcates sacred Superet space; and (4) the primary tool of doctrinal instruction through which new members are introduced to the Superet Laws.

Mother Trust was sent to this planet by Father/Mother God to elevate the spiritual consciousness of humanity. Much of the power inherent to Superet sacred material results from the fact that these are acheiropoieta: materials “created by an artist’s hand, at least in part, but finished by divine intervention” (Roberts and Roberts 2016: 74). Not only was Mother Trust “not of this world,” She created all of Her instructional tools while in communion with Jesus Christ. Members, therefore, consider these materials to be authoritative not simply because they belonged to Mother Trust, but because they were created by a semi-divine being receiving divine inspiration. These materials are not simply cultural constructs, they are of divine provenance, and as such are imbued with eternal sacred power.

Superet objects are not iconographic in the traditional sense of the term; they do not “stand-in” for the divine agent, but are instead literal extensions of God. Therefore, I find the term “indexical icon” to be useful when referring to the materials that Mother Trust worked through. In accordance with Superet terminology, I have reserved the
term “relic” for Mother Trust’s personal belongings, which since Her death, have become sacred by default of having been in close personal contact with Her. These relics are various, including, amongst other things, the taps from Her apartment, a box of metal Christ figures that Mother Trust took off their crosses, the red roses Mother Trust held while dying, and hair from Mother Trust’s brush.

In the void that Mother Trust’s passing created, Superet sacred materials have assumed an authority otherwise reserved for Mother Trust herself. Many of these materials were sacred when Mother Trust was alive, and She often used them to perform healings and other miracles. However, the religious materials that Mother Trust left behind have physically replaced their owner/creator in Her absence, and as such, have assumed an increasingly expansive role as link between the divine and terrestrial realms. These materials have continued to attract and filter the Superet Light of God ensuring that Superetists heal “out of” their human conditions without physical access to Mother Trust.

The Superet Light Center

The Superet Mother Church or Superet Light Center (SLC) is located at 2516 west 3rd street, Los Angeles, CA. in the predominantly Salvadorian neighborhood of Westlake/MacArthur Park. As well as being the first Superet church ever built, the SLC is the movement’s international headquarter and an architectural template for all new branches. The SLC consists of a small, white, classical revival style Church-house built in 1922; a large, brick, classical revival style
Auditorium built in 1948; an ornate Prayer Garden built in 1951; a Shrine to Mother Trust located in the rear section of the Church-house, dedicated in 1959; and a dark orange, single level apartment complex used as living quarters for resident and visiting members built in the 1940s.

Looking at the compound from the northern side of W. Third Street, the Superet Light Center is divided into three parts; the Auditorium on the left, the Church-house in the center, and the Prayer Garden to the right. A tall, dark green, wrought-iron gate separates the SLC from the sidewalk. The church-house is a charming white, wooden building approximately forty-five feet long and twenty-five feet wide, with a fifty-foot white spire sporting a four-foot, heart-shaped neon sign. At the front of the church-house is an elevated, covered porch. A large black wooden banner on the porch awning reads: “Holy Superet Light Church” in gold, gothic lettering. A fourteen-inch bell, which a minister rings before Sunday Service, hangs inside the porch. Next to the porch stairs is an immense tree. At the foot of the tree is a small brass plaque that reads:

Mother Trust Superet Church
Classical Revival Style
Architects—Truesdell and Newton
Built 1922 Declared 1992
Historical-Cultural Monument No. 555
City of Los Angeles Cultural Heritage Commission
Cultural Affairs Department

One enters the Church-house through heavy double doors. Inside, the air is thick with incense. The walls are painted white, the ceiling black, and the hardwood floor a glossy dark brown. The ceiling consists of a twenty-five-foot triangular apex which is made up of an
intricate pattern of large wooden beams and cross beams. Eight square columns, four on each side of the building, support the roof from the ground. Most of the light in the building comes from ten stained-glass windows that run down each of the side walls. The windows depict detailed scenes from the bible in lightly faded colors, and provide a flattering, opaque light. The interior is also illuminated by four large white lamps that hang down from the ceiling, and four electric candle holders between each window. Each candle holder bears two orange, flickering candles. Three rows of pews, with ten pews per row, run from the entrance towards the altar. The pews are painted a deep Prussian blue and trimmed in dark gold. Each pew has a large gold heart, with a small white star at its center, painted on either side. The interior walls of the Church-house are replete with paintings, prints, drawings, and statues of Jesus Christ.

The altar, the focal point of the building, is located in an alcove, behind a wooden communion rail, at the back end of the Church-house. Constituting the entire backdrop of the altar is a mural depicting a colorful, iridescent, five-band rainbow. The rainbow arches between two clouds, across a blue sky. Above the rainbow hangs a large oval painting of Jesus Christ with a white dove flying out of an Aura in His chest, and a large eye floating above His head. Below the rainbow hangs a blue neon light in the shape of a seven-pointed star. Short phrases in dark gold, gothic lettering appear on the walls on either side of the altar. The phrase on the left, above one of Mother Trust’s Aura illustrations, reads “Holy Ghost Is Light,” while the phrase on the right, above a painting
of Christ, reads “Christ is Light.” “God is Holy Superet Light” reads above the altar alcove in the same gold lettering.

The altar’s canopy consists of a gold embroidered banner suspended in a yellow ten-by-thirty inch rectangular frame. The banner has a large gold heart embroidered in its center and the word “Superet” embroidered above it. The yellow frame is draped in a dark pink, tasseled, silk cloth. Two large, white porcelain statues of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary (representing Father and Mother God) kneel on either side of the framed banner with arms outstretched towards it. There are seven lit candles at the foot of the canopy flanked by two small porcelain statues of praying angels. Two gold-painted, electric candelabras holding six candles each stand on either side of altar centerpiece. The candelabras angle down towards the canopy. The Mensa is small and simple, draped in a white sheet with a purple band running across it. There are two small, framed images of Christ on the Mensa. Half a dozen large white vases filled with different types of white and pink flowers (including lily-of-the-valley, Calla lilies, April violets chrysanthemums, roses, and carnations, among others) line the bottom of the communion rail.19

The S.A.A.S Auditorium is the largest building on the SLC compound. The Auditorium is an imposing brick building with a white wooden roof supported by slim white columns. The building’s main

19 These flowers are real and are kept in a large, glass-doored refrigerator below the Auditorium Next to the room where Sister Esther keeps and prepares the flowers is he mimeograph room where Superet books were once printed. The mimeograph machine that first-generation Superetists used to print thousands of books and leaflets, now sits as a relic under a large plastic sheet.
entrance is located on Third Street. The doorway is flanked by two large vitrines displaying Superet books and images of Christ. Inside, the Auditorium is a large open-plan room with 15ft ceilings and hardwood floors. The inside of the building is painted almost entirely in pink. The room is filled with dark blue, benches neatly organized in rows that face a large, elevated stage. A wide aisle between the benches leads up to the stage. The stage is contoured by an ornate wooden band painted white. At the apex above the stage is a large, ornate shield painted gold featuring a purple heart at its center. In upstage right is a plush, gold and purple chair that a member made for Mother Trust as a gift for the healing she received. A small table with a crystal vase containing a white rose and a legal pad-sized black and white Miracle Picture of Mother Trust and Jesus Christ sits downstage-left. An oil painting of three men in different stages of Light development stands on an easel down-stage right. The main curtain is of purple velvet. The stage backdrop is painted pink, and at its center hangs a purple wooden sculpture of a large S linked to three purple hearts by two arches. A framed copy of Mother Trust’s “Superet Purple Heart of God” painting hangs above the sculpture. To the left of the stage are a brown grand piano and a podium from which members give the Tuesday night lectures. A large American flag hangs from a wall mounted support behind the podium. To the right of the stage is a door leading down to a congregation room. The walls of the Auditorium are decorated with Mother Trust’s artworks and paintings of Christ that She collected throughout Her travels. The auditorium is
equipped with a modern sound system, projector, and screen for use during lectures.

The Prayer Garden features a poured cement centerpiece walk-way surrounded by olive, jacaranda, palm, ficus, and oak trees creating a cove-like enclosure. Four, long wooden benches separated by three planters featuring an array of brightly colored carnations and roses adorn the garden’s center walkway. The focal point of the Prayer Garden is a large, glass display case containing a five-foot statue of Jesus Christ standing with outstretched arms on top of a blue globe speckled with golden stars. A whip, a crown of thorns, and a golden goblet lie on the globe at Christ’s feet. The Christ statue wears a heavy white robe trimmed in gold that matches the white cloth elegantly draped around the display case. Christ’s arms are outstretched to visitors as he gazes downward. A framed copy of Mother Trust’s “Superet Purple Heart of God” painting hangs above Christ’s head in the case. The top of the case is adorned with the words, “SUPERET LIGHT” in dark blue letters. Just above the case shines a ten-inch, seven-pointed, blue neon star. High above the star, arching over the Prayer Garden is a twelve-foot sign depicting a rainbow with “Superet Light” emblazoned on it in purple neon gothic letters. Superetists use the prayer garden for silent contemplation and personal reflection.

Once baptized, Superetists pay a tithe equaling ten percent of their monthly salary. In Los Angeles, the tithe is used by the SLC board of directors to pay for the printing of Superet materials, as well as any labor required for the church’s maintenance that cannot be
completed by the members themselves. Members must volunteer to do maintenance work on their church compound as frequently as possible. Despite the size of the SLC, Los Angeles members keep the Mother Church in pristine condition by spending most of their weekends, and many of their afternoons, cleaning and making repairs to its buildings and gardens. The labor expected of each individual, as well as the mandatory tithe, are known as “Love Offerings.” Love Offerings are a vital part of Superet devotional practice in that they epitomize one’s selflessness before God. By dedicating their free time to church-centered activities, Superetists incorporate a negation of personal desires and wants that could be otherwise pursued during times of leisure.

Color and Place

Mother Trust employed colors in Her artwork, books, and spatial decoration to evoke specific sentiments intended to help members cognitively map their behaviors within Superet ontology. In Her Wonder Books and recorded lectures, Mother Trust stressed that the colors represented the Light in human Auras. According to Mother Trust, these colors when applied decoratively had to be as light as possible, as darker shades represented a blockage, or heaviness that She associated with elementals. Mother Trust used colors primarily as metaphorical references to stimulate certain affects in her followers. The extent to which color has implications in material terms vis-à-vis dark objects or racialized persons was never brought up during my fieldwork. However, as Mother Trust makes clear in Her writings, Her
color designations are representational of Light rather than material qualities. In other words, humans create clear colors or black atoms in their Auras due to their behavior rather than their ethnicity. The rainbow has traditionally been the apotheosis of how a person’s Aura should look. A rainbow’s colors are bright, clear, and translucent, all of which are the attributes of a healthy Aura.

Mother Trust used color symbolically to remind Her followers to pursue righteous action and thought. The interior walls of many of the SLC buildings are painted pink, a color directly associated with spiritual love. The floors in every building are brown, a color that stands for dutifulness. In the Church-house, the pews are a deep royal blue, which is linked to selflessness, and the altar is draped in white cloth and decorated with white statues, flowers, and candles, all representing steadfast virtue (Mother Trust 1946: 73-74). Most noticeably, the text of Superet books is printed in dark purple, the color of God’s Superet Light, to imbue the reader with the text’s sanctity. Members I have interviewed continuously remind me of the direct connection between the benevolent colors Mother Trust saw in people’s Auras and those with which She painted and decorated the SLC.

Mother Trust used color as a means of conveying pertinent information quickly. Because the Superet doctrine is vast and often complex, color remains vital to embodying Superet doctrine. For example, Mother Trust explains that “God’s Will is the color Purple; where our [human] will shows in the Aura a dark red, black grey, or all darkness” (Mother Trust 1952: 25). The most revered color in Superetism is dark purple, the color of the Light of God. Dark purple
is used as the font color of all of Mother Trust’s books to solidify the fact that what She has written is the Word of God. The human Aura, on the other hand, is often murky and dark, representative of our debased existence lacking a Light Atom. Part of one’s indoctrination into Superetism includes learning not just what certain colors represent but how they affect one’s body. Mother Trust applied colors to create a feeling of constant “immersion” in Her followers whenever they were on church grounds or reading Her Wonder Books elsewhere. Every Superet Church on Earth complies with the same color scheme. The application of coded color schemes to Superet compounds effectively imbues the very structures of the compound with divine persuasion, transforming physical structures into powerful stimulators of a Superetist’s sensorium that accentuate divine presence.

Superet Motifs: Hearts, Stars, Rainbows, and Depictions of Jesus Christ

The most prominent motifs in Superet churches are stars, rainbows, hearts, and depictions of Jesus Christ. These symbols are rendered in different formats and media, they are most often painted, printed, projected, and embroidered. As constellations of “floating signifiers,” when used to decorate space, these motifs weave Superet doctrine into the very structures of church compounds. For example, during our early interviews, both Sister Sonia and Brother Jaime explained to me that the rainbow represents peace and the ideal Spiritual Aura that Superetists strive to achieve, making it one of the Church’s most instrumental symbols. Brother Jaime elucidated that
not only are the colors of a rainbow extremely light ("almost translucent"); they blend into each other so seamlessly that no solid lines demarcate them. Mother Trust idealized these “celestial” characteristics because She often saw them in divine Auras, diametrically opposed to the dark and rigidly defined colors of the human Aura that prevent the Light of God from coming through. Four large rainbows adorn the Superet Light Center. The two most visible depictions are a large rainbow mural behind the Church-house altar, and a magnificent sixteen-foot neon rainbow arching above the prayer garden. These bold presentations serve as reminders of the ideal Aura, helping church members remain focused on the positive development of their own Auras.

The seven and twelve-pointed Star-shapes found throughout the SLC represent both the Light Atom, and the divine source of Superet Light, effectively illustrating the link between humanity and God. Mother Trust used depictions of stars to remind Superetists to strive to keep their tripartite-self clear of elementals in developing their Light Atom. Stars are most frequently found inside heart-shapes as the source of divine Light, but they also appear alone as with the fifteen-inch white neon, seven-pointed star that adorns the center of the Church-house altar. This star, being the most prominent at the SLC, represents the ultimate goal of Superetism: developing a Light Atom.

