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Religious Dynamics of Secrecy in Cold War American Life

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in Religious Studies

by

Shelby Lynn King

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June 2024

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June 2024

Religious Dynamics of Secrecy in Cold War American Life

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by

Shelby Lynn King

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ABSTRACT

Religious Dynamics of Secrecy in Cold War American Life

by

Shelby Lynn King

"Religious Dynamics of Secrecy in Cold War American Life," explores the role religion has played in conceptualizations, imaginations, and rituals of secrecy in twentieth-century American history. I examine these articulations of secrecy and religion in two case studies from the 1950s and mid-1970s, which highlight how Americans have recruited the language and conceptual schema of religion to convey the gravity and internal logic of secrecy, as well as to negotiate the limits of its acceptability in American democracy. In so doing, I demonstrate how secrecy is not only a matter *for* religion, but also a matter *of* religion.

My first case study addresses the entanglement of secrecy and religion in Cold War constructions of "brainwashing." I take as my starting point the influential representation of brainwashing found in Richard Condon's classic 1959 novel, *The Manchurian Candidate.* I then trace the history of this icon of Cold War popular culture to its origins in the U.S. intelligence community following the scandalous false confessions of bacteriological warfare issued by American POWs in the Korean War. In addition to traditional historical analysis, I aim to shed new light on the relevance of religion in early Cold War American culture and politics by redeploying the ancient politico-religious category of *maleficium* as a framework to highlight brainwashing's early associations with diabolical magic, secret influence, and perceived transgressions of normative gender roles and sexuality. Through these historical and cultural analyses, I situate the history of brainwashing at the nexus of Cold War religion and politics,

illuminating the religious significance of fears and fantasies of secret influence in the spheres of domestic life and foreign policy.

My second case study examines debates surrounding the expanding national security state through close attention to the 1971-1973 Pentagon Papers trial, in which co-defendants Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo were indicted on espionage charges for conspiring to leak classified documents pertaining to the Vietnam War. Here, I focus on material manifestations of "sacred" national secrets, from official prohibitions against their disclosure to the spectacle of their presentation throughout the course of the trial. In this case, I build on a courtroom reporter's reflection on the striking significance of an otherwise everyday object—namely, a cardboard box. This, of course, was no ordinary box, but rather a vessel containing the TOP-SECRET documents known colloquially as the "Pentagon Papers." This reporter's description rendered this ordinary cardboard box an emblem with religious significance: a "totem of the age of information." Using this courtroom description as an entry point into a wider analysis of Cold War religion and politics, I demonstrate the analytical import of ascriptions of sacred value to classified information. This material analysis of religion provides a new avenue for re-examining the sacred significance attributed to state secrets, bringing into focus the socio-cultural meanings underpinning and shaping the politics of secrecy in American history.

In my concluding epilogue, I address the legacy of these Cold War developments in contemporary American politics in view of recent speculations surrounding the impending rise of a "New Cold War." As this study will demonstrate, exploring the origins and historical transformations of these Cold War entanglements of secrecy, religion, and politics can provide a new lens onto current manifestations of these entanglements in the press headlines and cultural debates shaping American society today.

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Introduction

> If the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface, or of waging a victorious battle against them, there is every reason to seize them.
>
> — André Breton[1]

> The peculiarity of treasure lies in the tension between the splendor it should radiate and the secrecy which is its protection.
>
> —Elias Canetti[2]

"So I guess we're in a new cold war." These were the words with which cultural commentator David Brooks began his March 23, 2023, op-ed for the *New York Times*, in which he speculated that, given the present geopolitical conditions shaping contemporary American life, we may be on the brink of yet another Cold War with China and Russia. With tensions rising once again between the United States and the very foes it faced the first time around, it is perhaps no surprise to find that Brooks "can't help wondering: What will this cold war look like? Will this one transform American society the way the last one did?"[3]

Notably, David Brooks is also the author of the recent *New York Times* bestseller, *How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen*, which promises to instruct readers in the art of getting deep into the hidden recesses of the minds of others so that they may do the same to, or for, us.[4] It is thus all the more curious to note that, in his preoccupation

[1] André Breton, "Manifesto of Surrealism" (1924) in *Manifestoes of Surrealism,* trans. by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 10.
[2] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (*Masse und Macht,* 1960; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1984).
[3] David Brooks, "The Cold War With China Is Changing Everything," *New York Times* (Mar. 23, 2023), https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/23/opinion/cold-war-china-chips.html.
[4] David Brooks, *How to Know a Person: The Art of Seeing Others Deeply and Being Deeply Seen* (New York, NY: Random House, 2023).

with unveiling the unseen depths of others, Brooks echoes a defining tension of the very era whose return he claims to foresee—that is, a tension between the salience of secrets and the urgent desire to unmask them. On this point, we might do well to keep in mind how in the "maze of deceptions and counterdeceptions formative of social realness," as anthropologist Michael Taussig has argued, "unmasking acquires enormous dramatic, no less than philosophical and religious, importance."[5]

Perhaps nowhere in American history has the power of secrecy and the drama of its unmasking been more culturally pervasive, and more politically urgent, than in the era of the Cold War. In this era of covert warfare, Americans were cautioned to be on alert for communist infiltrators embedded in various domestic organizations. Lawmakers, law enforcement, and military and intelligence agencies embarked on sprawling missions to unmask these communists and their "fellow travelers," seeking phantoms of enemy forces at home and abroad that were, at once, manifestations of secrecy and conduits for its negotiation. Theirs was a religious quest against the hidden forces that threatened to pollute the elements of American society deemed most sacred: the redemptive power of democracy, the missionary zeal guiding the righteous cause of freedom, the purity of the home, the wholesomeness of the family, the fortitude of the sovereign State, and the white, masculine, Christian nationalist ideology that presumed to protect them all.[6]

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[5] Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 107-108.

[6] The historiography of religion in the Cold War has grown substantially over the past two decades, with a number of noteworthy studies now shedding light on the significant—though often overlooked—role that religion played in Cold War American foreign policy and military strategy. See, e.g., Dianne Kirby (ed), *Religion and the Cold War* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008); T. Jeremy Gunn, *Spiritual Weapons: The Cold War and the Forging of an American National Religion* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009); Jason W. Stevens, *God-Fearing and Free: A Spiritual History of America's Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010); Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America's Religious Battle Against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011).

The outset of the Cold War coincided with the emergence of institutions of national security whose operation rendered state secrecy a protective shield against the influence of foreign adversaries. The expanding power of state secrecy in the aftermath of WWII was enabled and reinforced by an official classification system that would mark certain types of information especially sensitive, central to the success of American military and intelligence efforts, and beyond the ken of ordinary civilians. This Cold War reification of classified information reflected a more dynamic, totalizing trend toward the reification of state secrecy itself. Insofar as state secrecy in the Cold War era was "set apart" from the profane elements of everyday life, it acquired, per Émile Durkheim's definition of the sacred, a certain religious value.[7]

This dissertation aims to shed light on this overlooked entanglement of secrecy and religion in Cold War American life, to trace its presence in various arenas in which it is especially salient, and to track changes in the alignment of its constituent elements across the span of mid-twentieth century American history. I take as my case studies two snapshots of secrecy in Cold War America. First, I explore the motif of secret influence through the popular image of brainwashing that emerged in the wake of the Korean War, which serves as a prism for viewing entanglements of secrecy and religion in American popular culture at the dawn of the Cold War. Second, I turn to the leak of the Pentagon Papers in 1971 to examine these entanglements in issues of national security, classified information, and government power. Through these case studies, I examine some of the historical developments that rendered the issue of secrecy a dominant fixture in Cold War American life, surfacing as both a barrier to and an operational

[7] This characterization of the sacred is a crucial component of Durkheim's definition of religion: "A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them." Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,* Karen E. Fields (trans.), (NY: The Free Press, 1995), 44.

necessity for global power, a consequential point of social leverage, and a significant mode of cultural currency.

For Cold War-era Americans, issues of secrecy invited religious comparison, the significance of which has been largely overlooked in historiographies of religion and politics, the phenomenology of secrecy, and cultural studies of religion. Such oversights may stem from the degree to which religious references seem commonplace, operating as emphatic expressions of the power, prestige, and influence of various fixtures of American society and culture. Yet this commonplace usage is itself revealing, suggesting the degree to which religious terms and ritual structures have been integrated thoroughly into American social discourse in ways that are both broadly intelligible and culturally meaningful.

While the entanglement of secrecy and religion can be observed at the discursive level, where religious motifs may operate as free-floating signifiers, there is a significant phenomenological—that is to say, experiential—dimension to this entanglement, as well.[8] David Chidester has drawn attention to this phenomenological entanglement by highlighting the significant role secrecy can play in "generating the mystery that invests values with a sacred aura."[9] Here, Chidester echoes Kees Bolle's observations on the confluence of mystery, secrecy, and religion. In his analysis of the cultivation of secrecy in religious institutions, Bolle

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[8] Phenomenology concerns, broadly, the study of consciousness and experience from the first-person perspective so as to locate some fundamental or essential quality of various forms of experience, e.g., perception, thought, imagination, desire, etc. A central component of phenomenology is the concept of *epochē* (from the Greek, "to abstain"), which constitutes a suspension, or a "bracketing," of the investigator's own assumptions in order to isolate and describe the essence of some object/experience of interest. Phenomenology of religion (see, e.g., Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986)) builds on approaches developed in the field of philosophical phenomenology (see, e.g., Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, [1931] 1960); Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Donald Landes (London: Routledge, 2012); and Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York, NY: Harper Perennial, [1927] 2008). Notably, this approach can be seen also in the work of French social theorist Roger Caillois (discussed below). For an analysis of the phenomenological dimensions of Caillois' work, as well as early twentieth-century surrealists, see the editor's introduction to Roger Caillois, *The Edge of Surrealism: A Roger Caillois Reader,* edited by Claudine Frank, trans. Claudine Frank and Camille Naish (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

[9] David Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2018), 97.

characterized secrecy as the "wellsprings of real life, real knowledge, real behavior," maintaining that human life depends upon "mysteries of a constitutive, basic, binding meaning," and that religion has served as the most enduring source of such mystery—forever "seek[ing] its original center again," its central mystery, and "renew[ing] the very power that impelled it."[10]

In his attention to secrecy and mystery as constitutive, binding elements of social meaning, Bolle builds on the path paved by Georg Simmel, who argued similarly that modern social life requires a certain degree of secrecy, even as it privileges ideals of honesty. Simmel's work draws out the phenomenological and, indeed, metaphysical qualities of secrecy in ways that inform this study of secrecy and religion. Secrecy, he argues, is "sustained by the consciousness that it *might* be exploited, and therefore confers power to modify fortunes, to produce surprises, joys, and calamities," and thus, "the possibility and the temptation of treachery plays around the secret, and the external danger of being discovered is interwoven with the internal danger of self-discovery, which has the fascination of the brink of a precipice." It simultaneously "sets barriers between men" while offering "the seductive temptation to break through the barriers by gossip or confession." This sense of temptation, he observed most vividly, "accompanies the psychical life of the secret like an overtone."[11]

In this confluence of treachery and seduction, danger and fascination, Simmel's portrayal of secrecy approximates Roger Caillois' characterization of the sacred. For, as Caillois argued in *Man and the Sacred*, "the abiding truth of the sacred resides simultaneously in the fascination of flame and the horror of putrefaction."[12] Drawing on Rudolf Otto's study of the "subjective" and sentimental side of the sacred in *The Idea of the Holy*, Caillois suggests that the sacred is more like

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[10] Kees W. Bolle (ed.), *Secrecy in Religions* (Leiden and New York: E.J. Brill, 1987), Studies in the History of Religions (Supplements to *Numen*) XLIX, 5, 10.
[11] Georg Simmel, "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies," *The American Journal of Sociology* Vol. XI, No. 4 (January 1906): 441-98.
[12] Roger Caillois, *Man and the Sacred,* trans. Meyer Barash (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), 138.

a "category of feeling" than any discernible object or condition: "A feeling of special reverence imbues the believer, which fortifies his faith against critical inquiry, makes it immune to discussion, and places it outside and beyond reason." Rather than some inherent property, the sacred is "a mysterious aura that has been added to things," an aura of *tremendum et fascinans,* inciting ambivalent feelings of both terror and reverence.[13]

In contrast to Rudolf Otto's understanding of the "holy," the terminology of the "sacred" as it appears in this dissertation does not require an ontological priority or presupposition.[14] Whereas Otto presumed the sacred to be *sui generis* and outside the bounds of the empirical world, this study of secrecy and religion considers how the sacred has been experienced, perceived, debated, and generated historically *within* the empirical world. It may thus be situated, in part, against the backdrop of Émile Durkheim's attention to the social constructions of religion.

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Durkheim argued that religion must be understood as "an eminently social thing," "a fundamental and permanent aspect of humanity" premised upon "collective representations that express collective realities," whose roots can therefore be traced to society itself.[15] At base, these collective representations presuppose "a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes—two opposite genera," namely, the sacred and the profane. The notion of the sacred, he argued, is derived from the human experience of "collective effervescence," the "exceptionally powerful stimulant" we experience as a result of congregating with other members of our society in pursuit of a common aim. The sacred is "thrown into an ideal and transcendent milieu, while the residuum,"

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[13] Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, 20.
[14] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, JW Harvey, trans. (Oxford University Press, [1917] 1923).
[15] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms,* 9, 1.

the profane, "is abandoned as the property of the material world." Whether in the experience of collective effervescence or in the many symbolic forms it may take as its emotional effects are crystallized into collective representations, the sacred is designated as that which is "set apart" from the every day, "that which the profane must not and cannot touch with impunity."[16] For the purposes of this dissertation, Durkheim's alignment of the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane with the seemingly secular binary of the collective and the individual lays the groundwork for examining the religious significance of Cold War politics and popular culture.

Insofar as the academic category of the sacred appears throughout this dissertation, it is worth noting how this category has been critiqued by some scholars, both within and outside the field of Religious Studies. Such critiques have drawn our attention to the practical and methodological problem of the degree to which such frameworks of meaning may fail to fit the experiences and realities of the peoples and traditions they are made to describe. History of Religions scholar Charles Long, for instance, drew attention to the racial and colonial roots of this Western Christian category of the sacred, contending that it marked the hegemonic and ethnocentric limit point for understanding "*an-other*" religious experience.[17] Giorgio Agamben has problematized the term on definitional and etymological grounds, characterizing the common scholarly presumption of the ambivalence of the sacred—a presumption informing Caillois' definition of the term—as a "scientific mythologeme" that has inaccurately translated the ancient meaning of the Latin *sacer*.[18] Existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir's broader feminist critique of the sexist logic of binary categories is worth considering here, too; while de Beauvoir's argument centered on the gendered binary that renders the female a contingent Other

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[16] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms,* 34-38.
[17] Charles Long, "Interpretations of Black Religion in America," in Charles Long, *Significations: Signs, Symbols, and Images in the Interpretation of Religion* (Aurora, CO: Davies Group Publishers [1986] 1995), 145-170.
[18] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. D Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 75-80.

to the male Absolute, her critique could be extended to problematize the binary logic underpinning distinctions between the sacred and the profane, as well.[19]

While acknowledging such critiques, we cannot fail to see how outside the academy, the notion of the sacred holds continuing relevance in American society, whether as a rhetorical device to signify something "set apart" from the everyday (per Durkheim's definition), or as a value claim or attributive statement. As "the sacred" was used to convey meaning by participants in the two snapshots of Cold War secrecy examined in this dissertation, it must be taken seriously here, for it had (and has) real effects and real meaning in American history and culture. On this point, Long might have agreed, for, alongside his compelling critique of the scholarly treatment of the category of the sacred, he expressed appreciation for History of Religions scholar Mircea Eliade's "insist[ence] that human work and the imagination of the reality of matter has never totally obliterated the fact that the human is also a 'technician of the sacred.'"[20] Similarly, Chidester has observed that 'the sacred' is not "merely given, [it] is produced through the religious labor of interpretation and ritualization as both a poetics of meaning and a politics of power relations."[21]

Taking seriously such religious interpretations, ritualizations, and ascriptions of sacred value provides an entry point into Cold War entanglements of secrecy, religion, and politics, as well as the inner logic that rendered these entanglements intelligible, meaningful, and—for some—the stuff of common sense. For, beyond the pulpit and the political platform, religious dimensions of secrecy animated wide-ranging arenas of Cold War American society, from popular culture to realpolitik.

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[19] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex,* ed. and trans. H.M. Parshley (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956).
[20] Charles Long, "Mircea Eliade and the Imagination of Matter," in Charles H. Long (ed.), *Ellipsis: The Collected Writings of Charles H. Long* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 117-128.
[21] David Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 96.

In my first chapter, I argue that the religio-historical significance of the Cold War notion of brainwashing hinges on its configuration of a popular theology of evil. I begin by examining the elements of this Cold War theodicy as they emerge in Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate*, as well as John Frankenheimer's 1962 film adaptation of the novel.[22] I turn then to the historical context in which the idea of brainwashing arises, presenting comparative cases from public discourse on brainwashing alongside now-declassified files of government experiments in mind-control, then using these as a pivot point for reflecting upon the socio-historical conditions that made this image of brainwashing a potent ideological representation for popular culture and covert military and intelligence operations alike.