As a representation of the heart of God, the heart-shape is emblematic of the apotheosis of Superet veneration and the point to which this veneration is focused. Shaped like the heart “suite” in a
deck of playing cards, the Superet heart-shape is the most prominent motif in Superetism generally because the dual Purple Heart of Mother and Father God is the source of all creation. The most noticeable and impressive rendering of the Superet Heart of God sits atop the Church-house spire as a seven-foot heart-shaped neon sign depicting three hearts: a dark blue-neon heart inside of a purple heart, inside of a yellow heart. At the center of these three hearts is a twelve-pointed pink neon star with a smaller six-pointed orange neon star inside of it that represent the source of Superet Light. Below this beacon, from a window situated above the Church-house porch awning, a smaller yellow and purple neon heart shines forth with a pink twelve-pointed star at its center. In these emblematic positions, stars illustrate the connection between God and Humanity. Heart-shapes pervade Superet compounds at ground level as well. One quickly notices, for example, that each baptized church member wears a small, round lapel pin displaying a purple heart on a gold background. Inside the Church-house, each of the approximately forty-five pews has a set of gold hearts painted on either side of them. The altar’s apex also consists of a large framed, embroidered heart.

According to Mother Church ministers, the most powerful Superet indexical icon is an acrylic-on-canvas painting of the Heart of God made by Mother Trust. Known as the “Sacred Purple Heart of God,” the fifteen-by-twenty-two inch painting depicts the two Hearts of

20 Every Superetist must wear a “Purple Heart” pin to demonstrate the commitment they have made to live by the movement’s doctrine. Superetists receive their “Purple Heart Pin” after they have been baptized.
Father/Mother God. The hearts are layered one atop the other and they face the viewer vertically. Mother Trust painted the hearts in dark purple with a white sheen, giving them a glistening, three-dimensional appearance. Golden light radiates in bands from the Hearts’ contours. From a white point at their center, the Hearts emit a bright, straight beam of golden Light that streams toward the viewer. The original “Sacred Purple Heart of God” painting is housed in the SLC auditorium, but multiple copies hang throughout every Superet branch on Earth. The Superet heart’s wide proliferation acts not only as a reminder of God’s universality and benevolence, but also, working indexically, as a strong visual and cognitive queue designed to engage Superetists at a vibrational level. The heart-shape reifies Church Doctrine both through its inescapable presence and through the divine presence that it channels.

Mother Trust’s favorite depiction of Jesus Christ was Heinrich Hofmann’s 1889 “Head of Christ at Thirty-Three” (detail from "Christ and the Rich Young Ruler"). According to Brother Jaime, Mother Trust claimed that this image was the most accurate portrayal of Christ based on how She perceived Him when He visited Her. Reproductions of such popular paintings as Hofmann’s “Head of Christ at Thirty-Three,” Warner Salman’s “Head of Christ” (1940) and “Christ at Heart’s Door” (1942), and William Hollman Hunt’s “The Light of the World” (1853-54), hang in every Superet branch around the world. Sister Sonia explained to me that Mother Trust was instructed by Christ to buy an image of him for every supplicant who was ungrateful for the healing they received from her. Christ also instructed Mother Trust as to where He
wanted Her to put up these paintings. According to Sister Sonia, the purpose of this act was two-fold. First, it helped clear any bad energy or feelings of animosity that might have been generated between Mother Trust and the person healed, and second She loved to surround Herself with pictures of the Lord and the Vibrations they produced.

I have counted around thirty depictions of Christ in the Church-house, which given its small size means that these images quite literally surround the congregation during Sunday service. The sentiment that Mother Trust wanted to be encircled by Christ and His Vibration is one that I have heard repeated by many Superetists. Much like the Miracle Pictures discussed below, Superetists perceive images of Jesus Christ as active presences that help them maintain clean Auras. As David Morgan demonstrates in his analysis of popular images of Christ in American protestant homes, “to have an image of Christ that listens, an image that returns one’s gaze or watches over one is to have a Christ who is not simply represented by a picture, but in some sense presented in it” (Morgan 1998: 57). In this vein, the plethora of messianic imagery found throughout the SLC creates an archive of intentionality, “a place to encounter or interact with the sacred” (ibid 1998: 57). When I mentioned this idea to Sister Sonia some years ago, She added, “everything [in this Church] is about the Lord Jesus and everywhere you turn you want to be able to see the Lord Jesus...this brings us closeness to the Lord Jesus, and Mother Trust wanted it to be like that.” The complete immersion in Light Vibrations, as a consequence of saturating a space with sacred colors, images, and motifs correlates with Morgan’s argument that religious,

In rendering the absent present, Mother Trust designed the SLC to create a distinct awareness in Her followers. Testimonials are considered the ultimate confirmation a Superet worldview is cemented in the practitioner. For example, during an early interview, Sister Esther claimed to experience a perceptual shift when she left the confines of the SLC. Going home on the bus she explained feeling Her aura was often at risk because “other people’s auras can hurt it.” “You feel different outside the church, really different,” she said. This sentiment was often repeated by other Superetists. Brother Sam, Sister Esther’s husband, and Sister Lourdes, Sister Esther’s sister both spoke of a noticed perceptual shift when leaving or entering the church. Los Angeles members spend much of their free time in the SLC doing maintenance work such as cleaning, painting, sweeping, and gardening as part of their Love Offering. The perceptual shifts reported by some members could be due to their feelings of comfort and “peace” on the sacred compound as opposed to the little control they feel they have on events beyond its confines. The way Brother Sam and Sister Lourdes described this phenomenon is reminiscent of what Loic Wacquant has termed “claustrophilia.” Superetists perceive their church in very similar ways to how the Chicagoan boxers in Wacquant’s study saw their gym, as “an island of virtue and safety in the middle of an unpredictable and unsafe world” (Wacquant 2004:26). By relying heavily on familiar symbols, healing images, indexical icons, and coded color in decorating Her church, Mother Trust created an
immersive world that continues to keep “chaos and the wasteland at bay” (Morgan 1999:10). When I asked Sister Sonia why she thought Mother Trust designed the SLC the way She did, Sister Sonia explained,

Mother Trust wanted the interior of the church to resemble heaven, somewhere celestial, where one feels at peace. She wanted it to feel like something not of this world, because Jesus Christ said ‘my doctrine is not of this world’...Mother Trust wanted something heavenly to give you that feeling that you are not here...and sometimes that happens you know? Sometimes when I’m there I forget that I’m there and I’m just taking in everything that Mother Trust is saying (private conversation 2014).

Sister Sonia’s reflection attests to a deep communal relationship between the ritualized embodiment of Superet doctrine and the décor of the SLC. Her ability to become lost in Mother Trust’s words due to a transcendental state triggered by her physical surroundings is testament to the consciously active role that Mother Trust’s design plays within Superet spaces. Seen as one unit, the layout of the Superet Light Center is a perfect example of Ysamur Flores Peña’s idea of the “noble tension” of an altar. According to Peña the altar must be grandiose enough to inspire respect and awe, but not too elaborate as to intimidate the worshipper and dissuade them from visiting it (Peña 2005). The décor of the compound taken as single entity creates a powerful stereopsis that disassociates Superetists from the immediate, pulling them into proximity with the divine and enveloping them in healing Vibrations. In decorating the SLC—and standardizing its layout for all other Superet branches—Mother Trust created within the church compound a focal point for the transmission and reception of healing Light Vibrations. Mother Trust used writing, images, color, and spatial dynamics to code Superet cosmology into the church.
structures themselves, and in so doing, she converted a complex of neutral physical structures into a powerful vehicle through which Superetists can understand and embody Superet Laws as a means of healing and grace-filled being in the world.

Indexical Icons: Mother Trust’s Artwork and Superet Miracle Pictures

Mother Trust’s Artwork

Mother Trust made hundreds of drawings, collages, paintings, and ritual garments during Her lifetime to depict and manifest the Vibrations She saw. Not much is known today about how Mother Trust produced Her art because She usually worked through the night, alone in Her Los Angeles apartment. Today, only a few dozen of Her works remain in Church archives as many pieces are believed to have been taken by disserting members shortly after Mother Trust’s passing.²¹ Of Mother Trust’s remaining original artworks, the most important include

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²¹ There were approximately 200 members in 1957 according to Church estimates. Many Superetists left shortly after Mother Trust’s passing, taking Superet materials with them. The most infamous story of disserting members looting the SLC occurred during the tumultuous period immediately following Mother Trust’s death. In the late fifties, a fracture occurred amongst the few remaining Superetists, after one minister took control of the Church claiming that she was receiving messages directly from Mother Trust. Eventually this Sister was pushed out by two of Mother Trust’s closest students, Brother Lynn Becker and Sister Lou Love. However, the excommunicated Sister’s two sons stole a large amount of objects, including Mother Trust’s ashes. The Sister and her two sons took these items to Oklahoma thinking that they could harness the Light of God and start their own Superet Church. This church failed to materialize. When the last brother died in 2014, the Mother Church received a call from his wife. The woman told the Church that they should send someone to pick up some items that pertained to the Church because she did not want to throw them away. Brother Luis and Sister Lourdes rented a U-Haul van and drove to, completely unaware as to what they would find. Today the ashes are kept in a hidden location within the Superet Light Center.
five acrylic paintings that She made between 1927 and 1957. These paintings are, “The Sacred Purple Heart of God,” “The Light of the World,” “The Ethereal Superet Church,” “The Twelve Senses of Jesus Christ,” “The Holy Virgin Mary,” and the “The Superet Church in the Ether.” All these images are rendered in a similar palette of light yellows, pinks, greens, and purples. Most of the images have cracked over time due to the multiple layers of paint Mother Trust applied in making them.

The “Light of the World” is a two-and-a-half by one-and-a-half foot portrait of a smiling, bearded, Caucasian man with flowing blonde hair in a white tunic. The painting cuts off half-way down Christ’s abdomen, and goes up just above his head. His arms are raised to his chest, and his hands form two separate symbols representing peace in the Superet Sign Language. A large, six-pointed, white star shines out of Christ’s chest between his two hands. This star represents Christ’s Light Atom. To the right of the star is the word “Peace,” written in large, yellow, cursive letters. On His forehead, Christ wears a crown of twelve white stars. Yellow and pink rays of Light radiate from Christ’s body, and a yellow beam of Light contours his frame. Superetists deem the painting miraculous because the eyes of the Christ depicted are open and closed simultaneously. When gazing upon the image, Mother Trust invited Her followers to “watch Christ’s eyes open” as a way of receiving blessings from the painting.

22 Exact dates are unknown.
Mother Trust’s “Superet Purple Heart of God” is understood by Superetists as a direct revelation of God. This image presents to its audience the dual Hearts of Father/Mother God, which combined are the source of Superet Light. As the premier representation of God, this image is part of the trifecta of Superet images along with Heinrich Hoffman’s “Christ at Thirty-Three” (representing Jesus Christ), and the original Miracle Picture (representing Mother Trust). Every Superet branch is required to display these three images to demarcate the space and receive blessings. Jaime elucidated the function of this image in a written communication, “Her Works of Art, especially the Holy Superet Purple Heart Picture sends to us the Superet Light Vibration. This Picture is a copy of what is present in Heaven. As Mother Trust said, a Symbol. When we pray to this Picture we receive healing and help” (pers. comm. 2019).

Mother Trust’s depictions of Auras in pencil and colored pastels are the most numerous works that the Church owns. These images are on display in the Mexico City and Lagos branches as well as at SLC. Mother Trust created Aura illustrations in different media as a means of thinking through the information that She received from God, and sharing this information with Her followers. One of the most significant collections of these Aura paintings is found in Mother Trust’s 222 Symbol Study, which She designed as an illustrated and categorized study of Jesus Christ’s words in the New Testament. Mother Trust told Her followers that she made the Superet symbols from the “tears of her soul” (Leslie et al. 2016: 198) to help members. According to Mother Trust,
When we find ourselves depressed over world conditions, that is the time to turn to Symbolism for reassurance. Those old, old symbols of the old mystery of life are continually making and unmaking. They have an extraordinary effect on you if you follow them. They will relieve your mind, your heart-aches, your loneliness, and your sufferings; and will lead you to God more quickly than many sermons and teachings (Trust 1942: 5).

The Superet Aura illustrations shift the viewer’s focus away from their own bodies by engendering in them sensations of inner peace and love for God. As presentations of the Auras Mother Trust saw, Her Aura illustrations interact with Superetists who look at them, vibrationally influencing the viewer’s tripartite-self.

Despite the fact that contemporary Superetists are sometimes unsure of the specific meaning of a particular Aura illustration, they continue to display these images throughout Superet churches as guiding, benevolent devices. Because Mother Trust made these images in collaboration with Jesus Christ, Superetists consider Her Aura illustrations to have absorbed the Vibrations of both Mother Trust and Jesus Christ. Brother Jaime contends that apart from the “Superet Purple Heart of God” painting, artworks such as Aura illustrations do not directly heal Superetists. Instead, Aura images function as educational devices that contribute to a Superetist’s self-healing by acquainting them with Light of God. That is, by bringing the “Light Understanding” into the souls of Superetists, these images spur a change from within the individual member. Mother Trust’s works teach Superetists about the true nature of reality, an act which itself bestows blessings.

Mother Trust also commissioned local artists to illustrate visions that were too complex for Her to render artistically. The most
important of these commissioned works is a two by three-foot oil painting called “The Three Auras.” This painting depicts three stages of soul-consciousness evolution as illustrated by three identical, semi-nude, short-haired white men contoured by different Auras. The three men are painted on a dark background and stand side-by-side at a three-quarter angle to the viewer. The painting is “read” from right to left, showing the gradual progression of Soul Consciousness in the three individuals. All three men are surrounded by oval Auras rendered in different colors to demonstrate their progression towards spiritual enlightenment. The first man on the far right has a grey cage above his head, and is encapsulated by a dark Aura preventing the Light of God from entering his body. The Light of God is depicted as a wide beam of red and yellow fire that descends from an unspecified source above the painting’s contours. The Light is violently deflected as it touches the first man, causing it to slide off the left side of his body. The artist has rendered the Aura that surrounds the first man’s body in dark reds, greys, greens, and browns all of which represent the human condition. The first man’s aura, chest, and abdomen are also speckled with elementals that the artist has painted as black and gray dots.

As the viewer moves left from the first man to the second and third, the colors in the Aura surrounding each individual become incrementally brighter; the elementals vanish from inside the man’s chest; a silver “velvet rope” coming from the Light, into the man’s body becomes more distinct; and a Light Atom begins to form in his chest. Bother Luis explains that the “velvet rope” is the connection
which all Superetists work to foster with God as Light Bearers. The “velvet rope” is a condition that must be worked towards, for it links the individual’s Light Atom with the Light Atom of God. In the second and third men, the cage deflecting the Light of God is gone, and the Light no longer spills over on either side of the men’s bodies. The third man is completely free of elementals, and his Aura is rendered in light hues of purple, pink, yellow, and green giving it a more vibrant appearance. The Light of God moves freely into the third man’s body, and a clear Light Atom shines from the center of his chest. “The Three Auras” sits on an easel, in a simple wooden frame, downstage right on the Auditorium stage.

The Superet Auditorium houses the highest concentration of Mother Trust’s artworks. Mother Trust displayed Her art in the Auditorium because, as educational devices, these images help Superetists absorb the lessons transmitted in Her lectures. Much like the abundance of Christ images in the Church-house, Mother Trust’s art reflects and concentrates the teachings She transmitted in Her lectures. Mother Trust established the Superet Auditorium as a place where She could instruct Her followers in the key tenets of Superetism. Superetists still hold S.A.A.S. lectures on Tuesday evenings at the SLC as a way of receiving instruction directly from Mother Trust. The lectures consist of two members each reading one half of a transcribed lecture to the congregation.

Mother Trust’s literary and artistic body of work continues to influence Her followers through a system similar to R. G. Collingwood’s aesthetics, particularly his idea of “magic art.” “Magic
art” is utilitarian in that works of this kind are designed to arouse particular, predetermined emotions in its audience (Collingswood 1958: 65). Superet artworks primarily through the sight Sense to teach Superetists with what lies beyond the human plane of existence. Ultimately, Superet art familiarizes members with the realities towards which they are striving as Light Bearers. Brother Jaime explained that “these wonderful works of Art give us a visual of the Superet Light Teachings and help us to understand better with vision” (pers. comm. 2019). As such, Mother Trust’s art is magical in the sense that it produces an affective response in Her followers that helps guide them toward a “Vibrational Understanding.” In other words, Superetists understand what the Light of God looks like through Mother Trust’s illustrations.

As with Her books, sermons, and lectures, Mother Trust made Her art in collaboration with Jesus Christ. Superetists, therefore, consider Mother Trust’s art a miraculous presence that helps them foster surrender to God. Recently Brother Jaime assured me that since Mother Trust’s passing, “Her art means everything in the world to [Superetists] today. In our present state on this Earth, we need this help; so, all Her works of art hold Light Vibrations.” In making artworks, Jaime explained that Mother Trust “left blueprints for us to use as tools to earn a soul.” He elaborated that, Superetists use “these wonderful works of art” to “uplift our understanding, and bring the Heavenly Realms into our eyes and through our Senses” (pers. comm. 2019). Accordingly, the primary function of all magical acts, according to Collingwood, is to generate in the audience certain
emotions that are considered necessary or useful “for the work of living” (Flannery 1988: 28). As educational devices, Superet artworks function as thresholds between the human and divine realms, revealing to Superetists was it necessary for their own work of living and in so doing, offering blessings and encouragement.

Anthropologist Alfred Gell’s theories on the social function of art, put forth in the “Enchantment of Technology and the Technology of Enchantment,” are useful to understanding how Mother Trust illustrated divine instruction in Her art, and what affect these illustrations continue to engender in Her followers today. Gell argued that in order to understand the emic functions of art as established by the cultural context that created it, the art anthropologist could no longer analyze non-western art through the rubric of a European aesthetic tradition. Gell forcefully argued for a “complete break with aesthetics” (Gell 1992: 42), advocating instead for a methodology that framed art through the historically-bounded value system in which it was created, valued, and traded.

Gell’s concept of the agency of art is crucial to understanding the purpose of Mother Trust’s illustrations. As anthropologists Brigitte Derlon and Monique Jeudy-Bellini explain, Gell saw art not as an object of aesthetic contemplation, but instead as a “technique among others, a procedure in the service of action” (2010:131). Since they have the power to show the viewer realities beyond the perception of the human senses, Superet artworks demand to be interacted with as formal technologies in the pursuance of divine Light. Superet artworks are absorbent and revelatory in the sense that they pull in their
audience and reveal sacred truths to them. As such, they have agency to enchant and ensnare their audience in similar ways as the Kula canoe prow boards theorized by Gell in “The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology.”

Gell argued that Kula canoe boards were designed to be elaborate enough to ensnare and intimidate opponents in order to gain the upper hand in Kula trading competitions. Gell contended that Kula prow boards were not dazzling as a physical object, but “as a display of artistry explicable only in magical terms.” Consequently, the process by which the art object “comes into the world” was its source of power (1992: 46). Comparably, Mother Trust’s art is dazzling in so far as it was created by a more-than-human-entity in direct communion with God. The “technical miracle” (Gell 1992) of Mother Trust’s work is evinced by the fact that it manifests a threshold between this world and the divine one. Superetists attribute Mother Trust’s artistic virtuosity to Her unique positionality: Her ability to visit and illustrate divine realms and entities for Her followers.

Superet artworks, then, become technologies that allow Mother Trust’s followers to become acquainted with the Wholly Other. Of importance here is the fact that Mother Trust’s artistic technique alone does not enchant Her followers so much as Her ability to reveal, through art, what lies beyond the human condition. In other words, Superetists understand Mother Trust’s illustrations as windows to the realm of the sacred, allowing them to visit these places and ground themselves in their Vibrations. Essentially, the viewer is involved, or captivated, by the art piece to the extent that it reveals to them
the face of Christ or the Light of God. Mother Trust’s work captivates because, in depicting divine realms beyond human perception, Her art exceeds the limits of human artistic possibility. According to Brother Jaime, the mere experience of seeing these paintings, and of being exposed to the sacred realms that they reveal, has an apotropaic effect on the viewer’s tripartite-self. The action engendered by the art is a familiarization with God through what is ostensibly a self-portrait.

As Gell later argued in Art and Agency, and as is evinced by the mystique that Mother Trust’s art continues to hold today, “the demoralization produced by the spectacle of unimaginable virtuosity” traps the spectator in the index of the art-piece because the index embodies agency which is essentially indecipherable (Gell 1998: 71). Mother Trust’s illustrations work for Superetists in that they render the invisible visible, and in so doing reveal important truths about the universe. Superetists gaze upon these images to absorb the coded knowledge that they convey, for the work of art reveals to Superetists realities beyond the confines of the human condition through a process similar to what Gell referred to as “the essential alchemy of art” (ibid. 53).” The alchemy of art for Gell concerns the process through which common materials, such as paint, graphite, paper, and cloth are manipulated to create something that transcends their very materiality. In the case of Superetism, Mother Trust created a threshold between humanity and the divine with common materials through a very specific, acheiropoetic alchemy of art.
In *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment*, Christopher Pinney and Thomas Nicholas adopt Gell’s theories on art to contemplate whether art objects can engender social action (Pinney and Nicholas 2001: vii). Pinney and Thomas contend that art should be “seen as a special kind of technology that captivates and ensnares others in the intentionalities of its producers” (Pinney and Nicholas 2001: vii). Superetists contend that Mother Trust’s art does not simply bear meaning or aesthetic value; instead, Her art is a mediator between two worlds that is capable of modifying the everyday realities of Superetists. Mother Trust’s works are miraculous instruments of divine revelation that allow the initiated spectator a glimpse at the divine realms beyond human consciousness. As such, these works have the power to influence the trajectory of a Superetist’s experience in the process of earning Light.

Anthropologist Shirley Campbell elucidates Gell’s thesis of the agentive capacities of art by explaining that the art object “becomes a social actor merging with and standing for human agents and/or other supernatural agency given anthropomorphic vitality by other significant human actors” (Campbell 2001: 118). In this case, Mother Trust is the “significant human actor” who bestows numinous vitality to Her art in the processes of making it. Mother Trust artistically rendered the teachings She received from God with the expressed purpose of creating technological apparatuses that would help Her followers navigate the demanding doctrine of Superetism. Once the art is displayed in Superet branches, it assumes its role as social actor and concentrates the Light Vibrations of God.
Superetists value Mother Trust’s work—the way that Mother Trust painted, Her brushstrokes, the shapes She made, and colors She used—through a specific framework of art appreciation that She developed and taught Her followers as part of their instruction in Superetism. As part of their instruction in the doctrine of Superetism, Mother Trust taught Her followers how the motifs present in Her art reveal the divine, and, therefore, how members could be blessed by deciphering Her works of art. As part of their instruction in the Church, Superetists must learn to recognize what is presented in Mother Trust’s works to fully appreciate their importance.

Significantly, understanding the importance of an image based on what it depicts is a crucial first step towards self-healing.

A significant part of how Superetists learn to appreciate the apotropaic agency of Mother Trust’s artworks is by first learning what constitutes beauty in Superetism. Referencing the beauty of Sulka masks from New Britain, Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini argue that, “the contemplation of these ritual artefacts designed to represent supernatural entities effectively generates an emotion whose exceptional intensity gives access to the sacred present in the very dimension of the beautiful” (Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini 2010 138). Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini interpret a Sulka sense of beauty as a form of acheiropoiesis as well: “an accomplishment grounded both in human technical competence and in the help of the spirits” (ibid: 138). The Superet idea of beauty is very similar to that of Sulka society in the sense that Superetists understand Mother Trust’s art to be beautiful
in large part because it resulted from a “cosmological agreement” (ibid: 138) between Herself and God Superet.

As with Sulka mask displays described by Derlon and Jeudy-Ballini, when Mother Trust presented Her finished works to Her congregation, the images’ “sudden and intense performance of beauty” (ibid: 138) operated as a manifestation of the divine. Artistic beauty in both cultures is conceived of in terms of the efficacy of a mask/image to manifest other-than-human-agents—the spirits of ancestors for the Sulka and Jesus Christ for Superetists. Mother Trust’s ability to reveal what the divine looks like to Her followers through Her art is tied to both the functionality of Her art as scientific instruments for understanding God, and the mystery that surrounds how Mother Trust was able to technically accomplish such a feat. As in the case of Sulka vernacular terminology, beauty and efficacy are seldom distinguished in Superetism, and often they are “bound by a relation of absolute solidarity” (ibid: 139).

The Superet Miracle Picture

The most powerful of the Superet indexical icons is a postcard-sized black and white photograph of Mother Trust that contains a clear Christ manifestation in the bottom right-hand corner. Approximately twenty “Miracle Pictures” (characterized by an array of Christ manifestations, light beams, auras, and other photographic “irregularities”) were taken of Mother Trust throughout Her lifetime. Most of these Miracle Pictures were taken by local photographers during Mother Trust’s visits to Bethlehem throughout the 1930s when
Mother Trust would visit the “Holy Land” to work with Christ. The image reviewed below was the first of its kind, the image She took for Her sister Natalie before entering the Adirondack Sanitarium for tuberculosis treatment. As the “matrix” image (Roberts and Roberts 2016: 69-70) of Superetism, Mother Trust used the photograph as a contact relic to perform thousands of miracle healings during Her lifetime.

The original Miracle Picture a full body, black and white portrait of Mother Trust accompanied by the distinctly recognizable bearded face of Jesus Christ in the bottom right corner. Mother Trust stands at a three-quarter angle to the camera. Her head tilted slightly upward, She looks expressionless into the distance to the right of center. Her right hand rests on a draped table, Her left hangs by Her side. She wears a broad-brimmed, Edwardian hat decorated with flowers, and Her hair is pinned up in a pompadour style. Her dress, of a heavy and voluminous material, is also designed in Edwardian fashion (frilled long sleeves, tight waist, and a broad hem that touches the floor). On Mother Trust’s dress, in the lower left quadrant of the image, one finds a translucent yet distinct apparition of a disembodied, bearded visage of a young Caucasian male. The head of Christ, slightly larger than Mother Trust’s, also looks off to the right of the camera. The backdrop against which Mother Trust stands is dark and non-distinct.

The Miracle Picture was taken at a penny arcade a day before Mother Trust was to begin a period of convalescence for tuberculosis in upstate New York. In very poor health, and fearing that She would
not see Her sister, Natalie, again, Mother Trust had the portrait processed as a postcard to send to Natalie in Paris as a last memento. The night before Her miraculous healing, Mother Trust placed the photograph in an envelope and set it on Her bedside table. After leaving the center, She took the picture out of its envelope and noticed two apparitions on the photo that had not been there prior to Christ’s visitation: a white spot on Her chest (which She interpreted as a divine Light Atom), and a ghostly imprint of Christ’s face in the lower right section of Her dress.

Shortly after returning to Manhattan after being healed, Mother Trust was instructed by Christ to work with the destitute in New York’s missions to witness human suffering first-hand and better understand how She could heal people from their human conditions. In Her memoir, Miracle Woman’s Secret, Mother Trust claims to have used the Miracle Picture to heal thousands of people at the Water Street Mission. Today, this ideographic image has become the most prized icon that the Superet Church possesses. Not only is it used by officiating ministers to bless the congregation after Sunday service, but multiple copies of this image adorn every Superet branch on Earth. The original photograph sits on the altar in the Church-house of the SLC.

Indexical manifestations of the sacred in photography are by no means unique to Superetism; millions of devotees from a wide range of faiths have encountered and venerated similar types of spiritual photographic images since the medium was invented in the early nineteenth century. Two sacred images that are most analogous to the Superet Miracle Picture in both form and function are those of
Senegalese Sufi saint Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba (1853-1927), and Indian spiritual master Shirdi Sai Baba (?-1918). Because all three images share such close similarities in terms of what they do for their communities of worshippers, I have found discussing the original Superet Miracle in conjunction with the similarly powerful images of Ahmadou Bamba and Shirdi Sai Baba to be highly generative.

In all three circumstances, the medium of the image and context surrounding when and why they were taken are of great significance in regard to what the images imply about the subject depicted. In the case of Ahmadou Bamba, the photograph was taken in 1913 by French colonial police in Senegal but reveals very little of what Bamba actually looked like. The fact that the saint’s face is half-covered by a white, over-exposed cloth, and that neither of his hands (and only one of his feet) is visible, reinforces a powerful Sufi narrative of visual hagiography echoing the idea that “one cannot photograph a saint” (Roberts, 2013: 236). The original image of Shirdi Sai Baba, taken by Dattaram Dwarkanath Neroy in 1911, shows the Saint seated on a large stone, wearing a simple white robe and scarf, his right leg crossed over the other and his left hand gracefully resting on his foot (Roberts and Roberts 2016: 69-70). The fact that Baba gave his consent to the Neroy to take the picture is understood by his followers as an act of divine blessing that the image has captured, and which can be activated by Baba’s followers through darshan (the reciprocal act of seeing and being seeing by a deity). Similar to Superet Miracle Pictures that bless continuously as mediums through which the Light of God reaches this planet, images of Baba are deemed
authentic by his devotees if and when such images perform readily apparent miraculous effects (Roberts and Roberts 2016: 69).