Finally, in light of these two points of analysis, I address the religio-historical meaning of the cultural fashion of brainwashing as an evocation of the Cold War popular theology of evil. This emergent theodicy is marked by its reformulation of a traditionally Christian theodicy of the primordial spiritual Fall of humankind on the one hand, and its defacement of normative American ideals on the other. It is further characterized by socio-historical associations between secrecy, Orientalist racialization, gender and sexuality, and comingled fears and fantasies of the malevolent magic of the Other. Taken together, these analyses demonstrate that the significant social concerns expressed by the cultural fashion of brainwashing render it an instrumental subject for both Cold War studies and American religious history alike.

In this first chapter, I shed new light on the relevance of religion in early Cold War American culture and politics by redeploying the ancient politico-religious category of *maleficium* as a framework to highlight brainwashing's early associations with diabolical magic and secret

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[22] Richard Condon, *The Manchurian Candidate* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959); *The Manchurian Candidate*, directed by John Frankenheimer, written by George Axelrod (United Artists, 1962). The film stars Laurence Harvey as Raymond Shaw, Frank Sinatra as Captain Bennett Marco, Angela Lansbury as Ramond's mother, Eleanor Iselin, James Gregory as Raymond's stepfather, Johnny Iselin, and Kigh Dhiegh as Yen Lo.

influence. From its origin as a political problem in Roman antiquity to its reformulation as a legal problem in early Christian trials of idolatry and late Medieval trials of witchcraft, the category of *maleficium* has served to police the boundaries of acceptable society and proper religion. Throughout its shifting definitions and social functions, the term has carried connotations of secrecy and otherness, of harmful magic performed by malevolent forces under the cloak of night—in short, the magic of the Other, a subject of, and for, both fear and fantasy.[23]

In drawing on this category as a theoretical framework, I introduce a methodological approach that I follow throughout this dissertation—one informed by Taussig's observation concerning the analytical value of "rejuxtaposing the terms of the colonial inquiry, recycling and thus transforming the anthropology developed in Europe and North America through the study of colonized peoples back into and onto the societies in which it was instituted, where the terms and practices imposed upon and appropriated from the colonies, like *fetish, sorcery* (the *maleficium*), and *taboo*, are redeemed and come alive with new intensity."[24]

As William Pietz observed, the genealogy of *maleficium* is entwined with the colonial construction of the "fetish," whose materialist logic entailed the notion of making and of made objects, of artificiality, fraud, and subversion. A striking parallel emerges when the malevolent magic of brainwashing is viewed against the backdrop of Pietz's definition of the fetish as "a

[23] Martha Rampton has charted the history of *maleficium* from its presence in pagan rites of Roman antiquity to the early patristic era of Christianity, and notably, she identifies secrecy as a crucial component to this form of sorcery as it was theorized throughout this span of history. Martha Rampton, "Maleficium and Traffic with the Dead," in *Trafficking with Demons: Magic, Ritual, and Gender from Late Antiquity to 1000* (Cornell University Press, 2022): 146-163; On theories of the magic of the Other, see, e.g., Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question ... Homi K. Bhabha Reconsiders the Stereotype and Colonial Discourse," *Screen* 24 (1983): 18-36; Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Michael Taussig, "Viscerality, Faith, and Skepticism: Another Theory of Magic," in *In Near Ruins: Cultural Theory at The End of the Century*, Nicholas B. Dirks, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 221-56.
[24] Michael Taussig, "Maleficium: State Fetishism," in *The Nervous System* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 117.

kind of external controlling organ directed by powers outside the affected person's will," representing "a subversion of the ideal of the autonomously determined self." [25]

The entwined notion of *maleficium* provides an especially instructive framework for assessing the problem of evil in *The Manchurian Candidate*, for it brings our attention to the very elements that animate the story's representation of brainwashing: secrecy, subversion, malevolence, deception, fetishes, otherness, and magic. Through the prism of *maleficium,* we can situate both the makers and the making of Raymond Shaw, the story's protagonist, as components of a broader theological proposition concerning the identification and location of evil in Cold War society. To sketch out the components of this theological situation, I turn to selected excerpts from Condon's novel, alongside features of Frankenheimer's film adaptation, limiting my scope to the three elements most relevant for the purposes of my argument: the story's two central antagonists, Dr. Yen Lo and Eleanor Iselin, and its representations of brainwashing as a form of malevolent magic.

By combining these historical and cultural analyses, I situate the history of brainwashing at the nexus of Cold War religion and politics, illuminating the religious significance of fears and fantasies of secret influence in the spheres of domestic life and foreign policy. In this assessment, I build on the work of Michael Rogin, whose essay on American demonology in Cold War films charted a pathway for taking seriously the Cold War's fictions of brainwashing as an in-road to some of the cultural dynamics I explore in this first snapshot of secrecy.

In the context of Cold War America, as Rogin put it most vividly, the "celluloid medium of secret influence became the message."[26] For Rogin, Cold War fictions of brainwashing

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[25] William Pietz, "The Problem of the Fetish, II: The Origin of the Fetish," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics,* No. 13 (Spring, 1987): 23-45.

[26] Michael Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly: Communism, Motherhood, and Cold War Movies," *Representations*, No. 6 (Spring, 1984): 1–36. Here, Rogin is playing—fittingly--on the wordplay of Marshall McLuhan, who argued in his classic study, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1964] 1994), that the medium of technology *was* the message, rather than the mere conveyor of messages.

reflected a particular ideological development that "established a double division, then, between the free man and the state on the one hand, the free state and the slave state on the other." If, as Kathryn Lofton has argued, "religion appears as a term that organizes distinctions between control and freedom," then the Cold War notion of brainwashing—portrayed as a mind-controlling assault on individual free will—appears as an inherently religious cultural production.[27]

Richard Condon himself seemed to indicate as much when, in 1977, he theorized mind control as an intuitively theological concept: "No one—not anyone—needs theologians to answer the question: 'Where does the soul live?' We know the soul lives in the mind because the soul is the mind in all of its unfathomably intricate individual conditioning. It is the mind of intent, of hope, of purpose, of achievement by the spirit beyond achievement by physical action."[28] In this theology of mind control, Condon located the conditioned mind at the nexus of the human soul, individual freedom, and spiritual striving. In so doing, he echoed the religious framework in which influential American Cold Warriors conceptualized and conveyed the dangers of brainwashing.

This religious framework was evident in then-CIA Director Allen Dulles's speech on "Brain Warfare," delivered to the National Alumni Conference at Princeton University in 1953, in which he highlighted the "far reaching implications" of brainwashing as an enemy weapon "thwarting our own program for spreading the gospel of freedom." "Its aim," he explained, "is to condition the mind so that it no longer reacts on a free will or rational basis but responds to

[27] Lofton continues: "Whenever we see dreams of and for the world articulated, whenever we see those dreams organized into legible rituals, schematics, and habits, we glimpse the domain that the word religion contributes to describe. Whenever we see the real ways we organize ourselves to survive our impossible distance from those dreams, we grasp why religion exists. Not because the religious is that dreaming or those realities. Because religion has been a word used to summarize the habits by which we demarcate ourselves as certain kinds of dreamers and makers." Kathryn Lofton, *Consuming Religion* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 2-3.
[28] Richard Condon, foreword to Walter Bowart, *Operation Mind Control* (Glasgow: Fontana, 1978), 13-17.

impulses implanted from outside." For Dulles, the human mind was both precious in value and exceedingly vulnerable, "the most delicate of all instruments…so finely adjusted, so susceptible to the impact of outside influences that it is proving a malleable tool in the hands of sinister men."[29] Brainwashing thus appeared to threaten not only the missionary efforts of American foreign policy but the sanctity of free will itself. For FBI director J. Edgar Hoover, this enemy weapon was indeed one of deep religious consequence, for, in his dire description, what the Communists sought was a way to remake man "from a child of God into a soulless social cog."[30]

On the surface, Condon's novel, *The Manchurian Candidate*—and likewise, John Frankenheimer's 1962 film adaptation—invited audiences to reflect on this contemporary socio-political crisis. Gesturing with scant subtlety toward Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist crusade, both the novel and the film posed the possibility that the "enemy" was not only closer than Americans thought, but indeed among them, embedded within their very institutions.[31] Yet as I show in this case, there is a deeper religious significance to Condon's brainwashing fiction, as well—one that invites reflection on the continued relevance of Mircea Eliade's theory of what he termed "cultural fashions."

According to Eliade's definition, "cultural fashions" are "philosophical and literary vogues" marked by a striking "imperviousness to criticism."[32] As Eliade observed, "for a particular theory or philosophy to become popular, to be à la mode, *en vogue*, implies neither that it is a remarkable creation nor that it is devoid of all value," for "it does not matter whether the facts in question and their interpretation are true or not." It does not matter because, as Eliade

[29] Allen Dulles, "Brain Warfare," Summary of Remarks by Mr. Allen W. Dulles at the National Alumni Conference of the Graduate Council of Princeton University, Hot Springs, VA. (April 10, 1953).
[30] J. Edgar Hoover, *Masters of Deceit: The Story of Communism and How to Fight It* (New York, NY: Holt, 1958).
[31] This proposition concerning the enemy within is a key feature of Cold War cinema, as Michael Rogin has demonstrated. See, e.g., Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly."
[32] Mircea Eliade, "Cultural Fashions and History of Religions" in *Occultism, Witchcraft, and Cultural Fashions: Essays in Comparative Religions* (University of Chicago Press, 1976), 1-17.

noted, "No amount of criticism can destroy a vogue." It was in this striking resiliency that Eliade identified "something 'religious'" at work in cultural fashions: their popularity "reveals something of Western man's dissatisfactions, drives, and nostalgias." In short, Eliade's identification of deeper religious meanings embedded in and expressed through the very popularity of "cultural fashions" provides a way to think and speak about the "popular" as a site for serious social inquiry, and thus presents an opening for analyzing some of the religious dynamics of popular culture in the Cold War period in which Condon's representation of brainwashing emerged.

Eliade's *oeuvre* remains a relevant, albeit debated, contribution to the study of religious history. Most notably, in his endeavor to bridge history and morphology, Eliade introduced the field of *histoire des religions* as a methodological framework for assessing transhistorical and cross-cultural meanings of mythic patterns and archetypes. As far as Eliade was concerned, the history of religions had less to do with historical events than with revalorizations and devalorizations of core archetypes. This framework has been critiqued for presuming an overly consensual view of the cultural meaning of symbols, myths, and rituals that is consequentially inattentive to the ways in which such meaning has been debated, reformulated, and deconstructed.[33] His emphasis on synchronic morphology has been critiqued likewise for neglecting the diachronic history in which religious meaning has been shaped by real historical people, political conditions, social crises, and cultural conflicts.[34]

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[33] See, e.g., Bruce Lincoln's notion of "profanophany" as an implied critique of Eliade's concept of "hierophany" in *Discourse and the Construction of Society* (Oxford University Press, 1989), 125-27.

[34] J.Z. Smith's critiques of Eliade's approach are most noteworthy, insofar as his methodology introduces a paradigmatic shift from Eliade's *histoires de religions* to a comparative History of Religions attentive to specific historical, social, and political conditions. See, e.g., Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), chapters 2, 3, 5; Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), chapters 1-4, 16-17; Smith, *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1978; repr., Chicago University Press, 1993), chapters 4-7, 11-13. Though not referring to Eliade *per se,* Richard Slotkin's discussion of the concept of "genre" reflects the critiques cited above. He critiques certain definitions (like Eliade's) of the significance of cultural productions as rooted in universal

Such criticism notwithstanding, Eliade's approach also extended an invitation for an appreciation of the religious significance of seemingly secular phenomena, anticipating later key developments in the field of religious studies, from theories of material religion to analyses of religious dimensions in "everyday" life.[35] His analysis of cultural fashions, in particular, opened the way for a serious consideration of popular culture as a site of religious significance. Thus, when it comes to analyzing the relationship between religion and popular cultural productions, as I do in this first snapshot of Cold War secrecy, Eliade's work remains useful to think with. Thus, for my purposes, his identification of the religious quality of "cultural fashions" presents an opportunity for reassessing the popularity of Condon's influential representation of brainwashing not only as an indicator of its cultural relevancy but also as a signpost to its deeper religious significance.

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archetypes, which insist that, "the forms of cultural expression develop from an autonomous (or semi-autonomous) mental activity in which a linguistic or psychological program of some sort—a 'collective unconscious' or a 'grammar' of tropes or archetypes—determines the essential structure of all myth/ideological expression. …but such approaches tend to obscure the importance of historical experience and change in the shaping of specific myth/ideological systems and in the social life of the communities the systems serve." Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation: The Myth of the Frontier in Twentieth-Century America* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

[35] See, e.g., T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (University of Chicago Press, 1981); T.J. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (NY: Basic Books, 1994); R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); Richard Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation* (1998); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Harvard University Press, 2000); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2005); Fred Nadis, *Wonder Shows: Performing Science, Magic, and Religion in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Simon During, *Modern Enchantments: The Cultural Power of Secular Magic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011); Lofton, *Consuming Religion*; David Walker, "The Humbug in American Religion: Ritual Theories of Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 30-74; Jane Naomi Iwamura, *Virtual Orientalism: Asian Religions and American Popular Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2010); David Chidester, "The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, and the Potlatch of Rock 'n' Roll: Theoretical Models for the Study of Religion in American Popular Culture," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Winter, 1996): 743-765; David Chidester, *Authentic Fakes: Religion and American Popular Culture* (University of Chicago Press, 2005); David Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics* (Oakland: UC Press, 2018); Mark C., Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion* (University of Chicago, 1992). For more on the significance of the "everyday" and "low-brow" theories of popular culture, see, Stuart Hall's influential analysis, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular,'" in *People's History and Socialist Theory,* R. Samuel, ed. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981): 227-40.

In sum, *The Manchurian Candidate* offers a focusing lens for examining religious dynamics at play in the fears and fantasies of secret influence emerging in Cold War American popular culture. As I show in this first case study, a "sacred aura" adheres to this story of brainwashing in explicitly religious motifs and metaphors as well as implicitly religious elements that structure its central arc. The key point I wish to make, though, is that this ostensibly secular story also portrays an essentially religious, and particularly Christian, narrative operative in the Cold War construction of brainwashing more broadly.

My second case study examine questions of government secrecy through close attention to the 1971-1973 Pentagon Papers trial, in which co-defendants Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo were indicted on espionage charges for conspiring to leak classified documents pertaining to the Vietnam War. Here, I focus on material manifestations of "sacred" national secrets, from official prohibitions against their disclosure to the spectacle of their presentation throughout the course of the trial. In this case, I build on courtroom reporter Peter Schrag's reflection on the striking significance of an otherwise everyday object—namely, a cardboard box. This, of course, was no ordinary box, but rather a vessel containing the TOP-SECRET documents known colloquially as the "Pentagon Papers." This reporter's description rendered this ordinary cardboard box an emblem with religious significance: a "totem of the age of information." Using this courtroom description as an entry point into a wider analysis of Cold War religion and politics, I demonstrate the analytical import of ascriptions of sacred value to classified information. This material analysis of religion provides a new avenue for re-examining the sacred significance attributed to state secrets, bringing into focus the socio-cultural meanings underpinning and shaping the politics of secrecy in American history.

What makes the case of the Pentagon Papers worth revisiting today is the central role that secrecy played in the origin and production of these classified documents, in the legal

proceedings that stemmed from their exposure, and in the fever-pitch debates that arose in response to these factors. It was secrecy that inspired and motivated the defendants to take revelatory action; it was secrecy, on the part of the government no less than the defendants, that provided the impetus for the trial.

The issue of state secrecy proved multidimensional and seductive enough to draw attention from major social institutions, from the government to the press, each of which felt the resonance of its particular mission in the flashbang energy of conspicuous concealment. And it is with this issue of conspicuous concealment that the sacred seems most particularly entangled in the case of the Pentagon Papers. Notions of sacred power, authority, and ritual, as well as acts of desecration, transgression, and defacement of the sacred, pulse within and animate the sites of secrecy in this case—in classification labels, blatant acts of government deception, shoddy cardboard boxes holding TOP-SECRET documents, bureaucratic hierarchies structuring who had the authority and legitimate "need to know," and a network of policy-makers and covert operatives, each of them knowing what not to know when circumstances necessitated dissimulation.

At each stage in the storied history of the Pentagon Papers, from their airtight concealment at their point of origin and storage site, the RAND Corporation in Washington, D.C., to their eventual leak to the public on the front pages of major news publications, the Pentagon Papers generated contentious debates over the ethics and power of state secrecy. At the nerve center of the Pentagon Papers saga, issues of government power and individual authority were entangled with questions of the rights to witness, possess, and convey privileged information; the limits of social acceptability, no less than the limits of speech. The notion of the sacred is woven into—indeed, I argue, it is inextricable from—this tangle of issues and ideals, so long as we understand "sacred" to be, in J.Z. Smith's formulation, a situational or relational

category rather than a substantive one. From Smith's perspective, ordinary things become sacred through the "focusing lens" of sacred space, or "by having our attention directed to [them] in a special way."[36]

The idea of the sacred can be found in this case not only in the words of observers, which is to say in explicit references to religious phenomena, but also in the transgressions interrogated both inside and outside the courtroom, the ritual play of concealment and revelation that structured this saga, and the animated debates concerning the tense, and tenuous, line separating sacred values and state secrets. It is this entanglement of religion in the broader saga of the Pentagon Papers that marks the central concern of this chapter, opening possibilities for re-reading this political case as a lens onto the myths, rituals, and spectacles of national security and state secrecy in Cold War American culture.