The contemporary followers of all three mystics interpret and appropriate the numinous residue present in all three photographs in very similar ways. As acheiropoietos, the photographic images of Bamba, Sai Baba, and Mother Trust are simultaneously oneiric and absolute. As such, the power of these images lies in the gripping dialogic reality that they engender between themselves and their worshippers. In the case of Sai Baba, Polly and Al Roberts describe that “although many of the works that devotees refer to as “original” images of Sai Baba were known to be made by human hand, their production and existence are nevertheless miraculous as the result of the Saint’s intervention in the process of making the works, either during his lifetime or after his passing” (2016: 74). Similarly, the fact that Jesus Christ is present in the Superet Miracle Picture is proof of Mother Trust’s constant companionship with Him, and His influence in all of Her endeavors.

The indexical nature of sacred images such as those of Sheik Ahmadou Bamba, Shirdi Sai Baba, and Mother Trust often plays a fundamental role in how supplicants internalize religious doctrine. Writing on the depictions of Ahmadou Bamba in Dakar, the Robertses contend that devotional images such as these “can actively influence the ways that followers understand the person portrayed and integrate such findings into religious practice” (Roberts 2013: 249). Among Superetists, Miracle Pictures are not only venerated because they prove a strong personal relationship between Jesus Christ and Mother
Trust, but because as a direct manifestation of the divine, the images broadcast healing Vibrations. Likewise, Baba’s images are Baba himself, as proven by constant miracles (leelas) they produce for followers of sufficient faith and patience (Roberts 2016: 66).

The original images of Sheik Ahmadou Bamba, Shirdi Sai Baba, and Mother Trust are not simply symbolic or iconic representations of the semi-divinity of their subjects, they are proof that the divine is present wherever the image happens to be. In this sense, the image being inextricable from God cannot exist without, by default, bringing the essence of God into whichever space it occupies. In Superetism, the power of sacred images is felt so strongly that only baptized members (whose bodies have been prepared to receive the healing Vibrations these images broadcast) can own sacred images such as the Miracle Picture.

Copies of the original images of Mother Trust, Baba, and Bamba are prominently displayed in areas of heightened public focus such as altars, shrines, stages, public transportation hubs, and busy streets. In blessing the beholder, the images are considered active forces that disseminate the benevolence of God. The act of reproducing the original image through an array of different media (such as digital prints, painted murals, chromolithographs, sculptures, and textiles) allows more people access to divine presence and attention. As a result, portraits of Sheik Ahmadou Bamba, Shirdi Sai Baba, and Mother Trust have been copied with extraordinary consistency, resisting deviation from their original sources in the hope of remaining as
close and proximate to the image as possible (Roberts and Roberts 2016: 69-70).

Reproductions of the original images have a powerful aura because they are indexical of divine encounter. Copies are agentive and apotropaic because they regularly make intercessions into the lives of their followers. The reproductions of the Miracle Picture that adorn the walls of Superet branches in Calabar and Mexico City, for example, cannot be removed from the church compound because without them the space would no longer be sacred. These copies are relics of the divine: Father/Mother God made physically manifest. As such, each reproduction has the ability to heal those who pray to it.

Miracle Pictures, therefore, are displayed not only as memorials to Mother Trust, but as loci of influence, capable of affecting how members incorporate Superet Doctrine itself. In this sense, these "vessels of revelation" (Roberts 2003: 92) are by no means passive. As Christopher Pinney argues, these images act to erase the recipients' agency and propel them towards actions over which they have no control (Pinney, 2001:163). Each of these objects, in having been manifested by Mother Trust in communion with the Divine, are centers of power in their own right. The idea that these indexical icons may be copies is irrelevant to Superetists.

The Superet Miracle Picture proves Mother Trust’s mystical legitimacy because the image is a physical representation of relational ontology: Mother Trust’s proximal association with Christ binds them in a deeply spiritual way. The fact that the two subjects are physically touching (Christ’s head rests on Mother Trust’s dress)
speaks to what Pinney refers to as “proximal empowerment,” the idea that being in the presence of the sacred makes Mother Trust sacred herself. Similar to how Bamba is described as a "friend of God" (Roberts 2006:103), Superetists idealize Mother Trust as Christ’s “little sister” who is endowed with blessed Light Vibrations that She continues to offer those who "remember" Her by interacting with Her image.

Considering that the divine essence of Mother Trust, Sheik Ahmadou Bamba, and Shirdi Sai Baba have been captured and proven through photography, what advantages, if any, does the medium of photography have as credible source of evidence production? This question may be particularly salient in regard to other forms of materially rendered divine manifestation, such as the painted Image of Edessa, or the imprinted Shroud of Turin. Interpreting these images through Roland Barthes’ philosophy of extensionism has been particularly useful in understanding the three photographs of Mother Trust, Bamba, and Baba as proof of the semi-divine nature of their subjects (Barthes 1988: 80). The Superet Miracle Picture, for example, extends the viewer into the presence of Mother Trust (and by association, the Superet Light of God) due to the fact that it has physically captured the Light of both Mother Trust and Jesus Christ.

As Roland Barthes eloquently explained, “the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here” (1988: 80). At the instant the photo was taken, the camera (through the chemical reaction of photons meeting silver halide) captured the
light emanating from Mother Trust’s body and Jesus Christ’s face. The purpose of photography according to Barthes—“to annihilate itself as medium, to no longer be a sign but the thing itself”—lends itself well to understanding the function of religious images such as those of Mother Trust, Baba, and Bamba. Accordingly, Barthes refers to the subject of the photo as the “photographic referent.” The image, as sacred object, acts not as symbolic referent but as active embodiment of the divine; “the ‘photographic referent’ is not the optionally real thing to which an image or a sign refers but the necessarily real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph” (Barthes 1988: 76). However, photography in Superetism adds an agentive function beyond that of merely “embalming” the light of God. Through Barthes’s philosophy of extensionism, the viewer is presented with the “umbilical cord of light,” which, like “the delayed rays of a star” (ibid. 81) links the body of the photographed subject, through the gaze, to that of the Superetist. In this instance, light becomes Barthes’ “carnal medium” (ibid. 81) engendering physical proximity between photographic referent and beholder.

As a means of factual documentation, photography seems to be particularly suited to cementing existential truths held by Superetists, followers of Sai Baba, and Senegalese Mourides alike. As “certificates of presence” (Barthes 1988:87), culturally coded photographic images of Mother Trust, Shirdi Sai Baba, and Ahmadou Bamba carry with them an added, intrinsically powerful, Peircean indexicality (Pierce 1998: 5). Because photography “never lies,” the
“inconsistencies” and/or “aberrations” found in religious images are what, in many cases, define them as miraculous. The indexicality of images of Mother Trust, Shirdi Sai Baba, and Sheik Ahmadou Bamba is built on the foundation that the photograph consistently and flawlessly reproduces fact. These respective images, in revealing the true, semi-divine natures of their subjects, prove a causal relationship between the mortal subject and the numinous by effectively placing their subjects in two worlds at once. In the Miracle Picture, this characterization is exemplified by the miraculous apparition of Christ’s face, and the Light Atom on Mother Trust’s chest. In all three instances, photography reinforces the consensus that Baba, Mother Trust, and Bamba are indexical extensions of God. The images delineate a causal relationship that proclaims “you cannot have one without the other.”

Similar to Roland Barthes’ understanding of the photograph as the “embalming of an instant,” Miracle Pictures act to preserve divine power and, when deployed in accordance with Superet ritual practice, legitimize Superet space, bless Superetists, and act as mnemonic referents to the omnipresence of Mother Trust. Likewise, for Senegalese Mourides, images of Bamba understood as "visual piety," secure the world or sense of reality in which the self finds its existence” (Roberts and Roberts 2003, with reference to Morgan 1998: 205). As indexical icons, these images are empowered by the close relationship between the subjects they depict and the divine. In representing this bond, the respective image becomes a node of sacred healing energy. Because no Superetist alive today was old enough to
remember Mother Trust, the “memories” generated by the Miracle Pictures do not pertain to a recollection of lived experiences, but instead to a highly idealized ritual imagining of whom Mother Trust was. This idealization, in monumentalizing Mother Trust, acts as a surrogate memory through which events that happened in the past that were not experienced first-hand can be re-created and meaningfully applied to contemporary situations. Through this process, Mother Trust’s image becomes an idealized instructional beacon as to how to live in Superetism.

As an example, Superetists consider the pristine Light Atom visible on Mother Trust’s chest in the Miracle Picture direct proof that their leader is semi-divine. Attaining a clear Light Atom that, unburdened by elementals, will reincarnate into a higher Vibrational existence is a clear sign of supra-human existence and the ultimate goal of Superetism. As demonstrated by the Miracle Picture, the fact that Mother Trust possesses a clear Light Atom at such a young age proves Her semi-divinity. By capturing Mother Trust’s Light Atom, the Miracle Picture has become an exemplar of the ideal self towards which Superetist must strive. In adding layers of poignancy to the image, and allowing it to touch the viewer, the Light Atom is the “punctum” (Barthes 2000: 49). Miracle Pictures, as visual hagiography, function as “devices of anticipation” (Roberts and Roberts 1996: 103) performed through a paradigm of historiological prolepsis, a type of foreshadowing whereby something is represented as existing before it actually does.
As mirrors for the lives of their worshippers (Roberts 1996:105), Superet images structure rigorous narratives of surrogate memory. These images help recall Mother Trust not as someone who was known personally, but as a threshold between humanity and the divine. A collective Superet remembrance of Mother Trust is dependent on the continual interaction between the Miracle Picture and the initiated beholder, a relationship stimulated through prayer and other forms of, what Christopher Pinney terms, “corpothetics” (“the sensory embrace of images and the bodily engagement most people…have with artworks”) (2004: 22). Through acts of prayer, Superet Miracle Pictures often contribute to eidetic experiences replete with healing lessons often know as Miracle Encounters.

Anthropologist Claire Harris argues that photographic groupings of divine and human entities replicate the dynamic of a family album, creating a “connectedness” between the subjects depicted (Harris 2004: 136). Superetists often display the Miracle Picture and Mother Trust’s “Sacred Purple Heart of God” painting in close proximity to one another to provide both the source of Superet Light and the vehicle through which that Light is gifted to humanity. In the most apparent display of their interdependence, the Miracle Picture and the painting of the Sacred Purple Heart of God are used side by side to give the final blessing at the end of Sunday service. The two residing ministers bless the congregation by holding two-sided laminated cards above their heads (one side portraying the Miracle Picture and the other the Sacred Purple Heart of God) and reciting the benediction prayer. Each minister shows an opposing face throughout the blessing
ensuring both images are shown simultaneously. This blessing reinforces Mother Trust’s divinity through Her connectedness to God, while ensuring that the congregation receives a concentrated amount of Light Vibrations.

Sacred materials contribute to the construction of reality by highlighting how worshippers, in communing with such things, make and maintain a Superet lifeworld. Superet sacred objects are designed to heal the tripartite-self and keep it from regressing to a lower spiritual sphere. Mother Trust’s painting of the “Sacred Purple Heart of God,” Hoffman’s “Head of Christ,” and the original Miracle Picture constitute a pantheon of Superet images that every Superet branch is required to display. Superet works such as the pantheon of images concentrate and broadcast Light Vibrations that allow for healing to take place. One’s constant interaction with these materials is important precisely because they act as points of concentration for Light Vibrations. Consequently, their function as mediums of Light Vibration transmission between God and humanity also explains why these images are displayed in abundance in every Superet branch around the world.

These materials help stimulate Superetists own perception of the process of healing because they are illustrations created with the purpose of producing a physical representation of the ideal self. Sister Sonia, explains that when she gives classes to newcomers as part of their 12 Lesson Home Course, Superet sacred materials are especially effective in making tangible some of the more esoteric tenets of Superetism. For second and third-generation Superetists,
these images supplant the text, becoming “untrammeled visualizations of what the text professes” (Morgan 1999: 1). Visual materials guide students and Superetists towards a “more accurate” perception and internalization of the process of healing—a complex procedure said to take place internally at an atomic level. Sonia adds that Mother Trust’s visual work helps Superetists “reflect on what healthy Auras should look like and inflect on what their Auras might be like” (pers. comm. 2016). Evidently, apart from being direct points of access to the divine, Mother Trust’s materials are also critical apparatus required for the proper embodiment of Superet precepts.

The transformative aspect of Mother Trust’s art is what makes it valuable to Superetists. Superet sacred materials are not intended to evoke an emotional response alone, but to change the internal spiritual and corporeal make-up of those communing with them. Her artwork keeps worshippers grounded in a state that allows for the effective reception of divine Light. When used in accordance with a strict adherence to the Superet Laws, religious materials keep members in a constant state of receptivity and disposition to Light Vibrations that are the main contributors to the development of one’s Light Atom. Tying religious images to acts of healing in the case Shirdi Sai Baba and his followers, the Robertses maintain that,

The praxis instigated by images of Baba challenges the primacy of scopic regimes—the bias toward the visual to the exclusion of other sensory modes—perpetuated by Western literatures concerning devotional arts. The Saint’s images convey his presence and are haptic, insofar as they are directly transactional and produce miracles. In order to understand visual epistemologies—a paradigm-shift is needed, moving us from detached definitions of aesthetics to culturally determined performance—and body-based
insights that transcend but still respect the gaze (Roberts and Roberts 2016: 83).

Similar to how Baba’s followers interact with his images, the value of the emotions prompted in Superetists by Superet scared materials through healings and Miracle Encounters are directly correlative to spiritual transcendence and divine integration. The reaction one has to the objects is scripted and choreographed by God, and as such, is a fundamental part of Superet healing.
Part 4: Superet Materials in Nigeria

The first Nigerian Superet branch was founded by Brother Peter Mkpat, an ex-Methodist minister, in Okorotip-Ibeno in the state of Akwa Ibom on July 27th, 1957. The Ibeno branch was the first international Superet branch and second Superet church on Earth after the Superet Light Center. Superetists are still unsure of how Mother Trust’s literature found its way to Nigeria, but Mother Trust sent two ministers, Sister Rhoda Buck and Sister Margaret Harris, to instruct Brother Mkpat and his congregation in 1954 after he wrote to Her for assistance. As of my visit in 2017, Nigeria was home to the largest and fastest growing concentration of Superetists on Earth. Of the dozens of members I met during my short stay, many were highly educated—having earned M.A.s and Ph.Ds.—and had successful careers in banking, academia, law, and politics. Bother Ime, with whom we stayed in Abuja, had a Ph.D. in Economics and worked as a banker. In Kaduna, Brother Moses, an officiating minister, taught political science at the University of Kaduna. Brother Chris, with whom we stayed in Uyo, had at one time held the title of Commissioner of Sports for the State of Kaduna. Sister Goodwill, a member of the First branch of Calabar, held a Ph.D. in chemistry and found Mother Trust’s scientific approach to religion congruent with Her own research.23

23 While I would not argue that there is a clear class dimension to Superetism in Nigeria, many members cited Mother Trust’s references to the physical and chemical sciences as a reason why they found the Church so “truthful” and compelling.
Even though membership has risen steadily in Nigeria since 1957, the movement remains largely unknown outside of certain areas (particularly the south-eastern states). However, more than anywhere else on Earth, Superet branches in Nigeria are growing and proliferating at an exponential rate. Today, Superet branches number in the hundreds across much of southern and central Nigeria. Given that the number of Superetists in countries such as Mexico and the U.S. has stagnated, the continued growth of Nigeria’s Superetist population in many ways represents the future of the Superet Church. Given the importance of Nigerian branches to contemporary Superetism, I became acutely aware of my subject position as an inadvertent delegate of Superetism during my travels through the country. No matter how many times I publicly introduced myself as an independent researcher, I could not avoid the fact that my presence in Nigeria, and interest in the Church generally, were irrevocably enmeshed with the missionary efforts I was observing. Generally speaking, Superetists in Mexico and the United States recognize my interest in the movement as the result of an attraction ordained by God rather than mere coincidence. Similarly, my presence in Nigeria was often interpreted by Nigerian Superetists as a testament to the efficacy of Superetism rather than my own agency. Grappling with these associations was a reminder of the often fraught power dynamics involved in ethnographic research and missionary work, as well as the tenuous positions ethnographers often find themselves in while conducting fieldwork.
Mother Trust encouraged proselytizing as a noble cause, but also characterized Superetism as the religion of “enlightened souls” who, due to their previous re-incarnations, would be guided to the movement by God.  

Today, Superetism has a missionary presence in west African and Latin America led by Brother Jaime. Historically, however, many Superet branches started with an individual or group independently coming into contact with Superet literature and petitioning the Mother Church to become an accredited branch. The process of becoming a recognized Superet branch can be long and arduous. Foremost, the Mother Church often cannot afford to send a minister to other countries to train members. Once a group’s petition is approved by the board of trustees in Los Angeles, the Mother Church sends the required Wonder Books to applicants so they may begin studying the doctrine. Concurrently, a Prince of Peace Movement (P.O.P.M.) group is created by the potential Superetists as a way of establishing allegiance to Superetism. Upon the formation of the P.O.P.M group and the completion of the required readings, the Mexico City branch or Mother Church send a senior minister to the region to train ministers and baptize members. 

Becoming a minister usually takes two to three years. This paradigm has had interesting implications for my own research as a non-Superetist. According to Brother Jaime and Sister Sonia, I was guided by God to find the HSLC and research it. As a non-member, I am constantly aware of how my continued interest in the Church, and the friendships I have built over the years with members, have afforded me access to knowledge and places that would otherwise be off-limits to non-members. As an example of the difficulty involved in starting branches in countries without a pre-existing Superet presence, a group of Cuban Superetists have been trying to establish a branch in Boca Del Cielo, Cuba for almost four years with moderate success.

P.O.P.M. meetings take place once a week in every Superet branch. During the meeting, prayers are read with the intention of creating a lasting peace on Earth.
years of study, and a branch cannot be established without a minimum of two ministers. Once two ministers (ideally a man and a woman) have been ordained, they can inaugurate a new branch and baptize their own congregation.²⁷

Mother Trust founded the Prince of Peace Movement on Christmas morning, 1938, during Her second trip to Bethlehem. Upon witnessing the discord and animosity between worshippers of different faiths, Mother Trust created the P.O.P.M. as a non-denominational, non-sectarian, “club”, whose sole aim was to bring peace between peoples of different ethnicities, religions, and nationalities. Through the P.O.P.M., Mother Trust idealized bringing religions together, not under Christ as leader, but through Christ’s perceived ability to create peace. On Her second visit to Bethlehem, Mother Trust is said to have gathered a large congregation in a short period of time, apparently bringing temporary peace in the city by building up the “Light Vibration” in different houses of worship. Believing that all religions strove toward the same purpose: fostering a higher

²⁷ Male and female presiding ministers are ideal because they symbolize the closed “circuit” of negative (female) and positive (male) poles through which the teachings of Father/Mother God must pass before reaching the congregation. The female/male duo also represents Mother Trust and Jesus Christ.
consciousness of Earthly transcendence in their adherents, Mother Trust stressed that there should be an established, coherent dialogue between the religions of the world. Today, every Superet branch begins as a P.O.P.M. and maintains a P.O.P.M. open to all once it has become a Superet branch.

**Singular Objects and Artefactual Diasporas**

During the month of April in 2017, I travelled throughout central and southern Nigeria with Brother Jaime, and Brother Gabriel, officiating minister of the Second Abuja branch. We travelled by car from Kaduna to Abuja and into the states of Akwa Ibom and Cross River, home to the highest concentration of Superet Light churches on Earth. Aside from the opportunity to study the logistics of Superet missionary work in Nigeria, I was also interested in whether the décor of Nigerian branches deviated from those in the U.S. and Mexico, and what effect, if any, such deviation had on the transmission and practice of Superet doctrine in these locales. Due to the infrequent presence of senior ministers from the Mother Church, and the lack of Superet materials in the country, I naively thought that I would find some syncretism between Superetism and other religions in Nigeria. Not only did these nebulous integrations not materialize, Nigerian Superetists seemed to pursue Superetism with more fervor than I had encountered in the U.S. or Mexico. Consequently, even though most of the churches we visited had, for financial reasons, few of the elaborately decorative aspects that I had come to associate with Superetism in Los Angeles and Mexico City, Mother Trust’s teachings,
as contained in Her books and recorded lectures, were rigorously studied and strictly followed.  

Based on the requests of Nigerian branches, Brother Jaime brought with him two large, black suitcases from Mexico filled with religious materials to be distributed to the branches we visited. These suitcases contained the following:

- *In Her Presence* books—100 copies
- P.O.P.M. member pins—100 units.
- Superet Heart member pins—100 units.
- New (rust-proof) prototype Superet Heart member pins—15 units.
- Triangular altar banners—20 units.
- Miracle Pictures (Superet icon)—20 units.
- "Travelling altar" cards (small)—400 units.
- "Travelling altar" cards (large)—200 units.
- "P.O.P.M" baseball caps (for ministers only)—75 units.
- "Proud to be a Superetist" cloth bracelets—1000 units.
- Calendars—50 units.

As the first few days passed, the suitcases seemed to dictate not just the route we took, but also many of our journey’s developments. I began tracing the ways in which the religious materials these suitcases contained worked as links between a diasporic Superetist "brotherhood" both within Nigeria but also between Nigeria, Mexico, and

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28 Interestingly, even though this syncretism never materialized, many Nigerians with I spoke cited the constant threat of witchcraft as a reason why they decided to join the Church. On more than one occasion, members (particularly from the oil-rich and violently contested region of Port Harcourt) cited Mother Trust’s ability to "fight" witchcraft as a reason why they had joined and stayed in Superetism.
The high demand for religious material by Nigerian Superet branches led me to hypothesize that with the infrequent presence of non-Nigerian Superetists (Brother Jaime had not been back to Nigeria in thirteen years), Superet effects materialize not just the presence of God, but an important, physical connection between and the Mother Church. Importantly, in creating a life-line between branches in Nigeria, Mexico City, and Los Angeles, Superet religious materials give legitimacy to Superetism in Nigeria as a relatively small, and lesser known new religious movement.

In his article, “The Cultural Biography of Things,” anthropologist Igor Kopyttoff aligns his ideas on the biographies of objects with anthropologist Arjun Appadurai’s concept of “methodological fetishism” that follows things-in-motion as they are traded within and between social groups in particular spatial and temporal contexts (Kopyttoff 1986: 67). Methodological Fetishism seeks to follow objects themselves, not as material created and invested with meaning by humans, but as beings in their own right. In The Social Life of Things, Appadurai stipulates that,

...we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their

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29 I asked Brother Jaime if Superet materials could be printed in Nigeria instead of sent from Mexico, or brought on trips such as this one, he agreed that they could but that a printer of satisfactory quality had not yet been located. While I do not dispute that this may well be the case, I also believe that if Superet materials could be commissioned and created in Nigeria, branches would undoubtedly be presented with a vastly increased material emancipation from the Mother Church. Global branches are tethered to the Los Angeles Mother Church and Mexico City branch through their restricted access to what I would argue to be the most important aspect of Superet religion; material created and/or sanctified by Mother Trust. A result of this somewhat political dynamic is an artefactual hierarchy that designates the Mother Church and Mexico City branch as locales of pilgrimage for international members.
trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things. Thus, even though from a theoretical point of view human actors encode things with significance, from a methodological point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context (Appadurai 1986: 5) (emphasis in original).

Kopytoff applies Appadurai’s understanding of how the experiences of materials (as they move between social circles) gives them value to argue that objects have biographies and social lives much like humans do. In delineating the importance of the experiences of objects in tracing how commodities are made and un-made, Kopytoff demonstrates that the cultural biographies of things “make salient what might otherwise remain obscure” about the culture in which things take part (ibid. 67).

Kopytoff introduces the dichotomy of the commodity and the singular object as a means of demonstrating how cultural objects possess their own semiotics informed by the communities that create, use, and trade them. According to Kopytoff, what cultures or individuals deem “singular” are things that are not easily exchangeable within the community’s framework of comparable values. In Superetism, “singular things,” such as indexical icons, are often reserved for collective Superetist use only, making them unavailable to lay visitors or members for purchase. Furthermore, the trade and reproduction of these images within the Superetist community is strictly prohibited. Each branch is allocated its own allotment of materials, which cannot leave the branch premises. Arguably, by removing the most sacred materials from the realm of commodity (and, subsequently, restricting who has access to them) Superetists imbue
these materials with an added prestige that greatly informs their value within Superetism. The Wonder Books comprising the Light Library, on the other hand, are not singular objects in the sense that these are available for purchase to anyone.

As the “symbolic inventory” (Kopytoff 1986: 73) of Superetism, the items that Brother Jaime brought to Nigeria were recognized by members as not simply divine, but as prestigious because of how difficult they were to acquire. In existing beyond the realm of commodities, and in being traded through a very narrow sphere of exchange, Superet religious materials such as the ones brought by Brother Jaime conform to what Kopytoff argues are singularized materials (ibid. 74). Similar to the understanding that controlled medication should stay with the patient to whom it is prescribed, Superet materials are “terminal commodities” in that they usually stay within the branches to which they were given; they are not recycled or resold. The task of distributing these objects is confined to a narrow sphere of exchange, which is operated by a “restricted group” (ibid. 74-75) of Superetists. Importantly, Superetists put their own standardized system of value on the material culture of their Church. This system of value is not based merely on an “autonomous cognitive and cultural process of singularization” (ibid. 73), but on the premise that these materialized are singular primarily because they are extensions of the divine.

Moreover, given the expansion of Superetism across Latin America and West Africa, the singularization of Superet materials is heightened by the fact that these objects create a network that keeps
members connected to each other through their circulation and display. Superet material culture not only conforms to Kopytoff’s criteria of the singular object, in acting outside the realms of commodities attainable through standardized means of exchange, these objects are socially imbued with added authority to perform Superetism in new locales. That is, the rarity of these materials as singular objects gives them the added prestige of not simply bringing Light Vibrations into a neutral space, but also claiming said space as a Superet branch. In Nigeria, and undoubtedly in the Cuban P.O.P.M. as well, sacred materials play a vital part in connecting Superetists through a network of meaning similar to what Claire Harris calls an “artefactual diaspora” (Harris 2004: 132).

As Brother Gabrielle, Brother Jaime, and I proceeded from branch to branch, and the role of Superet materials became increasingly prominent in my field notes, Harris’ rumination that “an anthropological approach to material and visual cultures enables us to engage with the novel forms emerging from such encounters between the global and the local” (ibid. 146) was ever present in my mind. Referencing Harris’ extensive work on the role of photography in the post-“Incorporation” Tibetan diaspora, allowed me to contemplate Superet objects in Nigeria as the physical location for the transmigation of ideas about identity and belonging in local, global, and sacred contexts.

Most branches we visited were painted white inside and out, with door frames and windows painted light blue. For financial reasons, many churches lacked the signature large painted rainbow arching
across the back wall of the altar. These branches relied instead on faded Superet iconography such as the “Superet Purple Heart of God,” Miracle Picture, and Hoffman’s “Head of Christ” to designate the space as a Superet church. None of the branches I visited used neon; and colorfully painted interiors were an accessory that only large, urban branches seemed able to afford. The financial burden of many branches was most apparent in the proliferation of small paintings of a single rainbow found hanging in half a dozen smaller, more rural branches. These paintings were created by Sister Dale Leslie, a Canadian Superetist who has lived in Mexico City for three decades. Sister Dale made these dozens-or-so paintings in 2001 specifically for Nigerian branches that could not afford to paint an altar backdrop. Given the strict code of décor that each Superet branch must adhere to, I was surprised by the ingenuity of the Mexico City branch in sanctioning these paintings for Nigerian churches.

Since Mother Trust’s passing Her followers have improvised ways to maintain a material connection with Her (see Part Six) by consecrating new materials and spaces. In the past two decades, the Mexico City branch, in particular, has produced non-canonical materials as a way of memorializing Mother Trust, and expanding the reach of Superetism internationally. The rainbow paintings made by Sister Dale were the first purely symbolic (as opposed to indexical) objects to come out of Superetism since Mother Trust’s death. These paintings still hang in Nigerian branches today and have accrued, over the decades, their own particular aura. Brother Jaime and the Nigerian ministers who owned these paintings often chuckled when discussing how
they had aged. These images had also come to represent a miraculous time when Superetism began to spread more rapidly across southern Nigeria with little to no financial backing, and a sporadic missionary presence. As such, these images, while not sacred in and of themselves, are vital links in the artefactual network that connects Nigeria to the centers of sanctity in Mexico City and Los Angeles.