In conversion stories and jeremiadic lamentations, rituals of political theater, and spectacles of conspicuous concealment and public unveiling, elemental structures of religion indexed the degree to which secrecy in this case was not only "set apart" from the everyday, as in Durkheim's definition of the sacred, but also a locus of cultural meaning and an urgent site for social reflection. Religious phenomena thus provided a supplemental field of intelligibility through which the ambiguous and "unspeakable" issues of government secrecy and national security could be spoken, understood, critiqued, and debated. Occasionally, it served in more direct ways as a site for comparative analysis among participants and observers of this saga.

[36] This chapter is guided further by Smith's assessment in *Imagining Religion* that "There is nothing that is sacred in itself, only things sacred in relation" (55); Smith's theory of ritual will also prove influential throughout this discussion: "ritual represents the creation of a controlled environment where the variables (i.e., the accidents) of ordinary life may be displaced precisely because they are felt to be so overwhelmingly present and powerful. Ritual is a means of performing the way things ought to be in conscious tension to the way things are in such a way that this ritualized perfection is recollected in the ordinary, uncontrolled, course of things. Ritual relies for its power on the fact that it is concerned with quite ordinary activities, that what it describes and displays is, in principle, possible for every occurrence of these acts. But it relies, as well, for its power on the perceived fact that, in actuality, such possibilities cannot be realized" (63).

Academics and non-academics, both within and outside of government ranks, recruited elements of religion as material for vivid metaphors and explanatory models for social theories of secrecy and national security. In so doing, they ventured to theorize their own social, political, and historical conditions through the lens and language of religion.

The intertwining of secrecy, power, and the sacred became a focal point in debates raised by the scandal of the Papers revelation, suggesting a broad public awareness of their entanglement. The proper alignment of these elements in American culture served as an enduring source of tension animating these debates. The prosecution's argument to the court in the Papers trial evinced this tension as it conjured hypothetical scenarios to demonstrate the power of the classified secrets at issue. They dared jurors to imagine the power these classified documents might give to some agent of "the enemy," and furthermore, what danger may lie in the very spectacle of their revelation. The critical issue there was not only the information this revelation could hand over to our nation's enemies on a silver platter, as the prosecution contended, but moreover, what such a revelation would do to sully the image of the American patriot abroad.

The government sensed additional dangers lurking in the domestic sphere: what transformative effects might these documents have on the American public, and what were the potential consequences of their conspicuous concealment for a nation self-fashioned as an open society? President Nixon would come to view this domestic issue as both a political opportunity and a threat to his presidency. Of primary concern to the prosecution in the Pentagon Papers trial, however, was the mystifying stagecraft of the two co-defendants: Daniel Ellsberg, who orchestrated the leak of these TOP-SECRET documents by smuggling them bit-by-bit out of the RAND Corporation in Santa Monica, the government-sponsored foreign policy think tank where he had worked off-and-on as a consultant and analyst; and Anthony Russo, a friend and

former colleague of Ellsberg's whose commitment to the anti-war movement stoked a fire in his partner-in-crime, providing the ideological affirmation and social connections necessary for this seemingly impossible operation.

A cardboard box would seem ill-equipped to contain such grave secrets, and at any rate, box or no box, portions of these TOP-SECRET documents were already leaking into the public sphere through print and broadcast media by the time of the trial.[37] Yet it is the very insufficiency of the container for the secrets it contained that points to something fundamental in this study of the entanglements of secrecy and religion in the case of the Pentagon Papers. The provocative contrast between the unremarkable cardboard box and the palpable power of its tabooed contents offers an entry point into the material life of secrecy. The very materiality of the totem-box, moreover, provides an opportunity for repurposing the scholarly category of totemic power as a structural framework for assessing how materiality conditions our attention to sacred things in secular society.[38]

For scholars of religion, the totemic power of such an "everyday" object as the cardboard box raises to the forefront the presumed tension between scholarly categories of the sacred and profane.[39] It is this very tension that Gaston Bachelard sought to reconcile in *The*

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[37] *Washington Post* journalist Ben Bagdikian observed: "…As the lawyers and later the judges began looking beneath the awesome claim of TOP SECRET they began to see that it was seldom justified. List after list submitted by the Government to the Court in secret was shown to be filled with items already in the public domain or already known to adversary nations. The Government official brought in to testify in secret court session on how bad it would be to publish the documents later told Congress that at least 6,000 pages of the 7,000 should not be classified." Ben H. Bagdikian, "What Did We Learn?," *Columbia Journalism Review* (Sept/Oct. 1971): 45-50. As I discuss further in my second chapter, Bagdikian was one of a number of reporters who received copies of the Pentagon Papers from Ellsberg as he sought news outlets willing to publish them.

[38] See, e.g., David Chidester's chapter, "Incongruity," in *Material Dynamics*, 58-72. Consider, also, the conclusions Charles Long draws in his essay on Mircea Eliade and the religious resonance of material objects: "The inner structure of matter as the basis for cosmic order changes with every technological praxis. Through these changes life and integrity of matter becomes obscured, infantilized, trivialized and disenchanted. There is nevertheless the possibility for the rediscovery of the life of matter as a religious phenomenon--an equal and sometimes alternate structure in the face of the dehumanizing and terroristic meaning of history." Long, *Ellipsis,* 117-128.

[39] For a similar argument regarding the continued relevance of Durkheim's theories, see Richard Hecht, "Private Devotions and the Sacred Heart of Elvis: The Durkheimians and the (Re)turn of the Sacred," in *Matters of Culture: Cultural Sociology in Practice,* ed. Roger Friedland and John Mohr (Cambridge University Press, 2004), 157-183.

Poetics of Space through a phenomenological analysis of poetic images and intimate spaces—a method he termed a "metaphysics of the imagination"—to uncover the sacred qualities hidden within the seemingly profane images and objects that move us. Here, in a particularly fitting case, Bachelard saw in the everyday craftsman's creation of small boxes, chests, and caskets "very evident witnesses of the *need for secrecy*, of an intuitive sense of hiding-places," contending that such witnesses serve as testaments to an enduring "homology between the geometry of the small box and the psychology of secrecy."[40]

Schrag's totem-box manifested in material form a certain entwining of secrecy and power: the power that secrets gave to those who had them, and the power it denied to those prohibited from accessing them. While to Schrag the box appeared as a totem of the "age of information," I contextualize this periodization within the broader framework of the Cold War, in which the power of physical force in direct warfare gave way to the power of national secrets and the simulacra of nuclear plans in covert warfare. From this perspective, the notion of the "age of information" takes on new meaning, portraying not only the new technology and media that would enable the leaking of the Papers but also a situation in which a historical military preoccupation with the power of information bled into the wider totality of social institutions. For Schrag, the brown carton containing the Pentagon Papers embodied this meaningful socio-cultural moment, and in electing this box as the "totem" of this era, he invited his readers to reflect also on the sacred powers invested in classified information in particular and state secrecy more broadly.

In portraying the totem-box, Schrag re-purposed the academic terminology of scholars of religion, instructing us, in turn, as to how we might attempt similar analyses of American

[40] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space,* trans. Maria Jolas (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1958/New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 102-3.

culture by abstracting our own terms to new ends. In this case, the Durkheimian notion of the "totem" provides a way to rethink the secular issues and institutions involved in this case, not as sacred *per se*, but rather as occasions for assessing the limits of the profane in American secular society, where notions of the sacred bleed into and shape the very image of American society itself.

Durkheim appropriated the notion of the totem from ethnographies of native societies, using the term in his own analysis of small-scale, "primitive" societies to designate a certain principle of translation—from psychological experience to material representation. He defined the totem as a material manifestation of an inward experience of collectivity, a "mental energy" made visible in material form.[41] He argued that, in order "to express our own ideas even to ourselves, we need to attach those ideas to material things that symbolize them."[42] Yet the "benevolent" and "confident" feeling that Durkheim insisted "primitive" peoples had for their god—the society itself, in Durkheim's account—is hardly the sentiment one finds toward American society in contemporary accounts from the late 1960s-early 1970s.[43] In this "age of

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[41] Durkheim argued that "the god of the clan, the totemic principle, can be none other than the clan itself, but the clan transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal that serves as totem." He explained that, "Because social pressure makes itself felt through mental channels, it was bound to give man the idea that outside him there are one or several powers, moral yet mighty, to which he is subject. Since they speak to him in a tone of command, and sometimes even tell him to violate his most natural inclinations, man was bound to imagine them as being external to him. …he was led to imagine those powers in forms that are not their own and to transfigure them in thought." Since "religious force is none other than the collective and anonymous face of the clan and because that force can only be conceived of in the form of the totem, the totemic emblem is, so to speak, the visible body of the god. From the totem, therefore, the beneficial or fearsome actions that the cult is intended to provoke or prevent will seem to emanate so it is to the totem that the rites are specifically addressed. This is why the totem stands foremost in the ranks of sacred things." The totemic emblem, he argued "is the preeminent source of religious life. Man participates in it only indirectly, and he is aware of that; he realizes that the force carrying him into the realm of sacred things is not inherent in himself but comes to him from outside." Durkheim, *Elementary Forms,* 208, 211, 223. Reconceived in these terms, Schrag's "totem of the age of information" would reflect a sacred principle of secrecy simultaneously borne within and imposing itself upon individuals in American society, a principle externalized, rendered an object of mystery, and subject to mystification.

[42] Ibid., 229.

[43] According to Durkheim, "The primitive did not see his gods as strangers, enemies, or beings who were fundamentally or necessarily evil-minded or whose favor he had to win at all costs. Quite the contrary, to him the gods are friends, relatives, and natural protectors. …In sum, joyful confidence, rather than terror or constraint, is at the root of totemism." Ibid., 225.

information," protests and counter-protests flooded a field of social unrest. Confidence in American society was not a given, and such a fact seems clear enough when we consider the voices of those disillusioned by the prolonged stalemate of the war in Vietnam, by the state's undermining of the civil rights of marginalized peoples, and by the hypocrisy of smarmy politicians. In this sense, a cardboard box might very well have captured the flimsy artificiality of the projected image of American society.

While a strictly Durkheimian definition of the totem can only take us so far with respect to American society in the late 60s and early 70s, it is the process behind the "totemic principle" that seems most apt in this analysis. For Durkheim, this totemic principle concerned the material manifestation of a state of "collective effervescence," associated with the heightened emotions, electric and contagious energy, and freedom of total abandon that the so-called 'primitive man' felt when immersed in special social gatherings. Note here the parallels between this experience of collectivity and the experience of being face-to-face with something secret. What Durkheim envisioned was an originary desire for some material representation of an overwhelming, ineffable experience—something to render the abstract feelings of collectivity intelligible, visible, and speakable. Note here, as well, the parallels between this desire to render the intangible manageable and Schrag's desire to imagine his own society as conceivably manifest in physical form, indeed, as material evidence. In his totem-box, a hidden realm of covert activity was rendered intelligible, the invisibility of classified information was rendered visible, and, as Schrag himself suggested, the unspeakable history of the Vietnam war was somehow rendered speakable.

To rethink secrecy in terms of the totem is to rethink its relation to the sacred, insofar as the latter is inextricable from the experience that Durkheim's totem translates into material form. For the totem-box was no mere image; it was the "principle of secrecy itself,"

materialized, and it is significant that, for Schrag at least, this principle could only be conveyed in terms set apart from the profane language of the everyday courtroom report. As I inquire further into the religious dynamics of secrecy in this case, I look beyond the totem-box to other materializations of secrecy, such as the official executive order which outlined, less in law than in tradition, the foundations of the classification system. I point also to the iconic 'rubber stamp' used to mark documents with classification labels, thereby locating them within a kaleidoscopic system of power and information. The 'priesthood of national security' became a catchphrase for this system, evoking differentiating insider terminologies at many levels of access to secrecy, some levels even classified themselves. Though none captured fully the tantalizing yet noxious brew of fears and fantasies of the unknown, these material forms did express deeper Cold War political and socio-cultural debates concerning government secrecy and the sacred values, identities, and rituals invested therein.[44]

Across the span of the decades examined in this dissertation, secrecy retained a practical and strategic significance as a considerable weapon and obstacle of covert warfare, but it acquired new and wider-ranging significance as a focal point of the deeply human and fundamentally religious concerns over individual free will, moral culpability, sacred power, prohibitions, transgressions, and the ongoing battle between forces of good and evil. From the 1950s to the 1970s, the sacred value that Americans identified in and attributed to secrecy was challenged, negotiated, and subjected to public and institutional pressure. Such changes do not suggest an evolution, per se, but rather a reconfiguration reflecting shifting values and voices,

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[44] I am guided here by David Chidester's assessment of what he refers to as the "political economy" of basic categories of religion, of religious formations, and of circulations of religion—a framework that enables us to explore the "material conditions and consequences that make materiality matter in religion." As Chidester argues, the conditions and consequences of categories, formations, and circulations of religion "rise to the level of materiality by making a difference in the fabrication of relations between people and things in the world," thus enabling the scholar of religion to attend to the often-overlooked dynamic materiality of religion as an important arena in which human beings construct meaning in their world. *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 14. For a discussion of material dynamics in Cold War American culture, see ibid., 89-103.

positions of power, media and information technologies, cultural icons, visions of freedom, and definitions of democracy.

As I demonstrate in chapter 1, the notion of secret influence became a topic of social concern and cultural preoccupation across all strata of domestic life and foreign policy—from the military concern over enemy techniques of mind control to debates over the potential sinister influence of controlling mothers to racist representations of the innate malevolence and cunning power of Chinese communist brainwashers. In chapter 2, I extend these inquiries to consider how secrecy acquired new cultural significance as it became a central subject of political debates over classified information in the expanding institutions of national security and over state secrecy's facilitation of abuses of power in government. I return to these observations in my concluding epilogue, in which I address the legacy of these Cold War developments in contemporary American politics in view of recent speculations surrounding the impending rise of a "New Cold War." As this study will demonstrate, exploring the origins and historical transformations of these Cold War entanglements of secrecy, religion, and politics can provide a new lens onto current manifestations of these entanglements in the press headlines and cultural debates shaping American society today.

Ch. 1: The Sacred Aura of Secret Influence:
Brainwashing as a Popular Theology of Evil

Introduction: The "Cultural Fashion" of Brainwashing

Early press reviews tended to agree that Richard Condon's brainwashing fiction *The Manchurian Candidate* was not a particularly good book. It was, however, an exceedingly popular one, becoming an instant bestseller following its original publication in the Spring of 1959. A reviewer for *Time Magazine* imagined that it might number among the "Ten Best Bad Novels," if such a list existed: "books whose artistic flaws are mountainous but whose merits…keep on luring readers."[1]

The apparent paradox of this "best bad" novel, and the cultural significance of that very paradox, may be illuminated by situating *The Manchurian Candidate* and its influential representation of brainwashing within the framework of what History of Religions scholar Mircea Eliade termed "cultural fashions"— "philosophical and literary vogues" marked by a striking "imperviousness to criticism." In their popularity and striking resiliency to criticism, Eliade saw "something 'religious'" at work in "cultural fashions," something that materialized the abstract "dissatisfactions, drives, and nostalgias" of their audiences and gave voice to deeper currents of human concern.[2]

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[1] "Pantless at Armageddon." *TIME Magazine* 74, no. 1 (July 6, 1959): 78–79. In his analysis of the film for the British Film Institute, Greil Marcus touches on this mixed reception of the book, writing that it "had an unusual kind of success. It was simultaneously a bestseller and a cult book, casual reading for the public and the subject of hushed conversations among sophisticates: could this really happen?" Greil Marcus, *The Manchurian Candidate,* BFI Classics (Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 16.
[2] Eliade, "Cultural Fashions and History of Religions," 1-17.

Viewed through the analytic framework of the "cultural fashion," the alluring merits of *The Manchurian Candidate* can provide a window onto the religious significance of this fixture of Cold War popular culture. For, what the book perhaps lacked in literary acumen, it made up for in the cultural resonance of its dystopic rendering of Cold War ideological preoccupations. Interrogating the contradictions and logical tensions animating 1950s American culture, Condon's novel envisioned a world in which the ideological lines and moral presumptions of Cold War America were, like the brainwashed mind of its protagonist, not merely "washed" but "dry cleaned."[3]

The brainwashing conspiracy at the center of this story involved an illicit collaboration between two forces of evil: Raymond's chief brainwasher, the Chinese Communist Dr. Yen Lo, and Raymond's "American operator," revealed eventually to be his own mother, Eleanor Iselin. These dual antagonists embodied two interrelated Cold War "enemies": a racialized foreign enemy on the one hand, and a sexualized domestic enemy on the other. Yen Lo's character reflected a post-WWII reemergence of the Orientalist "Yellow Peril," in which the inhabitants of the "Orient"—in this era, often a broad conflation of diverse Asians and Russians alike—were constructed as devious, inscrutable, heartless, and, above all, mysterious Others. Eleanor Iselin's character embodied emergent fears of the contaminating effects of maternal impurity, cohering around the provocative theory of "Momism"—a perceived defacement of the ideal American mother, whose "proper" place was not in public politics but in the home, and whose "proper" femininity and sexuality were pure and submissive.[4]

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[3] Condon, *The Manchurian Candidate*, 55; Richard Slotkin's definition of ideology is instructive, especially insofar as it highlights the multitude of meanings and interests involved: "Ideology is the basic system of concepts, beliefs, and values that defines a society's way of interpreting its place in the cosmos and the meaning of its history. As used by anthropologists and social historians, the term refers to the dominant conceptual categories that inform the society's words and practices, abstracted by analysis as a set of propositions, formulas, or rules." Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 5.