The Superet artefactual network is predicated on the fact that none of the sacred images displayed in Superet branches are of Nigerian origin. In Nigerian Superet communities, legitimacy and prestige are not only associated with Superet material, but specifically Superet material imported from the U.S. and Mexico. According to Brother Jaime, the SLC cannot afford to send materials to Nigeria due to low membership and its own expenses. Superet materials usually enter Nigeria when a foreign Superetist visits (about once or twice a decade over the past forty years). The rarity of these objects and the exclusivity through which they are acquired bestow on them added status amongst Nigerian Superetists. The high demand for, and coveted status of, Superet materials was readily apparent to me during my stay. Most of the branches’ Superet books were tattered and stained with red dust from heavy use, and ministers would often travel a full day by car to see Brother Jaime in-person and request books and images for their branches.

Among the materials brought by Brother Jaime, the most important was a digitally rendered prayer card depicting the trinity of holy Superet images floating amongst clouds on a blue background. On the left of the image was Hoffman’s “Head of Christ” (representing Jesus
Christ); in the middle, raised slightly above the other two images, the “Superet Purple Heart of God” (representing Father/Mother God); and on the right, the original Miracle Picture (representing Mother Trust). The card was printed in two sizes, eight-by-ten inches, and eleven-by-thirteen inches, to be used as a praying device and a church adornment. Brother Jaime described the card as a “small altar” or “traveling altar” containing “everything we need” (pers. comm. 2017). The image turned out to be vital for smaller, rural branches in that it was compact and modular. In containing the three most important icons simultaneously, these images easily doubled as a complete altar for newer branches that could not yet afford to decorate their altars in accordance with Mother Trust’s more elaborate requirements.

Despite the fact that most images distributed throughout Superet branches are reproductions of originals housed at the Mother Church in Los Angeles, these reproductions are crucial to channeling the Light of God, and in so doing, transforming a neutral space into a Superet church. Because the aura of these objects is contingent on their function as transmitters of Superet Light, mass-produced Superet images are deemed to be just as efficacious in healing as the originals from which they derive. Copies are not symbolic referents as such, but independently agentive sacred objects. Their function as efficacious healing technologies is dependent on their role as transmitters of Light Vibrations and on the personal interaction these images have with worshippers. In line with Christopher Pinney’s concept of “proximal empowerment” (Pinney 1997:171), mass-reproduced
Superet images are effective precisely because of their “closeness” (Benjamin 2007: 223) to the worshipper, not despite it.

The deeply personal, thaumaturgical relationship between Superetists and Church icons demonstrates that Walter Benjamin’s famous argument concerning the destruction of an artwork’s aura through mass reproduction takes for granted the potential agency of the reproduced object as an extension of the divine. Superetists demonstrate that, irregardless of its “originality,” the interaction between the divine and the worshipper through the object bestows the object its aura. The Superet object’s aura is contingent on the personal interaction between a group (or individual) with the object, and what role that object plays in the interaction. As long as Light Vibrations pass through the object, it makes little difference to Superetists whether or not it is a copy. In channeling divine entities, these materials are not simply decorative, symbolic referents to Superetist identity; they are Superetism.\(^{30}\)

Moreover, one could argue that in regard to groups that use a mass proliferation of images as a means of coming into contact with the divine—such as worshippers of Shirdi Sai Baba and Sheik Ahmadou Bamba—the reproduction of sacred materials reinforces the aura of the original rather than depletes it. As demonstrated by Superet material culture (and somewhat less esoterically by current American celebrity culture), the mass, visual reproduction of an important icon (or

\(^{30}\) This is not to say that a hierarchy of materials does not exist within Superetism vis-à-vis the heightened sacred efficacy of original Miracle Pictures or Mother Trust’s original artworks. However, inasmuch as copies of Superet materials transmit Light Vibrations effectively, their format is not of great importance.
celebrity) often reinforces, rather than depletes, the aura of the referent. In Superetism particularly, the idea that the aura of a work of art is destroyed by its mass reproduction takes for granted the ability of the object itself to transform any spatial context with its very presence, regardless of what form it takes.

As demonstrated by the different forms and functions of Superet sacred materials, the ”auras” of objects are diverse and exist within a spectrum predetermined by interaction rather than format. The cult-value possessing aura of mystery, traditional legitimacy, and historical experience; and the exhibition-value possessing aura of mechanical mass production that Benjamin references (Benjamin 2007: 222-225) are but two examples of what is essentially intersubjective experience. If anything, Benjamin’s own essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (as an extremely reproducible object containing its own palpable aura) demonstrates that apart from being a highly subjective construct, the aura is both a product of culture and temporality. Commenting on the ”social trails” followed by objects such as the mass-produced Superet “travelling altars,” Harris contends that as objects move through “networks of cohesion,” they ”may also create identity and even extend the dimensions of individual personhood in a manner akin to a prothesis” (Harris 2004: 134).

Following this idea, the proliferation of Superet material religion guarantees the extension of Superet Light through Nigerian branches.

As was evinced during my stay in Nigeria, imported Superet materials legitimize the lesser known Superetist movement in Nigeria while creating an artefactual connection between Nigerian branches and
centers of Superet influence in Mexico City and Los Angeles. The Mother Church in Los Angeles and the Mexico City branch are themselves prestigious pilgrimage sites largely due to the fact that they house powerful contact relics that belonged to Mother Trust. As such, these locales are prestigious to some degree because they represent the sources to which the international Superet artefactual diaspora is tethered.
Part 5: Memory and Remembrance as Emergent Healing Technologies

Memory does not preserve the past in the pickled solution of untainted religious doctrine, but reconstructs it with the dual assistance of traces left behind and the present needs and dispositions of those conducting the work of remembrance—(David Morgan 1999: 47).

Today, the objects that Mother Trust created and collected, as well as the spaces She designed and inhabited, have come to both symbolically and literally embody the Holy Superet Light Church for Superetists. As we have seen, in the physical absence of a unifying leader, the abundant archive of objects created and collected by Mother Trust has taken on a powerfully autonomous role within the Church. However, since Mother Trust’s death, Superetists have contributed to Her archive of religious material by using Her possessions as sacred relics. Moreover, in the past decade, Superetists in Mexico City have published various texts on the experiences and lessons of first-generation Superetists who learned from Mother Trust directly. In an attempt to synthesize the broad, agentive role that memory plays within Superetism, I have chosen as case studies a book authored by second-generation Mexico City branch members titled In Her Presence..., and the Superet Shrine created by first-generation Superetists from Mother Trust’s Los Angeles apartment shortly after Her death. Despite not having been sanctioned by Mother Trust, both In Her Presence... and the Superet Shrine are important locales of healing due to their mnemonic function. Furthermore, the Shrine and In Her Presence... have become part of the broader archive of Superet sacred materials because they are direct results of a
continual process of prolepsis (a pulling forward of something from the past and applying it to the present), vital to contemporary Superet praxis. Moreover, the dialogic relationship between Superetist and religious object may be an indicator of how remembrance of Mother Trust has become a meaningful way of finding closeness with God.

In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*, Marianne Hirsch coined the term “postmemory” to discuss the inherited trauma second generation descendants of Holocaust survivors experienced as transmitted through images, texts, and stories. Hirsch’s idea of postmemory also accurately encapsulates the process through which second and third-generation Superetists who never met of Mother Trust “remember” her. Often, the experience of being in the physical presence of Mother Trust is transmitted through images, testimonies, and objects so palpably for contemporary Superetists as to create “completely independent memories” (Hirsch 2012:103) of Her in these individuals. In Her absence, events surrounding Mother Trust’s life continue to reinforce the narrative that She was “not of this world.” Hence, events preserved as stories, such as the miraculous healings that first-generation Superetists witnessed Mother Trust perform on a quotidian basis, have since acquired a highly idealized status amongst current Superetists. Despite the fact that many of these events happened over fifty years ago, their transmission through *In Her Presence*... and the Shrine keep the movement alive by reassuring contemporary Superetists of their leader’s semi-divine status.
As powerful mnemonic devices, Superet sacred materials such as *In Her Presence...* and Mother Trust’s belongings have come to embody the Church for Superetists by generating a network of “postmemories” (Hirsch 2012) through which members construct and navigate a meaningful Superetist identity. Given the “postmemories” that contemporary Superetists continuously create as a means staying close to Mother Trust, the process of remembrance in Superetist communities requires a hermeneutic negotiation of memory that is performative, dynamic, and constantly in flux. In the absence of Mother Trust, memory becomes a performative act of reconstruction as well as recollection for Superetists; and postmemory, triggered and mediated by Superet material culture, tethers Superetists to the movement’s complex and often demanding doctrine.

*In Her Presence...*

*In Her Presence...* consists of an anthology of transcribed, firsthand accounts from first-generation Superetists who were indoctrinated by Mother Trust personally during Her thirty years in Los Angeles. Comprised of information compiled and edited by Sisters Dale and Yolanda and Brother Jaime over a period of two decades, *In Her Presence...* offers a rare glimpse into what Mother Trust was like as a person. The first-generation Superetist testimonies that comprise the primary text of the book were recorded on video as oral histories from the late 1980s to the early 1990s in Mexico City and Los Angeles. The recorded testimonies were given by Brother Lynn Becker, Sister Lou Love, Brother Tony Fertolia, Brother Eddie Gaysor, and Sister Ivy
Kirby all of whom were in their seventies and eighties at the time. The testimonies that comprise much of the text primarily concern Mother Trust’s miraculous healings and the unusual visual phenomena that accompanied Her presence. As per the interviews, the Miracle Encounters that members experienced on a daily basis include, Christ’s beard appearing on Mother Trust’s face; Christ’s arms appearing on Her body; light coming out of Mother Trust’s eyes and mouth, and from under her dress; a tiara of twelve stars appearing on Mother Trust’s head, Mother Trust becoming transparent, and Mother Trust resuscitating a member who had died during a meeting. According to the members relating these stories, the visions and Miracle Encounters usually took place during Mother Trust’s Inner Circle meetings, or Minister Classes, that took place once or twice a week and often lasted until dawn.

In Her Presence... is also an attempt to archive the experiences of Superetists who learned from Mother Trust directly, for the “coming generations of Light Bearers.” Throughout the text, Brother Jaime, Sister Yolanda, and Sister Dale complement the “precious experiences” of first-generation Superetists with journal entries and old photographs from members, as well as quotes from Mother Trust’s lectures as a means of painting a detailed portrait of who Mother Trust was. According to Brother Jaime,

the purpose and the importance of the book is to bring out Mother Trust so future Superetists can know what it was like to be near Her, to hear Her, to see Her, and feel Her. The book brings Her out in such a way for the reader to feel they are having their own personal experience with Her as a Superetist. This book can remind us of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles in telling a story [through] the acts
of Superetists who were so fortunate to know and be with Her (pers. comm. 2017).

As a work of collective remembering, concerned with transmitting information to future Superetists, the text has been fundamental in engendering a sense of postmemory in Superetists who never knew the founder of their religion. In the book’s introduction, the editor’s characterize the stories featured as agentive, claiming, “they can be felt in the soul, they are warm, and produce a sense of happiness and tranquility” (Leslie et al. 2016: 2). Much like the affective emotions that often accompany postmemory (Hirsch 2012: 103), the authors describe the experience of reading their mentors’ testimonies as being, “transported back and picturing everything that was happening” (Leslie et al. 2016: 3). Effectively, the text has been printed in both English and Spanish and has gained wide popularity amongst international members seeking to know Mother Trust better.31 According to Hirsch, the performative act of reading, and physically ‘reliving’ first-generation Superetist testimonies fits Hirsch’s description of the experience of post-memory as ‘not-memories’ communicated in ‘flashes of imagery’ and ‘broken refrains’ transmitted through the language of the body” (Hirsch 2012:109).

Being intrinsically tied to Mother Trust, even “un-official” texts such as In Her Presence... have the ability to touch the viewer who feels rather than simply sees or reads Mother Trust. Although postmemory can never be memory, the transcendental power of postmemory lies in how effectively it approximates memory in its affective force

31 In Her Presence... was amongst the most requested items in Nigeria, for example.
Superetists frame materials such as *In Her Presence*... and the Superet Shrine as technologies capable of vibrationally changing an individual’s tripartite-self by exposing them to Mother Trust’s wisdom through Her words and objects. *In Her Presence*... and the Superet Shrine work through a “process of affective contagion” (ibid. 117) that inscribe doctrinal narratives through bodily responses. The Shrine and the book, by containing remnants of Mother Trust’s physical presence on Earth, become unofficial contact relics capable of bringing the worshipper into proximity with Mother Trust. As objects that open “a window to the past and materializes a viewer’s relationship to it” (ibid. 117), copies of *In Her Presence*... produce a deeply personal relationship between Superetists and Mother Trust.

Sister Dale ends *In Her Presence*... with the line, “we will never really know Who Mother Trust was, not until we develop into a higher sphere ourselves” (Leslie et al. 2016: 253). Paradoxically, one can only attain this “higher sphere” by continuously interacting with the living archive of Superet relics that *In Her Presence*... has become a part of. This paradox, however, reflects the ingenuity of second-generation Superetists in creating their own archive of who Mother Trust was based on their contemporary needs. As is evinced by *In Her Presence*..., the new and recombinant material culture of Superetism has made of the canonical archive an ever-expanding prosthesis to help Superetists heal in Mother Trust’s absence.
The Superet Shrine as Healing Reliquary

Mother Trust passed on at the age of eighty-four on October 27th, 1957 from what Superetists contend was a lifetime of absorbing Her patients’ elementals. According to Brother Jaime, despite being semi-divine, Mother Trust’s human body became overly polluted with the elementals from the people she healed, causing it to deteriorate.

Mother Trust took over the conditions of people to help them because of Her great love and sacrifice to do so. After years of great physical and spiritual Labor, it was time to go Home. As Jesus suffered and died for humanity to awaken, so did She. Because of Her Love, She often healed those who did not deserve it and Jesus told her She would have to pay the price, which She was willing to do (pers. comm. 2019).

The Superet Shrine was dedicated on Easter Sunday, 1958 by first-generation Superetists to commemorate Mother Trust’s time on Earth. The Shrine was created in what had been Mother Trust’s alcove apartment, located at the southern end of the Church-house, behind the altar. Mother Trust’s followers curated the space much like a museum in the respect that they laid out Her possessions on tables, bed-stands, mantles, in glass display cases, and in glass-doored closets and cupboards. Today, the Shrine is officially open twice a year, on December 25th and Easter Sunday, but baptized members can request to visit the space at any time. Along with the Auditorium and Prayer Garden, the Superet Shrine is one of the most revered sites within Superetism so far as it perpetuates Mother Trust’s presence and animates the rest of the Mother Church with Light Vibrations.

In curating the Shrine, first-generation Superetists understood that Mother Trust purposefully surrounded herself with objects that
projected a pleasing aura. Today, Superetists understand the modifications created by Mother Trust’s assemblages, and the vibrations born of them, to be distinctly beneficial to the Shrine visitor’s tripartite-self. As such, the Superet Shrine is a contributing factor to the SLC’s authority and mystique throughout the Superetist Diaspora. Mother Trust chose Her possessions based primarily on their aural characteristics. The particular groupings of objects that She displayed throughout Her apartment were not merely influenced on a personal aesthetics of décor, but on the objects’ individual vibrations, and their amplification when combined with other objects of similar vibrational nature. Mother Trust always took into consideration the “aural signature” of an object when acquiring it, regardless of whether it was a hairbrush or a stone from the Grand Canyon. The innate aural forces, trajectories, and propensities of Her belongings made them precious to Mother Trust and to Her followers as well. The fact that Mother Trust chose Her furnishings based on the vibrations they transmitted also explains why ostensibly profane objects such as doylies, sewing cases, chairs, clocks, handbags, tea sets, screwdrivers, hairpins, and photo albums have become scepters of Her presence today. Mother Trust decorated Her apartment based not only on the premise that an individual object could be energetically modified in the presence of another, but that the reaction that this proximity created would engender a new, more powerful stream of Vibrations. By surrounding herself with particular objects, Mother Trust transformed Her apartment into a prism of vibrational energy
that constantly emitted, reflected, recombined, and magnified the
different Vibrations emanating from their material sources.

Apart from clothes, furniture, dishware, and appliances, the
objects displayed in the Shrine include Mother Trust’s artwork and
scientific instruments that She created as educational aids to impart
Superet knowledge to Her followers. These objects include hand-made
ritual garments, bibles, collages, acrostics, paintings, drawings,
framed collections of rocks from the Grand Canyon, framed collections
of rocks from Bethlehem, photographs, gifts given to Mother Trust in
return for healings, charts, notebooks, and jewelry. The processes of
Levi-Straussian bricolage through which first-generation Superetists
rearranged Mother Trust’s belongings allowed first-generation
Superetists to develop and maintain new ways of staying in touch with
Her. As such, by recombining and displaying Mother Trust’s belongings,
Superetists designed the Superet Shrine to preserve a physical element
of Mother Trust on Earth.

As a place that commemoratively recreates Mother Trust’s life on
Earth, the Shrine is designed in what Performance Studies scholar
Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett would describe as “in-context.” The
objects on display are left “as they would have been” when Mother
Trust was alive, and yet their very organization adheres to a
schematic arrangement defined by their relationship the physical space
of the Shrine. “In-context” approaches to installation, establish a
“theoretical frame of reference for the viewer” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett
1998: 23), in which the layout of this living museum does not simply
attempt to display Mother Trust’s belongings as memorabilia, but as
hard evidence of Her physical existence. The implicit ontology-shifting dimension to this curation is what is reminiscent of subject-oriented, pre-Linnaean, Wunderkammer displays. As repositories of experience, the indexical nature of the objects in the Superet Shrine makes of them efficacious access points to the divine. By accentuating Mother Trust’s possessions (affixing glass doors to closets and kitchen cabinets so the visitor can see into them), first-generation Superetists strove to familiarize visitors with Mother Trust as a person and to focus one’s attention to how a messenger from God lived in human form. As a result, much like Sai Baba’s temple complex in Shirdi, India, the Superet Shrine becomes a “living map” (Roberts and Roberts 2016: 68) of Mother Trust’s life.

Much of the locale’s mystical power may lie in the fact that the Superet Shrine exists as a form of Wunderkammer that preserves Mother Trust’s presence through the coded assemblages on display. Kunst-und Wunderkammern (literally “art-and-wonder chambers”) collections appeared in western Europe during the late Renaissance and flourished up until the diversification of museums in the nineteenth century. These “curiosity cabinets” were often open to the public, and quite popular, as evinced by the Peale Museum in Philadelphia, the Capuchin Crypt in Rome, the Museum of Imperato in Naples, and the Musee du Trocadero in Paris (before its transformation into the Musee de l’Homme and later the Musee du quai Branly) (Stewart 1994: 206). The objects comprising these collections varied widely between natural wonders, curios, artwork, and human feats of ingenuity; and their
elaborate, incongruous arrangements were often just as important as the objects themselves.

What makes Wunderkammern collections notable in relation to the taxonomically standardized, modern museum that appeared in the 19th century is the fact that their objects were often displayed according to the aesthetic whims of the collector. The singular nature of such categorization— as exemplified by the Anatomical Museum of Leiden that groups its specimens (human, animal, and vegetable alike) by type of defect—is unusual enough to personalize the curatorial process, making the collector’s own sense of display a significant attribute of the collection. In the case of the Superet Shrine, the purposeful display of Mother Trust’s belongings collections reveals just as much about what first-generation Superetists sought to achieve in creating the Shrine, as it does about Mother Trust Herself.

The curatorial process that first-generation Superetists employed in designing the Superet Shrine created of Mother Trust’s apartment a complex mnemonic device akin to that of Giulio Camillo Delminio’s sixteenth-century “memory theatre.” As described by Frances Yates in The Art of Memory, the highly elaborate, stratified topography of Delminio’s memory theatre served as a form of constellation, exhaustively representing various knowledge systems (Yates 1966: 145). Much like Diderot’s 1772 encyclopedia, Delminio’s theater

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32 According to media scholar Peter Matussek, “[Giulio Camillo Delminio’s memory theatre] was a wooden building, probably as large as a single room, constructed like a Vitruvian amphitheater. The visitor stood on the stage and gazed into the auditorium, whose tiered, semicircular construction was particularly suitable for housing the memories in a clearly laid-out fashion—seven sections, each with seven arches spanning seven rising tiers. The seven sections were divided according to the seven
sought to account for a knowledge of everything, a recurring fixture of the modern period’s grand narratives. In his treatise L’idea del Teatro, Delminio described the theatre as a structured “designed to locate and administer all human concepts, everything which exists in the whole world” (Bolzoni 2015). Much like Delminio’s theatre, the Superet Shrine has power to draw down “celestial influences,” creating a benefic “intimate association” (Yates 1966:155) between itself and its visitors. Moreover, as a mental store-room “divided into memory places” (Ibid. 155), the Shrine acts as a mnemonic constellation of sacred objects acting that engenders Superet healing through a direct exposure to Mother Trust.

Framing the Shrine as a memory theater is vital to understanding how Superetists re-conceptualized once common household objects in order to commemorate Her but also experience Her healing Vibrations by engaging with Her material possessions. Not much is known today about the curatorial process as undertaken by now-deceased first-generation Superetists. What is clear, however, is that as a place of pilgrimage and remembrance, the Superet Shrine symbolizes Mother Trust’s continued presence on Earth. By manifesting Mother Trust in physical

planets known at the time - they represented the divine macrocosm of alchemical astrology. The seven tiers that rose up from them, coded by motifs from classical mythology, represented the seven spheres of the sublunary down to the elementary microcosm. On each of these stood emblematic images and signs, next to compartments for scrolls. Using an associative combination of the emblematically coded division of knowledge, it had to be possible to reproduce every imaginable micro and macrocosmic relationship in one’s own memory. Exactly how this worked remains a mystery of the hermetic occult sciences on which Camillo based his notion” (Matussek 2001).
space, the Shrine becomes a powerful indexical icon in its own right. As such, the Shrine contributes to the sacred authority of the SLC as the Superet Church headquarters.

French historian Pierre Nora’s concept of the lieu de mémoire, a place in which “memory crystallizes and secretes itself” (Nora 1989: 8), helps expand on the Shrine’s role within Superetism by demonstrating how Mother Trust’s experiences preserved in the objects on display create a personal proximity with visiting members. Nora argues that lieu de mémoire occur at the same time that an immense and intimate fund of memory disappears, surviving only as a reconstituted object beneath the gaze of those still present (ibid: 12). Facing the physical death of Mother Trust, first-generation Superetists created the Shrine not simply as a memorial to Her, but as a means of preserving Her guiding presence. According to Nora, the purpose of these spaces is to stop time, establish the state of things, and materialize the immaterial (ibid: 19). All of these factors are readily evident to Superetists who have visited the Shrine with whom I have spoken. The locale destabilizes everyday experiential realities of time and space, effectively collapsing the distance between the Superetist and Mother Trust, by bringing Her into physical presence through Her belongings.

Beyond the “aural signature” of Mother Trust’s belongings, the Superetists who consecrated the Shrine considered the “everyday” objects that Mother Trust possessed sacred by default of having been in personal contact with Her for extended periods of time. First-generation Superetists recognized that Mother Trust’s physical
belongings were relics made sacred by the aura they accrued over three decades of personal contact with Her. As such, first-generation Superetists founded the Shrine based on the premise that, as Mother Trust’s home, the space could bless visitors with Her Vibrations. Today, the apotropaic power of the Shrine is vital to understanding its prestigious position within the archive of Superet religious materials. According to Brother Jaime, “The Shrine carries Mother Trust’s Vibration because She lived and worked there through Light Vibrations. Mother Trust lived in a completely different sphere than us humans. [The Shrine] is holy due to the fact that Jesus came to here to help Her; so Jesus’ Vibration is there as well” (private conversation, 2019). Because of Mother Trust’s deictic nature, Her belongings are just as much a technology of healing as they are a testament to Her existence. Religious materials such as those found in the Superet Shrine come to embody the Church in a literal sense. Superet objects, and the coded spaces that contain them, act as vessels for God’s Light in the absence of the Church’s founder, and mnemonic aids in a collective remembering of the unexperienced.

The Superet Light Center has shared many of Mother Trust’s objects with international branches to ensure that Superetists around the benefit from the sacrosanct presence of these materials. Brother Jaime explained, Mother Trust’s belongings preserve Her presence in vibration “with those unable to visit the Holy Mother Church.” In the Mexico City branch, for example, Superetists showcase Mother Trust’s heirlooms to bless visitors to the church and maintain Her presence on the compound. Dozens of Mother Trust’s possessions are laid out in a
glass display case in the church’s foyer to greet visitors as they enter, and dozens more objects are kept in a large cardboard box under the altar to bless to the congregation during service. Each year on October 27, the day Mother Trust passed on, Superetists in Nigeria, Mexico, and the U.S. lay out Her belongings in an elaborate display as a way of commemorating Her life.

During a visit to the Mexican Superet branch last year, Brother Jaime and I discussed the function of Mother Trust’s possessions, and the importance of having them on church grounds. Brother Jaime defined these personal effects as “living, sentimental objects,” and explained that despite Superetists being well acquainted with Mother Trust in Her spiritual form, these materials “endear Her to us [by] reflecting Her physical Life” (pers. comm. 2018). According to Brother Jaime, the ability for these objects to recall and transmit Mother Trust’s presence is particularly important given the fact that Mother Trust took the “Superet Light Beam that She held in Her heart with Her when She left.” Contemporary Superetists care deeply for Mother Trust’s living relics because they not only retain Her vibrations, they maintain the Superet Light Beam that almost disappeared with Her passing. In Brother Jaime’s words, “these relics that She possessed and touched are connected with the Highest Light. Mother Trust’s belongings hold Her Vibration.” Having Mother Trust’s affects in Mexico and Nigeria therefore, “gives members the opportunity to revere Her in a personal way through seeing and touching what She touched” (pers. comm. 2018).
In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennett brilliantly emphasizes the agentic contributions of nonhuman forces in our everyday lives to counter, what She perceives to be, the anthropocentric reflexes of human language and thought (Bennett 2009: xvi). Bennett’s development of the term “vital materiality” is centered on a novel reconfiguration of waste and ecological hyper-awareness, aimed at destabilizing the self-proclaimed uniqueness of humans, by demonstrating how our existence on Earth is deeply affected by the things around us (ibid: x). Bennett introduces “vibrant materiality” as a way of understanding inorganic material as agentive beyond the mechanistic and lifeless inconsequentiality through which “things” are commonly considered in Continental philosophy (ibid: vii). Through this intervention, Bennett seeks to re-examine what might be considered worthless detritus, for example, as agentive and mediating. The author explains that, "vitality" refers to “the capacity of things, edibles, commodities, storms, and metals not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.” (ibid: viii). The idea of non-human-agents with independent forces and trajectories is vital to my interpretation of the Shrine as entity.

In delineating “vital materiality” as a theoretical lens, Jane Bennett calls for a radical shift away from humanist or anthropocentric perspectives towards ones that focuses primarily on the agency of objects. Applying this line of reasoning to the case of

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33 Even though Superet Doctrine focuses on the human condition, Superetists consider Mother Trust and Her teachings as deific rather than human.
Mother Trust’s possessions, Superetists recognize their significance as extensions of the divine. Every object in Mother Trust’s apartment, the space included, was chosen by Her based on its inherent vibrational nature as seen in its Aura. The fact that Mother Trust lived in this space, and interacted with these objects on a daily basis for over three decades, gives the Shrine a particular gravitas that is not found in any other Superet branch.

Crucial to Bennett’s construction of “vital materiality” is Bruno Latour's term “actant.” An actant denotes an ability to influence that can be either human or not; “it is that which has efficacy, can do things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events” (Bennett 2009: viii). As an actant object, made up of smaller, interconnected actant objects, the Shrine beneficially modifies visiting members on a vibrational level. The Shrine, in this case, is a powerful locus of transmission, a node that concentrates the Superet Light of God. Put simply, the spatial design of the Shrine accounts for a social world in recreating an idealized (if abstracted) vision of Mother Trust.