[4] For an extended discussion of the Cold War historical context that shaped Condon's story, and his portrayal of brainwashing in particular, see David Seed, *Brainwashing: The Fictions of Mind Control: A Study of Novels and Films Since World War II* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2004), 106-33. In his review of Jonathan Demme's 2004

Both Condon's novel and Frankenheimer's film are regularly categorized under the genre of the political thriller. Both parodied the polarized ends of Cold War American politics, reflecting a growing liberal critique of McCarthyism that advocated for a measured anticommunist middle-ground. In fact, much of this story cannot be conceived without politics, for the secret conspiracy for which the brainwashed Raymond Shaw would be "activated" was conceived for political ends—for the political ambitions of Raymond's mother, and for the political goals of the global Communist order to which Yen Lo dedicated his brainwashing work. Yet, in the words of Condon's anonymous narrator, nor could the political ends of the brainwashing plot be conceived without religion:

> If the assassin were to be used in the West, as this one would be, where sensationalism is not only desirable but politically essential, the blow needed to be struck at exactly the right time and place, at a national emotional apogee, as it were, so that the selected messiah who would succeed the slain ruler could then defend all of his people from the threatening and monstrous element at whose doorstep the assassination of an authentic national hero could swiftly and effectively be laid (45).

This conspiracy was a matter of politics, to be sure, but it was also a matter of myth, messiahs, and monsters. Condon here identifies not only the inherent religiosity of national politics, but a more harrowing imagination of the lengths to which that religiosity could be operationalized and defaced in the hands of evil doers like Yen Lo and Eleanor Iselin.

The idea of brainwashing that emerged from Condon's influential depiction evoked a spectacular subversion of traditional American norms and ideals, offering a symbolic site for reflection upon, and critique of, the domestic, social, and political crises of Cold War America. These crises emerged from and shaped the contentious social and political divisions between

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remake of Frankenheimer's film, Cliff Doerksen suggests that the original version "gets its kick from a volatile blend of four different flavors of fear: fear of communism, fear of McCarthyite anticommunism, fear of the yellow peril, and fear of female power." He observes, moreover, that "…in Frankenheimer's film mommies are ultimately scarier than commies." That does seem true for Frankenheimer's film, but less so for Condon's novel, which hinges on a two-fold villainy as key to the conspiracy at its center. Cliff Doerksen, "The Right Kind of Remake," *Chicago Reader* (August 12, 2004).

conservative right-wing anticommunist crusaders and their liberal targets and critics. The right-wing camp feared communists were secretly brainwashing Americans to destroy the sacred foundations of the traditional American family, religion, and flag-waving patriotism; their liberal critics argued that it was, in fact, the rabid anticommunists who were brainwashing Americans into a fit of McCarthyite hysteria. Representations of brainwashing materialized deeper religious features of those crises, aligning fantasies of Communist techniques of secret influence with religious motifs of human autonomy, free will, moral judgment, the consciousness of guilt, and the battle between good and evil. In this chapter, I explore this popular representation of brainwashing as a Cold War "cultural fashion," whose religio-historical significance hinges on its configuration of a popular theology of evil.

I. ***Maleficium*** and the Making of Raymond Shaw

> The consciousness of guilt gives a scent to humanity, a threat to putrefaction, the ultimate cosmetic. Without the consciousness of guilt, existence had become so bland in Paradise that Eve welcomed the pungency of Original Sin. Raymond's consciousness of guilt, that rouged lip print of original sin, had been wiped off. He had been made unique. He had been shriven into eternity, exculpated of the consciousness of guilt.
>
> —Richard Condon, *The Manchurian Candidate*

Raymond Shaw "had been made unique," Condon tells us, and it is curious to note how central this notion of making—and of being *made*—is to the story of *The Manchurian Candidate.* Raymond has been made by two malevolent forces: he has been made into an antisocial, asexual, emotionally arid shell of a man by the perverse domestic influence of his mother, and he has been made into an instrument for Communist aims under the conditioning powers of his brainwasher, Dr. Yen Lo. These two figures pursue their sinister goals through deception,

subversion, and secret alliance, features conveyed in both Condon's novel and Frankenheimer's film adaptation through analogies of magic and witchcraft. Through this lens, the making of Raymond Shaw can be seen as something more than mere psychological conditioning—it is *maleficium,* the ancient magic art of "evil-doing."[5]

In the story of *The Manchurian Candidate*, the diabolism of Raymond's makers condenses two threads of Cold War ideological concern—a sexist (and sexualizing) domestic ideology concerned with the perverting potentiality of motherhood and a racist (and racializing) nationalist ideology concerned with the subversive potentiality of communists. Yet insofar as it is tied to his "exculpat[ion] of the consciousness of guilt," the making of Raymond Shaw also bears mythic traces of a particularly Christian logic. Reformulating traditional Christian interpretations of the "Fall" of the first humans in the biblical Book of Genesis, Condon locates the condition of humanity in a consciousness of guilt that is, at once, a "threat to putrefaction," a "rouged lip print," and a counterforce against bland purity (93-94). Raymond's exculpation is thus contingent upon his unique absence of guilt, the "wip[ing] off" of which appears less like a reprieve and more like a robbery. He is, after all, made not by the divine overseer of the Garden of Eden, but by two evil influencers whose *maleficium* is "putrefaction," *par excellence*.

[5] While the Latin *maleficium* is translated more literally as "bad-making," the translation of "evil-doing" is also common in literature on early witch-trials of the medieval era and seems more apt for my purposes here. For a general history of this terminology in the context of Medieval Europe, as well as a detailed analysis of the most well-known and influential 15th century text on the subject, *Malleus Maleficarum* ("Hammer of Witches") by Henricus Institoris (Krämer) and Jacobus Sprenger (Germany, 1487), see Hans Peter Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2003); For a broader history of witchcraft, see Brian P. Copenhaver, *Magic in Western Culture: From Antiquity to the Enlightenment* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Gábor Klaniczay, "A Cultural History of Witchcraft," *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (Winter 2010): 188-212; for analyses of popular theories of witchcraft vs. inquisitorial dogma, see Carlo Ginzburg, *The Night Battles: Witchcraft and Agrarian Cults in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (New York, NY: Penguin Books [1966] 1983); Carlo Ginzburg, *Ecstasies: Deciphering the Witches' Sabbath*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (New York, 1991), originally published as *Storia notturna: una decifrazione del sabba* (Turin, Italy, 1989). As I employ Eliade's notion of the "cultural fashion" in this chapter, his assessment of the historiography of European witchcraft may be of interest: Mircea Eliade, "Some Observations on European Witchcraft," *History of Religions* 14, No. 3 (1975): 149-72.

The reader first encounters Sergeant Raymond Shaw upon his return from the Korean War, which, much to Raymond's displeasure, his mother has orchestrated into a nationalist spectacle and publicity event to boost the political campaign of her husband, Raymond's stepfather, Johnny Iselin. Raymond is now a decorated soldier, having received a Medal of Honor for his supposedly heroic leadership under enemy fire. All surviving members of his patrol recalled in similar details Raymond's honorable feats: how he had saved the lot of them in a dire confrontation with the enemy, how he moved in on the enemy combatants, seizing one of their own machine guns in the process, and even redeploying eight of their own grenades against them—none of which actually occurred.

What really occurred was too horrifying to be remembered—a feature that was, in part, by design. As he would eventually learn, with the help of his fellow soldier, Captain Bennett Marco, Raymond and his patrol group had actually been taken prisoner by agents of the enemy. They had been deceived by their traitorous Korean interpreter and field guide, Chunjin, who led them straight into the arms of their own ambush. Once captured, the group was then transported to a secret research facility in Manchuria to be brainwashed by the evil genius, Dr. Yen Lo (D.M.S., D.Ph., D.Sc., B.S.P., R.H.S.) (35). Unlike his fellow patrol members, however, Raymond was subjected to a special procedure, transforming him into a sleeper agent to be reinstalled in America.

We first meet Yen Lo at a Research Pavilion in Tunghwa, where he is presiding over a seminar in which he will demonstrate his brainwashing methods to an assembly of Communist officials from Russia and China. In the awe-stricken eyes of his Sino-Soviet comrades, Yen Lo seemed "the living monument to, and the continental expander of, the work of Pavlov." Yet he had long departed from the mainstream Pavlovian doctrine, developing "his own radical technology for descent into the unconscious mind with the speed of a mine-shaft elevator" (30).

His behavioralist approach to the unconscious mind had no use for the classic theories of "Herr Freud, whom he called 'that Austrian gypsy fortune-teller' or 'the Teuton fantast' or 'that licensed gossip'…." Instead, he "approached human behavior in terms of fundamental components instead of metaphysical labels":

> His meaningful goal was to implant in the subject's mind the predominant motive, which was that of submitting to the operator's commands; to construct behavior which would at all times strive to put the operator's exact intentions into execution as if the subject were playing a game or acting a part; and to cause a redirection of his movements by remote control through second parties, or third or fiftieth parties, twelve thousand miles removed from the original commands if necessary. The first thing a human being is loyal to, Yen Lo observed, is his own conditioned nervous system (32).

Yen Lo was critical, too, of contemporary theories concerning the limitations of hypnosis. He dismissed as "nonsense" the "old wives' tale" that "no hypnotized subject may be forced to do that which is repellent to his moral nature, whatever that is, or to his own best interests," for we can "see it occasionally in sleep-walking and in politics, every day" (41). The cold sterility of Yen Lo's approach to the human mind is aligned throughout the story with his Chinese ethnicity and his Communist leanings, each serving to signify his essential (and essentially hostile) foreignness. "His entire expression was theatrically sardonic as though he had been advised by prepaid cable that the late Dr. Fu Manchu had been his uncle" (38).[6] Like Fu Manchu, whose fictional adventures were chronicled in the popular stories of Sax Rohmer, Yen Lo is an inveterate trickster whose evil machinations are buoyed by his superior intellect and the disturbing levity with which he approaches his brainwashing mission.

Yen Lo delights in the trick; off the clock, he can be found fascinating his staff with his Origami creations or lulling them into trance with ancient fairy tales. He relishes the chance to

[6] In the film adaptation, this reference is made by Captain Ben Marco as he begins to recall bits and pieces of this episode. Speaking of his memories to an Army psychiatrist, Marco says, "I can see that Chinese cat standing there like Fu Manchu…."; A *TIME* magazine review (1959) of Condon's novel also described Yen Lo in such terms: "a brilliant Chinese disciple of Pavlov—a sort of Marxist Dr. Fu Manchu." "Pantless at Armageddon."

play with the minds of his captives by injecting a "little fun" into his brainwashing procedures. Presenting the brainwashed soldiers assembled on stage, he explained to his comrades that "each American was under the impression that he had been forced by a storm to wait in a small hotel in New Jersey where space restrictions made it necessary for him to watch and listen to a meeting of a ladies' garden club" (38).[7] He "had conditioned the men to enjoy all the Coca-Cola they could drink, which was, in actuality, Chinese Army issue tea served in tin cups" (32). While in captivity, the soldiers were provided all the cigars and cigarettes they could want, but "Yen Lo had allowed his boys to have a little fun in the selection of outlandish tobacco substitutes because he knew that word of it would pass through the armies, based upon the sure knowledge of what made armies laugh, rubbing more sheen into the legend of the Yen Lo unit. They would be talking about how much those Americans had savored those cigars and cigarettes from Lvov to Cape Bezhneva inside of one week, as yak dung tastes good like a cigarette should" (33).

But it was "the famous Raymond Shaw" that Yen Lo's colleagues had come so far to see. Before introducing his prized subject, however, Yen Lo took a moment to address his Russian colleagues—suggesting to readers his role as a link between the Communist "Reds" of both China and the Soviet Union. Speaking in Russian, the "Chinese doctor" paid tribute to their "chief, Lavrenti Pavlovich Beria," who "saw this young man [Raymond] in his mind's eye, only as a disembodied ideal, as long as two years before he [Beria] was appointed to head the Ministry

[7] This is one of the most famous scenes in Frankenheimer's film adaptation. While in the book, the demonstration is presented to us as its own chapter, in the film, we arrive at the demonstration via this garden club scene, which to great and lasting critical acclaim, plays out in an innovative circular motion: the camera pans across an audience of little old ladies learning about hydrangeas, who, upon a few passes, are replaced with the true faces of the attendees. We arrive at this garden club scene by way of Captain Ben Marco's nightmare. Marco was part of Raymond's captured patrol group, and his dream serves to weave together several plot points: dreams-as-revelations, the brainwashing demonstration, Yen Lo's masterful trickery (initially, we, too, are deceived into believing the garden club scene is the real substance of Marco's dream), and the entry-point of the villainous character of Raymond's mother, whom Yen Lo invokes with reference to the "trigger" that will function as the key to unlocking Raymond's conditioning—the Queen of Diamond's card. After Marco awakens, screaming, from this nightmare, the film cuts to a scene that only appears much later in the novel, in which Marco is relating the content of his nightmares to investigators.

of Internal Affairs and Security in 1938, and that was thirteen eventful years ago" (39).[8] It was to Beria that Yen Lo dedicated his presentation, with "humble personal gratitude for his warm encouragement and fulfilling inspiration" (39). His obsequious gesture to the Russian representatives underscores his dedication to the Communist cause, and as an overture to his demonstration, renders the brainwashed assassin common property of the Red alliance. Yet while many in the audience were thrilled to witness "this dream by Lavrenti Beria: the perfectly prefabricated assassin," one Soviet official—Mikhail Gomel—felt a growing sense of fear with respect to Yen Lo's evident power. Gomel is a Politburo man, a member of the Soviet Central Committee, "with a bullet head and stainless-steel false teeth" that "made him carnivorously unphotogenic and therefore unknown to the newspaper readers of the West," and who, notably, "did not approve of Yen Lo or his work." As Yen Lo spoke,

> Gomel was multiplying Raymond. If Yen Lo could manufacture one of these he could manufacture an elite corps of what could be the most extraordinary personal troops a leader could have. … Gomel felt himself grow taller but, all at once, he thought of the power of Yen Lo and it spoiled his vision. Yen Lo would have to manufacture these assistants. Who would ever know what else he had built into their minds, such as acting to kill within an area where they were supposed to be utterly immobile? He had disliked Yen Lo before this but now he began to feel a bitter hatred toward him. But what could be done to such a man? How could fear be put into him to control him? Who knew but that he had conditioned other unknown men to strike at all authority if they were to hear of Yen Lo's arrest or death by violence, or for that matter, death under any circumstances whatsoever? (46).

[8] Lavrenti Pavlovich Beria (1899-1953) served as a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, a chief of the secret police, Marshal of the Soviet Union, administer of the gulag system of labor camps, and overseer of the USSR's atomic bomb development. Following Stalin's death (Mar., 1953), Beria became the First Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers and led the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD). By June, 1953, he was overthrown in a coup orchestrated by Nikita Krushchev and Georgy Zhukov. He was tried for treason, and summarily executed by December, 1953. His legacy is one of brutality and genocidal violence, which, needless to say, contrasts deeply with the "warm" and inspiring figure described by Yen Lo; this contrast serves to indicate the corrupt nature of Yen Lo's complicity and allegiance with the Communist Party. See James H. Hansen, "The Kremlin Follies of '53… The Demise of Lavrenti Beria." *International Journal of Intelligence and Counter Intelligence* 4, no. 1 (1990): 101-114. For a more comprehensive biography of Beria, see Amy Knight, *Beria: Stalin's First Lieutenant* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993).

These descriptions of Gomel— "carnivorously unphotogenic," "unknown to newspaper readers of the West," salivating at his vision of a manufactured corps of eternally loyal troops—reveal him to be essentially Other, embodying Western stereotypes of both the "Orient" and communists alike. He is characterized as a figure entrenched in the Communist cause and thus an ostensible ally in this brainwashing conspiracy, but his fear of Yen Lo's power serves to differentiate the two men. Yen Lo may pay tribute to the "chief" of his Soviet comrades, but this *malefico*'s power eclipses the Communist cause, leaving open-ended the vexing question of what he may be capable of when left to his own sinister devices. "Who would ever know what else he had built into their minds…?" Gomel thinks to himself, leaving us to wonder, too, what such powerful magic could enable in the service of evil aims. Yen Lo's demonstration will not resolve this question but rather magnify the mysterious possibilities generated by its very asking.

Raymond Shaw, Yen Lo continued, "was a unique combination of the exceptional: both internally and externally." Yet "as formidable as were Raymond's external attributes," we are told, "he possessed internal weaknesses that Yen would show as being incredible strengths for an assassin" (39-40). By Yen Lo's assessment, Raymond's peculiar psyche was marked by an ambivalence of such magnitude that it bordered on spiritual crisis: "His soul has been rubbed to shreds between the ambivalence of wanting and not wanting; of being able and unable; of loving and hating" (44).[9] Note here that, despite his disdain for "metaphysical labels," Yen Lo points to the state of Raymond's "soul" as key to his "unique" vulnerability to brainwashing. I will return to this point later, but for now, it is worth considering how Raymond's shredded soul is presented not as an effect of his brainwashing, but rather a special precondition for it.

[9] John Frankenheimer, director and co-producer of the 1962 film adaptation of the book, was drawn to the divisions reflected, in particular, in the character of the brainwashed Raymond Shaw, "trying to fight the inner conflicts which tormented him." Joy McEntee, "Melodrama and Tragedy in 'The Manchurian Candidate' (1962)," *Literature/Film Quarterly*, Vol. 43, no. 4 (2015): 304-317.

Raymond's shredded soul stemmed from his "total resentment," particularly toward his mother, who, Yen Lo noted, "helped to bring about his condition to the largest and most significant extent." "The resentful man," Yen Lo explained, "is a human with the capacity for affection so poorly developed that his understanding for the motives of others very nearly does not exist.":

> Yen Lo patted Raymond's shoulder sympathetically and smiled down at him regretfully. 'Raymond is a man of melancholic and reserved psychology. … Raymond's heart is arid. At the core of his defects is his concealed tendency to timidity, sexual and social, both of which are closely linked, which he hides behind that formidably severe and haughty cast of countenance. This weakness of will is compounded by his constant need to lean upon someone else's will, and now, at last, that has been taken care of for the rest of Raymond's life' (43-44).

If Raymond's resentment made for a great assassin, his "weakness of will" made for an ideal brainwashing subject. In Yen Lo's hands, this weakness was ripe for exploitation: "The subject could not ever remember what he had done under suggestion, or what he had been told to do, or who had instructed him to do it. This eliminated altogether the danger of internal psychological friction resulting from feelings of guilt or from the fear of capture by authorities, and the external danger existent in any police interrogation, no matter how severe." Raymond's conditioned amnesia would foreclose the possibility of his consciousness of guilt. Thus "the instant he killed, Raymond would forget forever that he had killed" (48).

Yen Lo would prove as much by offering his spectators a demonstration of Raymond's brainwashing in action. "With all of that precision in psychological design," the self-satisfied Yen Lo said, "the most admirable, the most far-reaching characteristic of this extraordinary technology of mine is the manner in which it provides for the refueling of the conditioning, and this factor will operate wherever the subject may be…and utterly independently of my voice or any assumed reality of my personal control" (48). He explained that, "to operate Raymond it amused me to choose as his remote control any ordinary deck of playing cards. They offer clear,

colorful symbols that, in ancient, monarchical terms, contain the suggestion of supreme authority." Note, again, that whatever Yen Lo might think of metaphysical labels, a certain religiosity still haunts the periphery of his brainwashing procedure as its successful deployment relies on his theory of a cross-cultural resonance of symbols of authority. Turning to his subject to demonstrate the "first refueling key…which unlocks his basic conditioning," Yen Lo then asked, in what remains the most famous line in both the novel and film adaptation: "Raymond, why don't you pass the time by playing a little solitaire?" (48-49).

At the request of "the old Chinese," Raymond "walked to stage right" to retrieve a pack of cards.[10] As Raymond shuffled the cards and laid out the solitaire seven-card spread, Yen Lo presented "the second key that will clear his mechanism for any assignment": "the queen of diamonds, in so many ways reminiscent of Raymond's dearly loved and hated mother…." Once the queen appeared, Raymond neatly squared the pack and placed her on the top of the deck, "then sat back to watch the card with offhand interest, his manner entirely normal" (49-50).

Having cleared his "mechanism" for his assignment, Yen Lo asked Raymond whom he disliked least in his patrol group—besides Captain Marco, who was manufactured to later recommend that Raymond be awarded his specious Medal of Honor, which "was very hard to get, so it took on a lot of magic powers" (13). Raymond identified the young Ed Mavole, a "funny fellow" who "never seems to complain." "Very good," Yen Lo continued. "Now. Take this scarf and strangle Ed Mavole to death." And Raymond did, to great applause. Raymond was then directed to shoot another patrol member, Bobby Lembeck, which he did, again to great applause. Yen Lo then "turned to face his audience and made a deep, mock-ceremonial bow, smiling with much self-satisfaction" (50-51).

[10] With this "stage right" movement, orchestrated by the "theatrically sardonic" Yen Lo, we are reminded that Raymond's brainwashing renders him a casualty of a new "theater of war"—the Cold War "battle for men's minds."

To Yen Lo's devilish delight, Raymond was "designed" so that he could be "activated" at any moment to carry out whatever act his "American operator" might command. All it would take was the right combination of triggers, he said—a strategically worded suggestion to play a game of solitaire, and the appearance of the "Queen of Diamonds" card—and the unwitting agent could thereby be induced hypnotically to murder without conscience. Raymond's role would be the key to a broader conspiratorial plan in which he would eventually be reactivated to assassinate a presidential nominee, culminating in a harrowing spectacle of such magnitude that it would shake the nation into oblivion, paving the way for what would amount to a grand political coup. This conspiracy, we learn, has been cooked up by Raymond's "American operator"— the Queen herself, Raymond's mother.

Eleanor Iselin is a "woman as ambitious as Daedalus," a shrewd, domineering, two-faced, heroin-addicted, sexually perverted, power-hungry mother and wife, "who could think but who could not feel" (23, 17). She had left Raymond's father long ago for the alcoholic, morally dubious political schemer, Johnny Iselin—a former judge, now a Senator, and an obvious caricature of Joseph McCarthy, right down to the frenetic accusations of "card-carrying Communists" allegedly embedded in the Defense Department (131).[11] Johnny is also "the caricature of a pious man…a superstitious Catholic who had ignored his faith for years, who supported none of the beauty of the religion he had been born into, but rooted and snouted out

[11] Matthew Frye Jacobson and Gaspar González address this, as well: "The figure of Johnny Iselin is so patently Joseph McCarthy himself that to say he is a 'McCarthy *type*' would be a ludicrous misrepresentation. This is no small matter, as *The Manchurian Candidate*'s depiction was among the very first full-throated satires of McCarthy, and it remains among the very best," adding that the likeness "is indeed part of the humor—Frankenheimer's invitation to consider that, ahhh, perhaps *this* is what was taking place off camera each time McCarthy surfaced with more charges." Matthew Frye Jacobson and Gaspar González, *What Have They Built You to Do?* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 82, 94; Howard Hampton similarly summarized the intertextuality of Johnny Iselin's character: "that Joe McCarthy couldn't have done more harm to the country if he'd been a Communist agent was an idea that was already bubbling up into the public domain—Condon and then Axelrod and Frankenheimer simply devilishly elaborated and fully articulated it." Howard Hampton, "*The Manchurian Candidate:* Dread Center" (15 March 2016), *Criterion Essays on Film*, available online at: https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/3970-the-manchurian-candidate-dread-center.

all the aboriginal hearsay it could imply concerning sin and its consequences" (70). Johnny's political exploitation of the religious language of sin foretells the malleable opportunism that would make him an ideal mouthpiece for Eleanor's political exploitation of the Cold War Red Scare.

Eleanor had orchestrated her affair with Johnny to procure for herself a husband sufficiently deferential to her social-climbing schemes. This affair had a detrimental effect on Raymond, in whose eyes "his mother would always be a morally adulterous woman who had deserted her home and had brought sadness upon her husband's venerable head" (63). It was thus Raymond's mother who, as Yen Lo had observed in his demonstration to his Sino-Soviet colleagues, "helped to bring about his condition" of resentment and ambivalence "to the largest and most significant extent." Raymond had become a repulsive, anti-social man who endeavored "to keep the rest of the world on the other side of the moat surrounding the castle where he had always lain under the spell of the wicked witch" (25, 150).

This "wicked witch" has no real love to give her son, just as she has no real love for Johnny. The only thing approximating love, for Eleanor, is her lust for power. Perhaps for this reason alone, her marriage to Johnny was never actually consummated.[12] For Eleanor, this was a fortuitous circumstance, as she "calculated without hesitation that she could use it as an irresistible weapon against him;" she wanted Johnny "as a striking force of her ambition rather than as a lover" (71). And indeed, as planned, she "ruled Johnny Iselin," for "he had been custom-made by [her]" (67, 91).

> As she had anticipated he would, Johnny Iselin had agreed with everything she said, which, when boiled down, expressed the conviction that the Republic was a humbug, the electorate rabble, and anyone strong who knew how to maneuver could have all the power and glory that the richest and most naïve democracy in the world could bestow.

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[12] In Condon's colorful description, "Johnny, that old-time mattress screamer and gasper, although throughout his life quite capable of getting and giving full satisfaction with other women, found himself as impotent as a male butterfly atop a female pterodactyl when he tried to have commerce with Raymond's mother" (70).

> Boiled down, Judge Iselin's response expressed his lifelong faith in her and in her proposition: "Just you tell me what to do, hon, and I'll get it done." Falling in love had been as simple as that because she had set out, from that moment on, to bring his appreciation of her and dependence on her to a helpless maximum, and when she had finished her work he was never again to be able to recall his full sanity (68).

On a psychological level, as well as a practical level, Eleanor's exploitation of Johnny's dependence on her—and Raymond's for that matter—is intertwined with her grasping for power. Her cynical disdain for the American populace is a key feature of her character, as is her desire for power and glory and her ability to maneuver through society and politics to slake her ambition. "She sought power the way a superstitious man might look for a four-leaf clover. She didn't care where she found it. It would make no difference if it were growing out of a manure pile" (66).

Eleanor's perverse desire for power was already evident from a young age. At age fourteen, in an episode that would instill in her a lifelong sibling rivalry, her brother had "beaten her with a hockey stick because he had objected to her nailing the paw of a beige cocker spaniel to the floor because the dog was stubborn and refused to understand the most elemental instructions to remain still when she had called out the command to do so" (73). From that moment on, Eleanor "vowed and resolved, dedicated and consecrated, that she would beat [her brother] into humiliation at whatsoever he chose to undertake, and it was to the eternal shame of their country that he chose politics and government and that she needed therefore to plunge in after him" (74).

This anecdote of animal abuse reveals the depths of Eleanor's psychopathy and foretells later manifestations of the mad queen's rage when her commands are not met. It also reveals two significant contributions to Eleanor's character: one pointing toward her political future, one extending backward to the origin of her sexuality. Eleanor's vengeance toward her brother sets her careening on the fast track to political power, where her commands will be met not

through overt aggression but through covert manipulation. Yet her vengeance toward her brother, which she will come to extend to anyone else who dares stand in her way, is rooted not in the hockey stick beating but in his self-election as the new head of the family following the death of her father, "a magnificent man of men" (73).

Eleanor's reverence for her father, however, was not merely the grief-stricken love of a child who'd lost her parent, but an incestuous love. Problematically, but significantly, Eleanor's relationship with her father is described not in terms of sexual abuse but in terms of complicit and passionate longing, and herein lies the root of her manifold perverted desires, which are not limited to her father but extend also to her son. Eleanor's "secret bond" with Raymond is implied metaphorically throughout the story in ways that highlight her characteristic transgression of normative gender roles and sexuality in the Cold War-era: as his mother, she dominates him psychologically, and as his "American operator," she penetrates his mind. These implications are made explicit in one controversial scene in which Raymond is put under the "spell" of his "American operator," an episode that is as disorienting as it is disturbing (and attesting to this, we might add the historical point that, to appease industry standards, it is cut in Frankenheimer's film to one brief, but suggestive, kiss).

Raymond resents being used by his mother for the sake of her political schemes, just as he resents being made a captive audience to her bad faith tirades in which she talks "shrilly of the American Dream and its meaning in the present, pulling stops out bearing the invisible labels left over from Fourth of July speeches and old Hearst editorials such as 'The Red Menace,' 'Liberty, Freedom, and America as We Know It,' 'Thought Police and The American Way'…" (102). Reflecting on his resentment toward her, and betraying the magnitude of his (conditioned) incestuous bond with her, the otherwise "sexual neutral" Raymond asks himself, "How can I look into those serenely lovely eyes, how can I be so deeply thrilled by the carriage of her

exquisitely wholesome body and grow so faint at the set, the royal set of that beautiful head and not remember, not always and always and always remember that it encases a cesspool of betrayal, a poisoned well of love, and a city of deadly snakes?" (191).

Eleanor has no illusions about her fraudulence, either, which is evident in her response to Raymond when he dares to accuse her of such: "I have to be a fraud….And I have to be the truth, too. And a shield and the courage for all the men I have ever known, yourself included, excepting my father. There is so much fraud in this world and it needs to be turned away with fraud, the way steel is turned with steel and the way a soft answer does not turneth away wrath" (141).

She lays claim to both fraudulence and truth because she *is* the truth, and indeed, she *has* to be. Her fraudulence is thus justified by necessity and duty; she must turn away fraud with more fraud, and she must do so in service of all the men in her life, for she is the shield that protects them and the courage that inspires them: "Johnny is going to lead the people of our country to the heights of their history," she tells Raymond. "But I have to lead Johnny….I could not give more to this holy crusade than I have given. …I know that what I did and what I do is for the greatest possible good for all of us" (143).

Eleanor's self-fashioning as a prophetic visionary and dutiful servant to the greater good signals to us her masterful mimicry of real emotion and true conviction. We have learned, after all, that we are dealing here with a woman "who could think but who could not feel," and moreover, that her only real conviction, "when boiled down," was that "the Republic was a humbug," and that power and glory were promised only to the strong "who knew how to maneuver." To this point, and most significant to my purposes here, we should note how this thoroughly unfeeling woman turns to biblical imagery and language to convey the depth of her supposed conviction, construing her domestic dominance and political scheming in

dispensational terms that render her ambition a necessary component to her holy crusade. Her prophetic vision foretells an apocalyptic scene—a bloodbath to purify a nation sunken into iniquity:

> This country is going to go through a fire like it has never seen…And I know what I am saying because the signs are there to read and I understand politics, which is the art of reading them. Time is going to roar and flash lightning in the streets, Raymond. Blood will gush behind the noise and stones will fall and fools and mockers will be brought down. The smugness and complacency of this country will be dragged through the blood and the noise in the streets until it becomes a country purged and purified back to original purity, which it once possessed so long ago when the founding fathers of this republic—the blessed, blessed fathers—brought it into life. And when that day comes—and we have been cleansed of the slime of oblivion and saved from the wasteful, wrong, sinful, criminal, selfish, rottenness which Johnny, and only Johnny is going to save us from, you will kneel beside me and thank me and kiss my hands and my skirt and give only me your love as will the rest of the great people of this confused and blinded land (143-44).

Politics, for Eleanor, is the art of reading signs, and she is an oracle on a salvific mission. We see here, again, her disdain for the American people, the sinful "fools and mockers" who must be purified of the "slime" of their oblivion. It is Johnny who will save the nation, she says, but we are reminded by her spurious self-fashioning that Johnny is merely "a striking force of her ambition." She finds it necessary to urge her husband to "try a little bit more to feel the sacredness of [his] own mission," though the mission is undoubtedly hers (157). In fact, it is Eleanor, we are told, who "had written the scriptures and set the tone of the sermons Johnny was to make along the line to glory" (155). We can only look askance at this fiery jeremiad in which she yearns for the "original purity" of a Golden Age brought to life by the "blessed, blessed fathers" of this nation, whom she idealizes with a reverence reminiscent of her love for her father, that "magnificent man of men." In this constellation of character traits, Eleanor's perverted desire for her father's love is mirrored in her perverted desire for power, both political and psychological.

Eleanor's villainy must be read alongside the villainy of her Communist co-conspirator, Yen Lo. Raymond's brainwashing cements their connection as a maleficent dyad who, together, form the nucleus of evil at the center of this story. The relationship between Eleanor Iselin and Yen Lo is not so much a friendship as an opportunistic alliance of two self-interested powers. We learn of their history from Eleanor herself. Having triggered her "mechanism" into a hypnotic state, Eleanor offloads her conflicted feelings—who knew she had any?—onto her brainwashed son, who, ostensibly, should not remember any of the details anyway due to his hypnosis:

> Raymond, you have to believe that I did not know that they [the Communist brainwashers] would do what they did to you. I served them. … I got them the greatest foothold they will ever have in this country and they paid me back by taking your soul away from you. I told them to build me an assassin. I wanted a killer who would obey orders from a stock in a world filled with killers, and they did this to you because they thought it would bind me closer to them. When I walked into that room … to meet this perfect assassin and I found that he was my son—my son with a changed and twisted mind…But we have come to the end now, and it is our turn to twist tomorrow for them, because just as I am a mother before everything else I am an American second to that, and when I take power they will be pulled down and ground into dirt for what they did to you and for what they did in so contemptuously underestimating me (289-90).[13]

We learn here that Eleanor has long "served" the cabal of Communists that Yen Lo represents, though the nature of their initial introduction remains a mystery. Yet for all her efforts on their behalf, her Communist collaborators took advantage of their loyal servant by taking her son's "soul" away. This latter point is paramount, indicating that what is at stake in brainwashing is something of religious value. The making of Raymond Shaw involves not only the washing of his brain but also, crucially, the theft of his soul—or whatever was left of the

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[13] Greil Marcus's commentary on Eleanor's violent vision is particularly poignant: "…Senator Iselin, or rather his Communist masters, or rather Eleanor Iselin, will be swept into power, which she will exercise as pure sadism, for its own sake, betraying her one-time comrades, destroying them and, the implication is, everything else. The United States. The republic. Herself. All for the pure pleasure of the act—for the pleasure of its violence. Save as an entry into a certain state of mind, there is no point in pausing over this plot as a clue to anything. The plot, in this movie, is an excuse—an excuse for the pleasure of its violence. That is, you're going to see everything you ever believed was fixed and given suspended in the air and then dashed to the ground." Marcus, *Manchurian Candidate*, 45.

shredded thing. This is a consequence even the self-styled prophetess could not foresee, for when it comes to *maleficium*, it's trickery all the way down.