The Shrine is made up of different facets, but the network of relations (and the benevolent, recombinant Vibrations these networks produce) is what grants the Shrine much of its religious prestige. The Shrine is constituted by a powerful symbiotic ecology, established in the sacred networks of actant relics that it contains. The regimes of attraction among objects vital to Latour’s concept of the actant are useful in exploring the Superet Shrine as a multi-referential entity unto itself. The dynamic interplay of objects, and its effect on
actualizing the Superet Shrine as place of healing, is imperative to understanding the space as one of raw potentiality above that of passive remembrance or symbolic representation.

One of Bennett’s main points in developing her “ecology of things” concerns the idea that the “image of thoroughly instrumentalized matter prevents humans from detecting (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling) a fuller range of nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” (ibid: ix). In this regard, Superetists consider the Shrine an instrument in the arbitration of the fortuitous because it houses a living, agentive repository whose parts are caught in permanent vibrational interaction. As such, the instrumental purpose assigned to the Shrine by remaining Superetists pertains to the Shrine’s perceived ability to develop in the visitor an acuity for “a fuller range of the nonhuman powers circulating around and within human bodies” (ibid: ix).

The hubris that Bennett associates with the anthropocentric worldview preventing many humans from experiencing the constantly circulating non-human powers (ibid. xvi) is in many ways reminiscent of hedonistic human behaviors that Superetism works to recognize and eliminate as a means of transcending the “human condition.” As a member of the Church, the inability to detect a fuller range of the nonhuman vibrational phenomena circulating around and within human bodies (ibid: x) is hard evidence of one’s failings in developing “soul consciousness.” Much like other important sections of the SLC, the Shrine, as a space of vibrant materiality, has become a powerful tool in disrupting what are perceived as hubristic human behaviors.
preventing Superetists from transcending the karmic cycle of lower-consciousness existence. The Shrine, endowed with the power of the objects that constitute it, functions as a prosthesis assisting members in developing a sensitivity to sacred phenomena.

With Mother Trust’s passing came an intense collective effort on behalf of remaining members to preserve the memory of their messianic leader, and guarantee, as far as possible, that She would continue to guide Her followers towards the Light of God. The first-generation ministers who curated the Superet Shrine after Mother Trust’s passing created a topographical network of religious objects uniquely legible to the Church’s members. The Shrine’s “in-context,” biographical displays serve as a physical testament to Mother Trust’s continued presence within the SLC. The objects that Mother Trust owned, created, and used in Her everyday life are displayed in Her apartment not only as testimony to Her existence on this planet, but of Her ongoing presence as a spiritual guide. Extending Claire Harris’ assertion that the biographical religious object “becomes a positive affirmation of an ongoing stream of presence rather than a memorial to absence” (136), the Shrine, as a record of Mother Trust’s existence, keeps Her present on Earth: and in so doing becomes a place of reality affirmation and effective healing.

Since creating the Shrine, the responsibility of maintaining a connection between the human and divine realms has come to rest on the ritualized, immersive relationship between the canonical material possessions of the Church, such as Mother Thrust’s possessions and educational materials, and its remaining members. However, second-
generation Superetists have recently created non-canonical mnemonic devices that, in helping to recall Mother Trust, also manifest Her guiding presence. The most popular of these mnemonics is *In Her Presence...*, a book that increasing amounts of Superetists use to better their understanding of Superet doctrine in lieu of Mother Trust’s physical presence. Both the Superet Shrine and *In Her Presence...* illustrate the resilience of Superetists to continue learning from their departed founder, as well as the dynamic role that of material culture plays in contemporary Superetism.
Conclusion

Concerning the Divine in the Study of Religion

In Vibrant Matter, Jane Bennett offers sound advice to those studying the agency of objects, “If we think we already know what is out there, we will almost surely miss much of it” (Bennett 2009: xv). Indeed, in Superetism, as in many other religions, experiencing divine revelation requires both proclivity and discipline. I have implemented ideas and frameworks from an array of ontologies to demonstrate how divine forces manifest themselves to Superetist worshippers through the movement’s sacred materials. In keeping with the wishes of the Superetists with whom I worked, I have made a concerted effort in crafting the various passages that make up this project to showcase the complexity of Mother Trust’s ideas as manifest through the sacred materials of Superetism.

One important implication of the descriptive style of writing I have employed in this project is reflected in my attempt to look at Superetism through its own value system, while striving to work against Peter Berger’s call for a “methodological atheism” is social science research (Berger, 1967: 107). Sociologist Douglas V. Porpora explains that, “Peter Berger has been the most seminal of contemporary sociologists of religion, so much so that today the form of bracketing Berger labeled “methodological atheism” is virtually a taken for granted presupposition of the sociological study of religion” (200: 57). In The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion Berger noted that religion, in the framework of
methodological atheism, constitutes “an immense projection of human meanings into the empty vastness of the universe—a projection, to be sure, which comes back as an alien reality to haunt its producers” (Berger 1967: 100). Accordingly, as Porpora elucidates, by espousing a framework such as methodological atheism, the sociologist of religion cannot in principle approach religious experience as if it were ‘genuine,’ but instead must “treat religion as a projection onto that world of what is entirely internal to humanity” (Porpora 2006: 63).

In “Methodological Atheism, Methodological Agnosticism and Religious Experience,” Porpora interprets Berger’s methodological atheism as a continuous process of “debarring” religious explanations from consideration in the social sciences, that, in so doing, forbids sociology from allowing supernatural explanations of religious experience to compete freely with naturalistic alternatives (2006: 58). Although Berger, a practicing Lutheran, never intended for his methodological atheism to favor actual atheism in sociology (Porpora 2006: 60), his particular social constructivist approach to the study of religion has had a deep influence on the social sciences since the 1960s (ibid: 64). Consequently, the study of religion through such lenses as methodological atheism remains problematic for religious groups such as Superetists who fear that their worldviews will be misinterpreted or “flattened” by academic researchers.

The researcher’s positivist, theoretical reduction of “Other” epistemologies does a great injustice to the people who orient their existences through them. Early on in this project, I adopted an approach similar to Ninian Smart’s “methodological agnosticism” (Smart
1972). Moving beyond the ever-popular phenomenological epoché, or suspension of judgment, as methodological technique, I decided to discard the very foundational realities that I was supposed to suspend in favor of a form of radical Socratic doubt concerning reality in general. I am not a Superetist, but equally, because Superetism, as a cosmological framework, is an “entirely non-falsifiable reality” (Cox 2003: 3), I have chosen not to examine the movement’s doctrine and material culture through a single exogenous analytical framework, but instead a constellation of frameworks both exogenous and endogenous. In so doing, I have attempted to portray the movement according to the interpretations of its members rather than simply my own.

In adopting this stance, I am not advocating for a “liberal theology” with which methodological agnosticism has come to be associated in the academy (Cox 2003: 4). My own approach has centered on interpreting Superetism within the ontological frameworks through which the Church operates. As a personal approach to the study of religion and other-than-human forces, I find Russell McCutcheon’s definition of methodological agnosticism most appealing. McCutcheon admits, “not knowing how the universe really is organized – not knowing if it is organized at all – the scholar of religion seeks not to establish a position in response to this question but to describe, analyze, and compare the positions taken by others” (McCutcheon, 1999: 216-17).

As mentioned in the text’s introduction, I moved towards a more descriptive analysis of the material culture of Superetism on the insistence of the movement’s members. As many Superetists cautioned,
my initial method of asking members for their experiences rather than quoting canonical texts was particularly dangerous for the non-Superetist reader who instead of absorbing the Vibrations inherent to Mother Trust’s teachings, could absorb a tainted version of Her teachings through my misinterpretation. Ministers in Los Angeles frequently prompted me to move my focus away from their experiences in the Church lest I absorb their human personalities and consciousness in my work.

The fact that Superetists frequently emphasized Mother Trust materials as the correct sources through which I continue my study, led me to become increasingly aware of how Mother Trust’s works speak for Her, and in so doing, perpetuated the Superet movement. As a result, I chose to move away from the firsthand experiences of members towards the functions of Superet objects. In doing so, I followed a methodology that gave precedence to the views of Superetists while muting my own critical analysis. This approach granted members a large degree of say as to how I conducted this project, and what I included in its final iteration. Furthermore, by catering to the requests of Superetists with whom I worked, I pursued a form of research that sought to implement the ethnographer/Interlocutor collaboration that academia often encourages but rarely pursues.

Although summarily important to a wide range of academic fields, researchers often use critical analysis to make human cultural traits legible to the academy. In wanting to avoid casting Superetism beyond its own terms, I declined running the movement through a critical lens as much as possible. The result is an ethnography that, in lacking
solid critical analysis, is more descriptive than most. However, I am ultimately content in the fact that I wrote not to critique the politics of the religion, but to seek to understand Superetism from the perspective of its members, by focusing specifically on what matters most to them.

The primary inquiry of this paper focuses on how divine forces reveal themselves to humans through sacred objects. However, my study also touches on the important themes of American gender, religious, and immigrant histories, as well as the politics of missionary work abroad and the positive and negative effects of such work on local populations. Studying new religious movements such as Superetism remains important despite their diminished popularity in the U.S. mostly because these organizations have often continued to spread in other countries where local epistemologies fit with those of exogenous new religious movements to create meaningful narratives and realities for converts.

Studying how lesser known religious movements such as Superetism develop and spread in countries such as Nigeria and Ghana is crucial to understanding not simply the politics involved in how many of these movements survive and spread through missionary work, but also the socio-cultural climate of the host countries and needs of its citizens. By touching on these dynamics, this project raises interesting questions for further research. Namely, why are religions such as Superetism more popular in some countries than others? What services do these religions provide to people in different cultural contexts? And, how do the missionary techniques involved in spreading
the doctrine affect local populations? Moreover, Superetism may not have much influence on mainstream religious spheres in contemporary U.S. culture, but the Church emerged out of a religious revolution that was quite popular in the United States at the turn of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Therefore, tracing the popularity of American new religious movements through their continued presence may be useful in complicating the unmarked ubiquity of Catholic and Protestant institutions in contemporary American secular and religious life.

The Functions of Superet Sacred Materials

Quoting sociologist Phillipe Bourdieu, Claire Harris argues that "our 'being in the world' is frequently orientated towards and around objects, to the extent that we can argue that just as objects can be said to construct persons so they construct places and spaces; that is, there is a mutually constitutive relationship between us and them, persons and objects" (Harris 2009: 134). Superetists navigate their daily realities with an orientation towards guiding objects. The very process of becoming a Superetist is contingent on the individual learning the movement’s doctrine by first learning how to recognize, interpret, and interact with Superet material culture. Most evidently, would-be members transform themselves into Light Bearers by understanding how to live with, and rely on, Superet sacred materials.

The materials that Mother Trust introduced to Her followers are particularly vital to contemporary Superetism because they operate as “evocative objects,” capable of leading members towards unity with God even in Mother Trust’s physical absence. Anthropologist Sherry Turkle
emphasizes that “evocative objects” reach out to form active partnerships (Ibid. 308) with those who interact with them. As well as being emotional companions that help Superetists stay close to Mother Trust as they heal through Light Vibrations, the Church’s material culture is a constant “provocation to thought” (Turkle 2007: 5) that shapes the worldview of Superetists in accordance with Church doctrine. Brother Jaime has explained to me that Superetists feel at one with the materials of the Church as much as if Mother Trust were physically personified in these them. Superet materials attract the Light of God to planet Earth, allowing Superetists to transcend the virulence of their human consciousness in order to reincarnate into a state of higher spiritual enlightenment. Ultimately, Due to their ability to manifest Mother Trust and the Light of God, Superet materials act as catalysts for self-creation in Superet doctrine.

This project has sought to examine the multiple, complementary functions that Superet materials perform within Superetism. I have analyzed Superet sacred materials through four, non-discreet categories based on how they are used by Superetists. The functions are categorized as pharmacological technologies, mnemonic devices, demarcations of Superet space, and tools for doctrinal instruction.

1. Pharmacological technologies. Mother Trust designed Superet materials in communion with Jesus Christ as technologies of healing that attract and broadcast the Superet Light of God. Superet materials are regularly used by Superetists through ritualized exercises, such as one’s daily prayers, to maintain the tripartite-self clear of “elementals.” This cycle of healing “out of” the human condition is
geared towards the complete integration of the individual Soul with the Light of God Superet; the ultimate goal of Superetism. The continued state of healing through ritualized manipulation of sacred materials embodies the core tenet of Superet ideology—becoming attuned to the Will of God. The relentless pursuance of a clear body, spirit, and soul (the tripartite-self) by interacting with Superet materials is essential to reincarnating in a higher sphere of consciousness after physical death. The fact that Superet materials are the premier technologies necessary to attaining the movement’s highest ideals has made them fundamental to Superetism past and present.

2. Mnemonic devices. First and Second-generation Superetists compiled Mother Trust’s belongings and the oral histories of members who knew Her to supplant the void left by Her physical death in 1957. These “new” Superet materials act both as memorials to Mother Trust and as agentive relics that help members heal by ensuring Mother Trust’s presence is maintained in the space in which they are displayed. Ultimately, these non-canonical religious devices act as a surrogate for Mother Trust, facilitating the experiences of contemporary Superetist by edifying Her presence.

3. Demarcations of Superet space. The decorative use of sacred materials within the confines of a church compound is imperative in creating a sense of legitimacy, identity, alliance, control, and prestige. The emblematic functions of Superet material culture are especially important given that Superetism remains largely unknown outside of its immediate communities. Moreover, Superet materials gain a prestige internationally because they remain strictly regulated
singular objects. The fact that Superet materials are only produced and distributed by the Mother Church in Los Angeles, and the Mexico City branch gives these materials an added function as links in an artefactual network that physically and vibrationally connects the Superet diaspora across the globe.

4. Tools for doctrinal instruction. Mother Trust meticulously delineated all aspects of Superet religious life in Her Wonder Books, and illustrated these “Laws” in Her artworks. These documents are therefore essential to the Superet experience as religious technologies that help keep members “on the right path.” The functions of these materials may be as disparate as defining the duties of ministers, guiding the instruction of would-be members, delineating the process for the establishment of international branches, and preparing the tripartite-self of would-be members through the 12 Lesson Home Course.

Superet materials often perform the above-listed roles simultaneously. As such, they comprise a complex rhizome that has upheld Superetism for almost one hundred years despite the physical loss of the movement’s founder sixty-three years ago, and the declining popularity of the movement in the U.S. since then. Superet objects have continued to support the movement because they ultimately comprise it. Superet materials are the physical structures of Superet Churches, as well as the guarantee that the Light of God still reaches Earth despite the loss of its original beacon, Mother Trust.
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