As her poor childhood dog could have pointed out, had its paw not been nailed to the floor, Eleanor does not take such insubordination lightly. She vows revenge against the Communist cabal for what "they did to [Raymond] and," primarily, we might presume, "for what they did in so contemptuously underestimating [her]."[14] Finally, she reveals to us her real ambition, so long dissembled under the guise of the devoted politician's wife: it will be the day, she says, "when I take power."

Eleanor's secret plot is eventually thwarted by the captain of Raymond's patrol group, the gritty intelligence officer Bennett Marco. Marco's own brainwashing had "slipped," he discovers, as memories of the patrol group's captivity and conditioning begin to emerge in his dreams. Marco learns that he is not alone; another patrol member, Alan Melvin, has been experiencing the same revelatory nightmare, "scene for scene, face for face, and shock for shock."

Prior to this confirming consultation, Marco thought he was merely losing his mind, and it is worth noting here how Condon's description of Marco's turmoil reveals a religious logic in the code of military duty, rendering madness a matter of conflicting "faiths": Marco "was being rubbed into sand by the grinding stones of two fealties," the "two faiths he lived by, far beyond his control; the first was his degree of holy reverence for the Medal of Honor…and the second was the abnormal degree of his friendship for Raymond Shaw, which had been placed upon his mind, as coffee will leave a stain upon a fresh, snowy tablecloth, by the deepest psychological conditioning" (162-63). In fact, each member of the patrol group had been brainwashed into

[14] That this is a matter of personal revenge is suggested in the film when, with a pregnant pause between the two statements, Eleanor's voice drops a near-octave as she utters the latter.

believing Raymond was "the greatest, warmest, most wonderful single guy they had ever met" (229). This fact confirms for Marco that something is amiss, because insofar as he could recall, "there was a broad chasm between [Raymond] and those men before the patrol" (230). The problem was this: "It was not that Raymond was hard to like. He was impossible to like" (25).[15]

After a laborious investigation, with the help of some supportive intelligence officials who agree that something just doesn't add up, Marco finally discovers that his troop had been brainwashed, that the Medal of Honor charade had been orchestrated by the Sino-Soviet communists who plagued his nightmares, and that a malevolent plot was about to reach its climax. He tries to explain his discoveries to Raymond: "They are inside your mind now, Raymond, and you are helpless. You are a host body and they are feeding on you." "They made you into a killer," he tells the now-thoroughly shaken Raymond. Ed Mavole and Bobby Lemneck did not die in battle as Raymond and the rest of his patrol group believed. Raymond executed them. "Not your fault," Marco reassures him: "They just used your body the way they would use any other machine" (232).

The thought of brainwashing, "the invasion of his person," its "rancid vulgarity," "sickened" Raymond. It was not only an "invasion;" it was a penetration: "What kind of a world of fondlers had this become?" Raymond asked himself, bringing the sexual connotation of brainwashing into full focus. "Why did Marco have to say that those thick-necked pigs were *inside* his mind?" (229). He rejected the theory outright, his mind taking him on a "circuitous detour that would allow him to avoid exposing himself to himself as a murderer, a sexual neutral, and a man despised and scorned by his comrades" (234).

[15] Marco's revelation emerges from his awareness of this fundamental disconnect. "His conflict between the love and admiration and respect for Raymond, which Yen Lo had planted in his mind, and his detailed, precise notes on exactly how Raymond had strangled Mavole and shot Lembeck had him beginning to live in dread and horror that everything which he still believed was happening in his imagination might somehow, someday, be proved to have happened in life" (119).

Marco pulls together a task force of psychiatrists and biochemical scientists to undo Raymond's brainwashing and uncover what his operators "built [him] to do." Yet even when put under deep hypnosis, "loaded to the eyes with a cocktail of truth serums, Raymond demonstrated that he could not remember his name, his color, his sex, his age, or his existence." His mind was "sealed off," confirming the worst of their fears: "Raymond had been brainwashed by a master of exalted skill" (233-34). For all their efforts, Marco and his team cannot overcome the power of Raymond's brainwashers, and it is notable that at this point in the film adaptation, Marco likens that power to sorcery: "'My magic is better than your magic.' I should've known better," he mutters, chastising himself as he struggles to outsmart the *maleficium* of Raymond's makers.

Marco eventually puts the pieces together, recalling from his dreams what Yen Lo had told his comrades of the Queen of Diamonds card and its function. He puts his hunch to the test and succeeds in unlocking Raymond's "mechanism." Now under Marco's hypnotic control, Raymond reveals the plan behind his brainwashing, which is to be executed at the upcoming national convention of Johnny Iselin's (unspecified) political party, in which Johnny will appear alongside the presidential nominee as his hopeful Vice President. Raymond can now recall the details of the plot, which were described to him by his "operator" in a previous hypnotic state. Though lengthy, I quote it here nearly in full, for it not only encapsulates the ultimate plan for which Raymond has been "made" also presents in dramatic detail the sordid politico-religious fantasies and sociopathic scheming that define Eleanor Iselin's villainy and rival Yen Lo's evil magic:

> I am ordered to shoot the nominee through the head and to shoot Johnny Iselin through the left shoulder, and when the bullet hits Johnny it will shatter a crystal compound which Mother has sewn in under the material which will make him look all soggy with blood. He won't be hurt because that whole area from his chin to his hips will be bullet-proofed. …he will get to his feet gallantly amid the chaos that will have broken out at that time, and the way she wants him to do it for the best effect for the television

> cameras and the still photographers is to lift the nominee's body in his arms and stand in front of the microphones like that because that picture will symbolize more than anything else that it is Johnny's party which the Soviets fear the most, and Johnny will offer the body of a great American on the altar of liberty, and as you know, as Mother says, there is nothing that has succeeded in the history of politics like martyrdom, for now the people must rise and strike down this Communist peril which she can prove instantly lives within and amongst us all. Johnny will point that up in his speech he will make with the candidate in his arms. It is short, but Mother says it is the most rousing speech she has ever read. They have been working on that speech, here and in Russia, on and off, for over eight years. Mother will force some of the men on that platform to take the body away from Johnny …then Johnny will really hit that microphone and those cameras, blood all over him, fighting off those who try to succor him, defending America even if it means his death, and rallying a nation of television viewers into hysteria and pulling that convention along behind him to vote him into the nomination and to accept a platform which will sweep them right into the White House under powers which will make martial law seem like anarchism, Mother says (305-306).

In the end, the plan Raymond describes will not be realized: in a final blaze of glory, he will turn his rifle away from the intended target, shooting both Johnny Iselin and his "dearly loved and hated mother," before finally turning it on himself. Outcome aside, note how in this passage, the ceaseless accumulation of instructions and staggered politico-religious musings suggest to us that its speaker is, at this moment, less a human being than a living phonograph. It is Eleanor who is in control, even in Raymond's memory, even under the control of another operator entirely—exactly as she planned, and exactly as Yen Lo designed ("as if the subject were playing a game or acting a part," "independently of my voice or any assumed reality of my personal control"). We can almost hear Eleanor's voice bellowing through Raymond's mouth; we can almost see her gesticulating wildly with every mytho-poetic advance toward the climax of her vision. In this play between audience and speaker ("and as you know, as Mother says"), we are interpellated into this scene ourselves, reminding us that the political platform—Eleanor's, and ours—is a space for both stagecraft and sermons.

Eleanor, we have seen, is crafty in her capacity to spin any story for her own gain, her "beautiful head" concealing a "city of snakes," in Raymond's eyes. This serpentine metaphor

could apply just as easily to the trickster Yen Lo, for both villains seem to embody the ancient archetype of the shrewd serpent—"more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had made" (Gen. 3:1), as the Christian biblical tradition goes.[16] I will return to this biblical imagery later to re-examine its relevance in light of the historical analysis that follows. What I will show is that the conspiracy in which these two *maleficos* are entwined bears theological implications that extend not only to the nefarious dyad, but beyond them, as well—to the "making" of Raymond Shaw, to the theft of his "soul," and to the phenomenology of brainwashing itself.[17]

II. "Some Unknown Force"

In mid-June 1953, around a half-dozen representatives from various government intelligence divisions assembled in the Special Operations Conference Room at Central Intelligence Agency headquarters in Langley, Virginia. They were gathered to discuss developments relevant to the newly expanded and highly classified Project ARTICHOKE, whose broad objectives centered on the behavioral control of human subjects. Midway through this meeting, discussion turned to a "very interesting angle" concerning American POWs who had recently returned home after their release from captivity in North Korea:

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[16] In an article for the New Yorker, Louis Menand—who wrote the foreword to Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate*—writes that Raymond's mother is "the serpent in the suburban garden of Cold War domesticity…" Louis Menand, "Brainwashed: Where the 'Manchurian Candidate' Came From," *The New Yorker* (Sept. 15, 2003); While the serpent archetype certainly predates Christianity, tracing back to ancient Indo-European mythologies, I restrict my scope to its relevance in Christian theology, which serves as a more prevalent anchor point in Condon's storyline (e.g., his reference to "Original sin" in the "consciousness of guilt," cited previously).

[17] Throughout this analysis, I emphasize the centrality of Raymond's conditioning through the metaphor of "making." Menand makes a similar observation in his article on brainwashing, positing that conditioning is *the* theme of Condon's novel: "Even before Raymond falls into the hands of Yen Lo, he is psychologically conditioned, by his mother's behavior, to despise everyone. His mother is conditioned, by her early incest, to betray everyone. And the American people are conditioned, by political propaganda, to believe her McCarthy-like husband's baseless charges about Communists in the government. It is not, in Condon's vision, the Communist world on one side and the free world on the other. It is just the manipulators and the manipulated, the conditioners and the conditioned, the publicists and the public." Menand, "Brainwashed."

> …interrogations of the individuals who had come out of North Korea across the Soviet Union to freedom recently had apparently had a 'blank' period or period of disorientation while passing through a special zone in Manchuria. [Redacted] pointed out that this had occurred in all individuals in the party after they had had their first full meal and their first coffee on the way to freedom. [Redacted] pointed out that [Redacted] was attempting to secure further confirmatory facts in this matter since drugging was indicated. …At the conclusion of the conference, [Redacted] discussed the problem of brain washing and its relation to the ARTICHOKE work. [Redacted] informed [Redacted] that [Redacted] was making a certain exploratory effort in the overall field of 'brain washing' and sources on brain washing material and in the near future we would have a report on that and its future relation to the ARTICHOKE work.[18]

It is perhaps no coincidence that the details in this memorandum sound much like a real-world prelude to Condon's brainwashing fiction, for, according to former State Department officer-turned government whistleblower John D. Marks, this report was likely one of Condon's sources of inspiration.[19] Exactly how Condon got his hands on this material, Marks does not know, or at least does not reveal. Yet what is most gripping about the mirror between Condon's popular fiction and this once-classified document is the light it sheds on the intertwining of fantasy and fact in the image of brainwashing that appears on the scene of American culture in the 1950s.

First came a series of speculations in the early 1950s, dotting local press outlets from Miami to Philadelphia, reported by one Mr. Edward Hunter, foreign correspondent. In his travels to the East, he said, he'd heard murmurings about a mysterious technique that Chinese

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[18] "ARTICHOKE Conference, 18 June 1953," report from Chief of CIA Security Research Staff and Chief of Technical Branch, attachment to memo from CIA Chief of Technical Branch, SO to CIA Chief of Bio-Chemistry and Pharmacology Branch, Medicine Division, OSI (dated 15 July 1953), in CIA MK-ULTRA Documents, 4 CD-ROMS, disk 1, MORI ID #144996, National Security Archive, George Washington University; This document and all declassified documents cited hereafter can also be accessed online through "The Black Vault" database of declassified government documents, MKULTRA/Mind Control Collection, at http://mkultra.theblackvault.com. For more on the historical development of the Cold War notion of brainwashing, see Seed, *Brainwashing: The Fictions of Mind Control*, xi-49, 81-105.

[19] "Condon consulted with a wide variety of experts while researching the book, and some inside sources may well have filled him in on the gist of a discussion that took place at a 1953 meeting at the CIA on behavior control." John D. Marks, *The Search for the "Manchurian Candidate": The CIA and Mind Control* (New York: Times Books, 1979), 9n; Dominic Streatfeild notes similarly that, "It was almost certainly the rumour cited in this document, with various pieces of information gleaned from [other mind control] experiments …that inspired the most famous 'brainwashing' story of all: Richard Condon's *The Manchurian Candidate*." Dominic Streatfeild, *Brainwash: The Secret History of Mind Control* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2007), 22n.

Communists had been using to convert their own people to the party. They called it *hsi nao*, he said, or "brainwashing," per Hunter's own translation. [20] By 1951, Hunter published a monograph of his findings concerning these secret techniques of mind control, entitled *Brain-Washing in Red China.* Its dustcover beckoned readers with the tantalizing promise of an exposé of Chinese brainwashing: "The first revelation of the terrifying methods that have put an entire nation under hypnotic control—explaining the mystery behind the voluntary 'confessions' of the innocent."[21]

This "brainwashing" involved "self-criticism" meetings, in which "students" were required to confess their ignorance, or betrayal, of various tenets of the Communist cause, and to write and share reports of their continuing edification. Yet, while framed by the communists as a sort of *re-education* or *mind-reform*, none of these terms seemed sufficient to Hunter. "Here the Biblical adjective 'awful' is more appropriate," Hunter suggested, for "the brain, like matter, had been a divine creation that could not be tampered with without paying a dreadful price." This was a new type of "psychological warfare on a scale incalculably more immense than any militarist of the past has ever envisaged." It was method of drilling subjects with Party propaganda "…until the mind of the student rings like a phonograph record that has stuck at a point that sings something about dialectic materialism…." It gave Hunter "the eerie sensation

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[20] Edward Hunter, "'Brain-Washing' Tactics Force Chinese into Ranks of Communist Party," *Miami News* (Sept. 24, 1950), 2; The number of Hunter's press pieces on brainwashing is staggering. To cite but a few, see: "'Antitoxin' Urged for GIs Against Red Brain-Washing," *The Atlanta Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), (May 3, 1953), 2A; "Red Semantics Creeping into English to Describe Chinese 'Brain-Washing,'" *The Atlanta Constitution* (Aug. 23, 1953); "The Ordeal of 16 months in Communist Hands," *Chicago Tribune* (Chicago, IL) (Sept. 5, 1965); Accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers database; Also see: "Brain-Washing Technique: Red Chinese Win Propaganda Victory," *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* (Fort Worth, TX) (Aug. 18, 1953); "They Aren't Traitors: Brain-washed POWs Are Sick Men," *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN) (Sept. 5, 1953); "67 Names in a Chinese Diary: Red's Double-Talk Fools Girl Students," *Herald and Review* (Decatur, IL), (May 18, 1954); "Red Propaganda Assaults Students on Tokyo Campus," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Brooklyn, NY), (July 8, 1954); "Contribution to Brainwashing," *The Spokesman-Review* (Spokane, Washington) (Sept. 22, 1954); "Brainwashing Used for Softening-up Purposes," *The Dispatch* (Moline, Illinois) (Nov. 26, 1956), 5; "Hunger, as a Weapon, Will Make a Man Work Himself to Death 'Voluntarily,'" *The Advocate-Messenger* (Danville, Kentucky), (Dec. 4, 1956); Accessed online via public archival news database: www.newspapers.com.

[21] Edward Hunter, *Brain-Washing in Red China* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951).

of a world turned inside out." It was a defacement of normal means of warfare, an inversion of the limits of acceptable social influence, "a distorted evangelism that is cold-blooded and calculating," modeled on "the old-fashioned evangelism of Billy Sunday and Aimee MacPherson [sic]," but "adapted to political ends and parodied."[22]

While Hunter claimed for himself the honor of having coined the term "brainwashing," and while his press pieces indeed set this notion afloat among the American public, U.S. government officials and international allies had already been alerted to the possibility of some such theory for the better part of a decade, beginning with the stunning and apparently forced "confessions" elicited in the Soviet Union's notorious Moscow Show trials of 1936-1938. Against this backdrop, amidst the Maoist revolution's Communist takeover in China, a sense of renewed urgency shook the upper echelons of the U.S. national security sphere in 1949 with the highly publicized case of the Hungarian Cardinal József Mindszenty who was arrested in Budapest on spurious charges of espionage, conspiracy, and treason against the Communist government. His trial began in February of 1949, and to the great surprise of observers worldwide, the apparently innocent Mindszenty confessed to every charge. "Somehow they took his soul apart," one U.S. Army officer thought.[23]

It was at this point that American intelligence officials began intensive investigations into the mysterious techniques they believed Communist interrogators were using behind the scenes

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[22] Ibid., 11, 302, 58, 35, 115. One of the most brilliant takes on Hunter's history, to my mind, is a lecture delivered by Simon Schaffer for a conference ("Brainwash: History, Cinema and the Psy Professions") organized by the Hidden Persuaders Project. Video footage of this lecture is available for viewing online. Simon Schaffer, "The Manchurian Automaton," lecture delivered at Birkbeck Cinema (3-4 July 2015), organized by the Hidden Persuaders Project in partnership with the Birkbeck Institute for the Moving Image, available online at http://www7.bbk.ac.uk/hiddenpersuaders/blog/the-manchurian-automaton/.

[23] This officer was Paul M.A. Linebarger, now also known as the prolific science fiction writer who published under the pseudonym, Cordwainer Smith. This remark comes from his lecture, "Psychological Warfare," delivered at the Naval War College (Dec. 15, 1950), published in *Naval War College Information Service for Officers* Vol. 3, No. 7 (Newport, RI: U.S. Naval War College Press, Mar., 1951): 19-47. For a comprehensive analysis of the case of Mindszenty, as well as the similar case of the American Robert Voegler's trial, held in the very same Budapest courtroom as the one in which Mindszenty's trial took place, see Susan Carruthers, *Cold War Captives: Imprisonment, Escape, and Brainwashing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009), 136-173.

to extract false prisoner confessions. It seemed Mindszenty was "under the influence of some unknown force," one CIA memo (February 24, 1949) suggested. The memo asserted, with palpable fear, that "…there is a strong indication that these countries may be further advanced than we might care to believe." The author advised the agency to develop a means for defensive action to protect vulnerable intelligence officers and foreign service officials. If the "unknown force" was a "truth serum," or some unknown combination of drugs—though the memo's author doubted this to be the case—then maybe the agency could find a way to manufacture an appropriate antidote. Perhaps a technique could be developed that would allow the agency "to condition him [an intelligence officer] so that he will no longer be susceptible to the various unfriendly interrogation techniques to which he might be exposed." The report concluded that, whatever the case, expanded investigation and experimentation was needed so that "…this office can at least keep abreast to or possibly surpass these interrogation techniques."[24]

Growing concerns among members of the intelligence community were seemingly confirmed when, in December of 1952, The North Korean Hsinhua Agency published the signed deposition of Colonel Frank H. Schwable, Chief of Staff of the First Marine Aircraft Wing, who had been held prisoner for fourteen months by Chinese Communists in North Korea after his plane was shot down on July 8, 1952.[25] In this deposition, Schwable confessed that the United States was deploying bacteriological warfare against the Korean people, and that his complicity gave him an "awfully sneaky, unfair sort of feeling of dealing with a weapon used surreptitiously against an unarmed and unwarned people." "Tactically," Schwable concluded, "this type of weapon is totally unwarranted—it is not even a Marine Corps weapon—morally it

[24] "Interrogation Techniques of Unfriendly Countries," memo from Security Research Section to Chief, Security Branch (Feb. 24, 1949), in CIA MK-ULTRA Documents, National Security Archive, disk 2, MORI ID #184367.
[25] Richard J. Maloy, "Schwable's Own Story: Arlington Colonel, Back, Tells Why He Signed 'Confession,'" *The Washington Post* (Sept. 28, 1953).

is damnation itself; administratively and logistically as planned for use, it is hopeless; and from the point of view of self-respect and loyalty, it is shameful."[26]

Such a statement from a high-ranking U.S. Marine seemed to American observers an unthinkable, unconscionable act.[27] "As more stories of misconduct emerged," historian Charles S. Young has noted, "it became a question of determining guilt: Were the prisoners to blame, or the enemy's mistreatment?"[28] Schwable faced public accusations of treason, and he would eventually face a month-long hearing before a special court of inquiry to determine whether he should be court-martialed. On the stand, Schwable testified that the "words were mine…but the thoughts were theirs." He knew his confession was false, he said, insisting that their "brain-washing had not tricked him into believing it."[29] His case closed on April 27, 1954, with no recommendation for disciplinary action; the court's opinion concluded that Schwable's confession was "excusable on the ground that it was the result of mental torture."[30] Yet Schwable's case was just the beginning; his confession would be followed by similar statements from a number of American captives, some of whom refused repatriation; among them, some chose to defect to the Communist side altogether.[31] The national scandal was only ramping up,

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[26] For Schwable's full confession, see Kenn Thomas, "Of Bugs and Bombs," *The Latest Word*, available online at www.umsl.edu/~thomaskp/plwordz.htm.

[27] President Eisenhower equivocated on the scandal in a morning press conference on March 10, 1954, lamenting that these were no longer the "Revolutionary War days," when "many nations adhered to codes." From a "humanitarian standpoint," he said, "you have to do justice to the individual," while from the "standpoint of [military] procedure…you think first of punishment as being instituted for the protection of society, the society that you know." And as Eisenhower seemed to imply, 1950s America was not the society that he once knew. Peter J. Kumpa, "President Gives 'Confession' View: Says He Knows No Answer to Schwable-Type Case," *The Baltimore Sun* (Mar. 11, 1954).

[28] Charles Stewart Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number: Exploiting Korean War POWs at Home and Abroad* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 110.

[29] "PW Ordeal Related: Schwable Explains 'Confession,'" *The Christian Science Monitor* (Mar. 12, 1954).

[30] "Col Schwable Cleared, but His Future Clouded," *The Boston Globe* (Apr. 28, 1954).

[31] Following their release, POWs of the 581st Air Resupply and Communications Wing, including Schwable, described their experiences in sworn statements forwarded to United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold, which were intended for distribution to the UN General Assembly, Eighth Session, First Committee, December 1954. "Letter, Willard B. Cowles to UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold," December 23, 1954, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, United Nations Archives and Records Management Section, obtained by Ole Jakob Skatun; accessed through Wilson Center Digital Archive: International History Declassified, available online at http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/122622. The cover letter enclosed

and its consequences were already existential. The false confessions and defections seemed to mark the American POW as "a symbol of a failed weapon of war," just as "the 'Oriental' interrogator represented a new kind of warfare."[32]

On the surface, the issue of culpability under conditions of torture may have seemed clear enough, but the debate was far from over. For one thing, what exactly was "mental torture," and how did it compare to the kind of physical torture condemned in the Geneva Conventions? As similar cases of brainwashing, both military and civilian, began appearing in the press, the debate routinely turned to two religious motifs: free will, and the soul.

The *Boston Globe,* for instance, attempted to shed light on the true danger of brainwashing by publishing a letter from a Belgian Catholic missionary who said he had been subjected to brainwashing in China. His case, the headline insisted, proved that the "Rack and Thumbscrew" style of physical torture was "Relatively Humane" in comparison to brainwashing. The letter writer, Father Richard Cocquyt, described experiencing a type of inexplicable hypnosis, followed by terrifying hallucinations. At first, he said, "I lost the ability to distinguish between dreams and reality but I still clung to my free will. Later they took even that away and I became the captive—body and soul." His body had been captive all along, of course, but once his free will was taken away, his soul became captive, too. The reporter urged that more

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with this package was written by Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., U.S. Representative at the United Nations. Lodge's letter, dated 26 October 1953, concludes with this intriguing statement: "These documents depict, in my view, a record of *unparalleled and diabolical mendacity* by the Chinese Communists against the United States" (my emphasis). In the pages that follow, I highlight Lodge's stated interest—recorded in a CIA memo of April 1953—in invoking the term "brainwashing" as a propaganda tool at an upcoming UN assembly meeting. For more on U.S. government agency involvement in devising and using propaganda at this UN meeting, including generating and shaping the POW letters distributed to the assembly, see Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number,* 130-31.

[32] Monica Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms of the Korean War: The Untold History* (Princeton University Press, 2019), 312. As Kim observed, the POW confessions "laid bare that a basic tenet of US imperial warfare vis-à-vis the global order had been challenged: the US was supposed to be the power that transformed the enemy in wartime encounters, not the other way around" (307). Kim notes additionally that brainwashing "had a longer genealogy of anxiety, fear, and power within American imperial history," arguing that its roots could be traced to "a deep-seated anxiety on the part of Americans about what they would see if the lens of decolonization was turned back on them" (317-18).

attention must be paid to "the human element that is implicit in this struggle against the most vicious conspiracy the human spirit has ever faced. We must learn that this war against Communism…is a struggle for the minds and souls of men." He concluded with a haunting warning: "At some future date it could be me—or you."[33]

Psychiatrist Robert J. Lifton had an early insight into such cases of brainwashing, or "thought reform," as he called it. He served on a U.S. Army committee investigating brainwashing and had been assigned to examine the repatriated American POWs aboard the *USS General John Pope* en route to San Francisco from Inchon, after which he spent seventeen months interviewing Western and Chinese victims of "thought reform."[34] He would later become a frequently cited source on the matter following publication of his landmark work, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (1961).[35] Lifton sought to demystify the subject of brainwashing, or "thought reform," disputing the idea that there was anything especially new or unprecedented about it. Prior to the publication of *Thought Reform,* he gave a lecture at the New York Academy of Medicine in 1956 in which he invoked religion to describe both precedents to brainwashing and results thereof. He opened with this revealing statement: "The Chinese Communists have developed a peculiar brand of soul surgery which they practice with impressive skill—the process of 'thought reform.'"

Thought reform, he explained, was merely an effective combination of known religious, therapeutic, and hypnotic methods, molded into a cohesive practice through an intensively controlled social environment. "Crucial to the momentum of 'reform,'" he noted, "is the utilization of guilt anxiety, along with moral exhortation, to induce confession. But elements of

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[33] Col. John J. Driscoll, "Brain Wash: Rack and Thumbscrew Relatively Humane Beside Reds' Quiz Methods," *The Boston Globe* (May 10, 1953), C1; Accessed via ProQuest Historical Newspapers.
[34] On Lifton's work with POWs, see Kim, *The Interrogation Rooms*, 307; Also see David Seed, "Brainwashing and Cold War Demonology," *Prospects*, Vol. 22 (Oct. 1997): 535-573.
[35] Robert J. Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: A Study of "Brainwashing" in China* (London: V. Gollanz, 1961).

these conversion methods have been employed by proselytizing religions and mass movements throughout history." He pointed to the Spanish Inquisition, the Roman Catholic confessional, the Russian Orthodox Church, and Protestant revivalists as key examples of such precedents. "Nonetheless," he concluded, "'thought reform' brings forth what may be the most advanced 'soul engineering' yet devised in the attempt of a secular religion to cast out its devils, to force its real or imagined heretics to recant, to win converts by the emotional sword."[36]

It is striking to see how, in his attempt at demystification, Lifton couldn't help emphasizing how much brainwashing looked like religion, and how much it echoed religious history. For Lifton, thought reform was like the practice of some "secular religion" seeking converts, eliciting guilt, and exhorting confessions. While Lifton may have sought to demystify brainwashing, in so doing, he seemed to reinject more mystery into the discussion. What exactly was "soul surgery," anyway? Religion may have provided a way to make sense of things, but the mystery of brainwashing was only growing as more stories, editorials, and commentary on brainwashing cases appeared in the press by the day. The cumulative effect of these stories demanded a concrete, cognizable answer. Edward Hunter, for one, was there to help.

III. "The Black Art"

In late June of 1956, the Senate Committee on Government Operations called upon Hunter to testify as an expert witness regarding this mysterious weapon of secret influence. "Brainwashing," he told the committee, "consists fundamentally of two processes, a softening up process and an indoctrination process," implemented in "an effort to put a man's mind into a

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[36] Robert J. Lifton, Chinese Communist 'Thought Reform': Confession and Re-education of Western Civilians," *Bulletin of New York Academy of Medicine*, Vol. 33, No. 9 (Sept. 1957): 626-644. William Sargant followed a similar logic in his fascinating comparative study of brainwashing and 18th century American revivalism, *Battle for the Mind: A Physiology of Conversion and Brain-washing* (Melbourne, London, and Toronto: Heinemann, 1957).

fog so that he will mistake what is true for what is untrue, what is right for what is wrong, and come to believe what did not happen actually had happened, until he ultimately becomes a robot for the Communist manipulator."[37]

By the time of his 1956 appearance before the Senate Committee, Hunter had just published his second book on the subject, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It* (1956), in which he placed an unmistakable stress on the truly mysterious, metaphysical dynamics of the technique: "Facts and fancy whirl round and change places, like phantasmagoria. Shadow takes form and form becomes shadow…" It was a technique that required "concealment and subterfuge" to "distract attention from the glaring fact that brainwashing is something new which is contrary to human nature and inseparable from communism."

> The Chinese knew they hadn't just been educated or persuaded; something much more dire than that had been perpetrated on them, similar in many peculiar ways to a medical treatment. What they had undergone was more like witchcraft, with its incantations, trances, poisons, and potions, with a strange flair of science about it all, like a devil dancer in a tuxedo, carrying his magic brew in a test tube.[38]

His words were compelling, inviting his readers to step into the secretive "shadow" of that hallucinatory "phantasmagoria"—a "new" space, where the line between "facts" and "fancy" blurred into fog. What his readers did not know, however, was that Hunter had been on the payroll of CIA all along, employed in the service of disinformation and tasked with putting a heavy spin on events in "Red China" to stir the hearts and minds of Americans against the

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[37] "Hearings before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, United States Senate, Eighty-fourth Congress, Second Session (Washington, D.C.: US Govt. Printing Office, June 19, 20, 26, and 27, 1956). His words echoed those of former POW Lt. John S. Quinn, who, upon his release from captivity in 1953, described the scandalous false confessions as "channeled thoughts," expressed by "living dead men, controlled human robots, which willingly, as long as they are under the spell, do their master's bidding. Sworn Statement of Lt. John S. Quinn, signed 9/23/1953 at Parks Air Force Base, California, included in documents forwarded by Willard B. Cowles to UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold (Dec. 23, 1954).

[38] Edward Hunter, *Brainwashing: The Story of Men Who Defied It* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956), 203, 3-4.

menacing Communist aggressor.[39] In the hands of Edward Hunter, from his very first news reports in 1950, the term *brainwashing* had acquired a mysterious, evil aura, automatically evoking something diabolical, magical, and fundamentally Other.

This emerging image of brainwashing as a powerful enemy weapon of evil secret influence was indeed so compelling that government officials had quickly recognized its political use-value on the global stage.[40] In April of 1953, a CIA memo related a conversation with former Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, now the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, who "had shown a great interest in the potentiality of the Chinese and Soviet use of 'brain washing' as a propaganda weapon for use by the United States at the United Nations' sessions." Lodge "was seeking a very dramatic word which would indicate horror and would condemn (by its sound) Soviet practices of attacking people's minds."[41] Brainwashing, pulsating with the symbolic

[39] Hunter would be identified publicly as a CIA employee in a 1972 Congressional hearing. For more on this context, see Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number,* 134; Historian H.P. Albarelli has written on Hunter's connection to the CIA: "Edward Hunter did not want anyone to know he was working for the CIA. Under the terms of his [security] and employment agreement with the Agency he was to appear to be a self-supporting, independent writer and journalist. As far as his readers were concerned, he had no hidden agenda, no biases, and no affiliation to anything or anyone other than pursuit of the truth. That his preferred topic was 'brainwashing' appeared to be nothing more than the result of his extensive travels throughout Asia and professional time spent in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Tokyo. His career as a foreign correspondent had begun in 1927, and he had served as a reporter and editor for the Hankow *Herald* and the Peiping *Leader*. Somewhere along the way, he developed a keen interest in psychological warfare as practiced by the Japanese and the Chinese. Also along the way, like many journalists of his day, he joined the CIA as an undercover operative." H.P. Albarelli, Jr., *A Terrible Mistake: The Murder of Frank Olson, and the CIA's Secret Cold War Experiments* (Waterville, OR: Trine Day, LLC, 2009), 187-88. As CIA Technical Services Staff (TSS) official John Gittinger reportedly claimed in 1979, "Nobody did more to advance interest and alarm about brainwashing than Edward Hunter." Albarelli, *A Terrible Mistake,* 187.

[40] Hunter's theory was so well publicized by 1956 that a classified report published by CIA's Technical Services Division would note that "'brain washing'…has caught the public fancy, and has gained world-wide acceptance. It is now commonly used as a name for the Communist 'thought reform' techniques. A number of attempts have been made to provide a scientific definition for this term, which have had the effect of confirming the general impression that 'brain washing' is in fact a scientifically designed and highly organized specific technique for the manipulation of human behavior. Many of these speculations about 'brain washing' are not supported by the available evidence." KUBARK [CIA] "Communist Control Techniques" (Secret) (Apr. 2, 1956), National Security Archive, "The Torture Archive," Identifier #00064_560402, available online at https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/project/torture-archive; Marks has charted the ironic, Frankenstein's-monster quality of the history behind the American idea of brainwashing in *The Search for the 'Manchurian Candidate';* For a detailed study of Hunter and his connections to American intelligence units, see Marcia Holmes, "Edward Hunter and the Origins of 'Brainwashing,'" (May 26, 2017), The Hidden Persuaders Project, available online at: http://www.bbk.ac.uk/hiddenpersuaders/blog/hunter-origins-of-brainwashing/

[41] Report to Chief of Security Research Staff and Chief of CIA Technical Branch, 11 May 1953, Subject: "ARTICHOKE Conference—16 April 1953," Black Vault: #146085; doc #224; 18/ 53-101-103. For more on the

potential of its mysterious aura, was already primed to be a lever of geopolitical power. And it was "a very dramatic word" indeed.

By 1953, CIA had already established a series of TOP-SECRET experimental projects and recruited a number of doctors, psychologists, and biochemists (some unwittingly) to investigate the techniques of behavioral control and test the limits of human will-power. First came Operation BLUEBIRD—the behavioral control research project established in the wake of the Mindszenty case and tasked with investigating "unorthodox methods" of mental manipulation "such as brain damage, sensory stimulation, hypnosis, so-called 'black psychiatry', 'Pavlovian conditioning', 'Brainwashing', or any other methods having pertinence for such procedures as interrogation, subversion, or seduction."[42] BLUEBIRD would eventually become the basis for expanded experimentation under the code-name ARTICHOKE, and it was to the aims of this latter phase of research that, in March 1953, a most interesting script proposal was made for an Interrogation and Special Operations (I & SO) training film on hypnosis entitled, intriguingly, *The Black Art*.[43]

> NARRATION BEGINS: This is Mary Jones. Mary is a trusted employee of CIA. She has been fully investigated and is cleared for Top Secret work. She works in a very sensitive office.
>
> [FILM SEQUENCE OF TOP SECRET THEFT]
>
> NARRATION: But you may well ask wherein did this show hypnosis? … Hypnosis and particular hypnotic activity as a post-hypnotic suggestion can be set in motion very

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involvement of government agencies in spreading the notion of brainwashing, see Young, *Name, Rank, and Serial Number*, 127-41.

[42] "Narrative Description of the Overt and Covert Activities of [Redacted]," c. 1 Jan. 1950, MKULTRA Papers, disk 2, Mori ID #190882, The National Security Archive. This area of classified experimentation was then reorganized under the further expanded project known, (in)famously, as MKULTRA, whose experiments in drugs and hypnosis on human subjects would later be publicly unveiled in the Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities ("Church Committee") hearings of 1975. The official report and related documents are available online at https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/resources/intelligence-related-commissions.

[43] "I & SO Training Film: Hypnosis: The Black Art," 1 March 1953, MORI ID#149585 [A/B, 3, 1/3 and 1/4]. Dominic Streatfeild notes that a large portion of the experimental budget allotted to Morse Allen—lead director of Project ARTICHOKE at the time—was devoted to the production of this film. However, I have found no additional sources to verify that this film was ultimately produced. See Streatfeild, *Brainwash*, 160.

> simply by telephone. And in this case, Mary Jones was, by use of code word and a previous post-hypnotic suggestion, made to carry out her surreptitious and illegal activity. Another question then rises, how possibly could Mary Jones be hypnotized, or where, or when? The answer is easy—a party stunt or this far more subtle means—
>
> NARRATION (NEW VOICE): 'You ought to learn how to relax. No wonder you're nervous. I'll bet you never have learned to relax. Here—let me show you.' …

The script writer continues with a suggestion that "These scenes should be designed to show that a person, while fully in a trance state, can appear to be completely 'normal' and whose activities because of this 'normal' appearance would deceive even the most astute observer." Mary Jones, they suggest, might then be shown typing normally at her desk: "Narrator will say at this point, 'This is also Mary Jones. She has no knowledge of what she did last night.' As she continues typing, the shadow of either a hammer and sickle or a hand moves across the screen, and the scene fades out." In this concluding scene, the writer suggests: "Narrator might possibly be saying as the film concludes, are the Soviets using hypnosis? Are any of our people subject to the hypnotic control of others? Scene should fade out at this point with the questions left unanswered and the problem merely stated."

Note here the "questions left unanswered," the mysterious ellipsis tempting the envisioned audience to indulge their fears and fantasies of the unknown and to imagine the manifold possibilities of hypnosis—its dangers and operational promises.[44] Here, the image of a hammer and sickle might well be interchangeable with the hypnotizing hand, suggesting that, for the script writer, communism and mind-control were interchangeable, too—an equivalence Edward Hunter drew, as well. Here, a striking parallel arises between the "far more subtle

[44] The considerable degree of fear and fantasy involved here is evident in the script description itself: "The producers of this film are, of course, unable to say that the activities shown in this film can be carried out under actual conditions, but these films will show the physically amazing things can be accomplished under hypnosis and it would be foolish to deny that the phenomena demonstrated in the laboratory could not be applied to real life. Perhaps in the future we shall be able to answer these questions."

means" of the "code word" administered via telephone and the "key" to trigger Raymond Shaw's conditioning: "Why don't you pass the time by playing a little solitaire?" The imagined features of secret influence as depicted by Condon, Hunter, and this script-writer all cohere around such surrealist evocations of hidden mysteries, yet to be revealed: something between "facts and fancy," where "shadow takes form and form becomes shadow." The scenes "fade out," leaving us, strategically, on the precipice of possibility.[45]

IV. The "Yellow Peril" of Yen Lo

Juxtaposing *The Black Art* and *The Manchurian Candidate* reveals a consistent theme concerning the metaphysical overtones of Cold War theories of secret influence. The notion of brainwashing had become something more than the "black psychiatry" envisioned by the architects of Project BLUEBIRD. Now loaded with presumptions of evil, brainwashing had become a novel "black art," a Cold War *maleficium,* conceptualized as something akin to a perverse defacement of ordinary religious phenomena.

For Hunter, the celebrated origin of "brain-washing," this mysterious technique was not exactly religious *per se;* it was religious in the *wrong* way, calling to mind all manner of witchy and magical things. Brainwashing was, in this description, evocative of *irreligious* subversion, a kind of evil magic employing methods like those associated with witchcraft, which colonial missionaries and ethnographers had long theorized as foreign, exotic, and impure deviations from *real*

[45] On this point, note parallels in a 1955 CIA memo on hypnosis research in which the author contended that "only the imagination and skill of the handling operator and the inherent limitations of hypnosis as a technique would limit the possibilities…. we obviously must devote serious efforts to work out counter-measures, both to protect ourselves and to anticipate what the opposition may do to frustrate our efforts. It should be recalled that the Russians at least since Pavlov have devoted large resources to work in related fields of psychology. If hypnosis really has a potential, we may at this moment be its victims. … If hypnotic control can be established over any participant in a clandestine operation, the operator will apparently have an extraordinary degree of influence, a control in order of magnitude beyond anything we have ever considered feasible." Memorandum For: [Redacted], Subject: "Hypnotism and Covert Operations," 5 May 1955, MORI ID#190713.

religion. This othering framework overlaps with Edward Said's influential theory of "Orientalism": "a political vision of reality whose structure promoted the difference between the familiar (Europe, the West, 'us') and the strange (the Orient, the East, 'them')."[46] An imaginative product of Western construction, the idea of the Orient "vacillates between the West's contempt for what is familiar and its shivers of delight in—or fear of—novelty."[47]

In 1958, political scientist Harold Isaacs published a survey of American ("predominantly white" and almost entirely male) attitudes toward China and India, the results of which seem to parallel what Said had assessed of Orientalism broadly.[48] Isaacs reported that, "For some it [the Orient] has been a romantic attraction ('all the picturesque mystery, exotic adventure') or repulsion ('a shrinking feeling')." While many of those he surveyed defined the otherness of Asians based on their skin color, he reported that an even larger number pointed to distinctions that emphasized religious difference, secrecy, and mystery: "'they are heathen, people with other gods, different religious concepts, religiosity; cultural, religious, language

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46 Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 43-44.

47 Ibid., 59; The "delight" Said addresses may also be read in terms of desire. Sara Ahmed brings our attention to the desire that she finds encoded in the Orientalist gaze. This desire, she argues, "involves a political economy in the sense that it is distributed: the desire to possess, and to occupy, constitutes others not only as objects of desire, but also as resources for world making." Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), 115.

48 Harold Isaacs, *Scratches on Our Minds: American Images of China and India* (New York: John Day Company/ Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1958). In terms of demographics, Isaacs noted that "the primary basis for selection was the one thing they all have in common: they all play an important or significant role in what we broadly call the communications process. Each one in some meaningful way influences or has influenced the flow of ideas and information and the patterning of attitudes among one or more of the many publics who compose the people." He interviewed 181 individuals and grouped them by profession using the following categories: Academic World: 41; Mass Media (Press, Radio-TV, Writers, Publishers): 40; Government: 28; Ex-Government: 12; Business: 13; Groups Concerned with Public Opinion and Education: 27; Church-Missionary Groups: 20 (14). In terms of political leanings, his interviewees included 69 Democrats, 47 Republicans, and 44 Independents (25). What is truly astounding about this study of attitudes toward Chinese and Indian peoples is that, of the nearly 14 pages describing the various demographic groups of his interviewees, not a single reference is made to Asian-Americans, who are presumably excluded from Isaacs' categorization of "American." In fact, only one paragraph of these 14 pages is devoted to discussion of racial demographics; here, he makes the striking (though perhaps unsurprising) claim that his panel "turned out to have to a remarkable degree many of the more obvious features of our national profile. It is predominantly white (174) and of Protestant background (137) with minorities of Catholics (12), Jews (29), and Negroes (7). In these positions of top and upper-level leadership the panel, like our society, includes along with a large majority of men only a small number of women (13)," (24). Thus, while an otherwise praiseworthy contribution to our understanding of anti-Asian racism and stereotypes in Cold War America, his study is hardly as representative as he suggests—a limitation that is, on its own, quite instructive.

differences; customs strange to an American; the idea of the Eastern soul, mind, mentality, morals, different from ours; they are difficult to understand….'" Situating his respondents within the framework of the contemporary Cold War, Isaacs observed that, "The onset of Communist terror and 'persuasion' in China has clearly revived in full and growing measure all the deeply latent images of cruelty and disregard for human life associated with the Chinese in many American minds, suggesting a power of evil that is not merely inhumane but bestial, not human at all, but subhuman."[49]

The emphasis Isaacs' respondents placed on Asian religious difference reflects Said's observation that, in public discourse, imaginations of the Orient retain "a reconstructed religious impulse, a naturalized supernaturalism."[50] This, I would argue, is precisely the kind of "naturalized supernaturalism" that is at work in Hunter's construction of brainwashing as a mysterious, specifically Chinese, particularly communist, and indelibly malevolent form of secret influence—a "dire" magical technique, "more like witchcraft…with a *strange flair* of science," conducted by "devil dancers." And this is also what we see at work in Condon's construction of his "Oriental" villain, the "Chinese doctor," Yen Lo, as well as his method of brainwashing, which is framed as a "distinctly 'Oriental' practice." as Matthew Frye Jacobson and Gaspar González have noted in their study of the novel and film.[51] "Yen Lo is beyond the normal (read: Western) reach of conscience and remorse," they observe, and the most "unnerving thing"

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[49] Ibid., 45-46, 108.
[50] Said, *Orientalism*, 121.
[51] See also, Jacobson and González *What Have They Built You to Do?,* 101-119. Here, Isaacs' study is relevant, too, for he observed that the issue of brainwashing, in particular, carried long-standing anti-Chinese prejudices into the Cold War-era: "All the qualities attributed to the 'evil and untrustworthy Oriental' come into their own in the new circumstances and the new hostile setting. They are drawn upon particularly to reinforce one of the most powerful of all the 'new' images emerging, the image of the Chinese as brain-washers. … It obviously was going to outstrip by far anything attributed to the Russians by way of explanation for the 'confessions' of the accused in the purge trials of the Stalin era….For the Chinese there was a whole battery of relevant qualities to draw upon, qualities which had been long attributed to them in some unique measure in the past: their inhuman cruelty, for one thing, and at its service, their inscrutability, their deviousness, their subtlety, and their devilish cleverness." Isaacs, *Scratches,* 218.

about him, "the quality that raises him above his Soviet comrades in the metrics of sheer evil," they argue, "is his calm, even cheerful approach to villainy," his laughter and frivolity while describing and pursuing his devilish aims.[52]

Yen Lo is one of many Cold War figurations of the "Yellow Peril," infused with the same pejorative anti-Asian stereotypes that characterized Sax Rohmer's serial villain Fu Manchu in the early twentieth-century.[53] Spanning from the 1910s to the 1950s, the Fu Manchu novels were immensely popular in the U.S.[54] Their early popularity, Mel Y. Chen has noted, "was driven by the sentiment of the Yellow Peril…concerning the rise of Chinese immigration and labor in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries" and, later, by "shared fears about rising East Asian powers in the mid-twentieth century."[55] Isaacs's survey indicated the enduring power of the figure of Fu Manchu as an embodiment of Asian difference, as his respondents' perceptions

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[52] Jacobson and González, *What Have They Built You to Do?,* 120-21.

[53] Reviewing Demme's 2004 film remake of *The Manchurian Candidate* for the *Chicago Reader*, Cliff Doerksen made the interesting observation that Condon may have been "inspired by Rohmer's 1936 novel *President Fu Manchu*, in which the mustachioed criminal genius grooms his own American presidential candidate while financing a bogus patriotic movement (the League of Good Americans) to put him in the White House. Fu Manchu's elaborate takeover plot further involves an unwitting amnesiac assassin, programmed to kill upon hearing a trigger word–'Asia'–from his evil controller." Doerksen, "The Right Kind of Remake"; For a more comprehensive study of Fu Manchu in the context of anti-Asian racism and Orientalist representations, see Christopher Frayling, *The Yellow Peril: Dr. Fu Manchu & The Rise of Chinaphobia* (New York, NY: Thames & Hudson, 2014). For more on the Yellow Peril, see, especially, John Kuo Wei Tchen and Dylan Yeats, eds., *Yellow Peril!: An Archive of Anti-Asian Fear* (London and New York: Verso, 2014); also see William F. Wu, *The Yellow Peril: Chinese Americans in American Fiction, 1850 to 1940* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1982); For a broader treatment of Orientalism in the Cold War, see Christina Klein, *Cold War Orientalism: Asia in the Middlebrow Imagination, 1945–1961* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); For a detailed overview of the history of Orientalism in American culture, see Naomi Rosenblatt, "Orientalism in American Popular Culture," *Penn History Review,* Vol. 16, Issue 2 (2009), Article 5; Isaacs cited in his study a review of Chinese representations in American film that summarized common cinematic devices: "The mystery of Chinatown was suggested by a whole series of visual cliches: the ominous shadow of an Oriental figure thrown against a wall, secret panels which slide back to reveal an inscrutable Oriental face, the huge shadow of a hand with tapering fingers and long pointed fingernails poised menacingly, the raised dagger appearing suddenly and unexpectedly from between closed curtains." Isaacs, *Scratches.,* 116.

[54] For more on the *Fu Manchu* series, see Ruth Mayer, *Serial Fu Manchu: The Chinese Supervillain and the Spread of Yellow Peril Ideology* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2014). Mayer's focus concerns the notion of seriality itself, as opposed to a typological study of the character. She deploys motifs of movement and regeneration, over and against static archetypal readings: "Conceiving of Fu Manchu as a 'mechanic' constellation also means approaching the medially diverse Fu Manchu narratives as serial performances or enactments instead of representations of the yellow peril theme, as generators rather than as mere reverberators of the ideological knowledge that is being disseminated" (7).

[55] Mel Y. Chen, *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2012), 116.

of Chinese people were often driven less by focused socio-economic reflection than by what they recalled from the fictions of Fu Manchu. One individual reflected on "a stereotype I've had since childhood of the Chinese as mysterious people.… Maybe it was the Fu Manchu stories. Has the idea of 'inscrutable' attached to it…." Another interviewee claimed that "All levels of U.S. society find the Chinese inscrutable, that we cannot understand them no matter how hard we try, that their ultimate thinking is untouched and unreached by us. Suppose this comes from Fu Manchu, early movie villains, the devious mysterious Chinese." [56]

In his 1913 novel *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu,* Rohmer (pseudonym of Arthur Sarsfield Ward) characterized his villain in memorable terms that articulated the kind of fear and fantasy of the Orient that both Isaacs and Said observed:

> Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare, and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government—which, however, already has denied all knowledge of his existence. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man.[57]

The inscrutable, devious Chinese villain Fu Manchu has been characterized as an antecedent to Yen Lo, both embodying "the satanic concentration of an entire continent's cruel cunning."[58] Recall that Condon himself made this connection between Yen Lo and Fu Manchu explicit in his novel, as did Frankenheimer in his film adaptation. It is thus not without reason that in 1957 social psychologist Raymond Bauer could invoke the supernaturalism of Orientalist othering in an article on the American "demonology" of brainwashing that condemned the

[56] Isaacs, *Scratches,* 84. 122.
[57] Sax Rohmer, *The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu* (1913).
[58] Jacobson and González, *What Have They Built You to Do?,* 108.

"eagerness to attribute such conversions to the demonic machinations of the Doctors Pavlov and Fu Manchu."[59]

While Bauer used the term metaphorically, "demonology" indeed captures the demonization of "Orientals" that generated such portrayals as that painted by the evangelical Christian Dan Gilbert, columnist for the anti-communist magazine *The National Republican,* whose fearsome 1951 essay, "Why the Yellow Peril Has Turned Red!" defined the "Yellow Peril" as "the organizing of Orientals into a force that seeks to destroy all white men from the face of the earth." Gilbert saw "the materialism of Marxian Communism and the superstitions of the Oriental religions" as near-identical forms of "pantheism," which he defined as the worship of "material things, rather than a Living God." He saw Chinese and Soviet Communists as nefarious, fetish-worshipping forces in league with the Devil, whose unholy mission was foretold in biblical prophecy. And, as Gilbert saw it, "all white men" were in danger of the sweeping, heathen sorcery of these *maleficos*, "these doers of murder and the deeds of the devil," these worshippers of material things.[60]

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[59] Raymond A. Bauer, "Brainwashing: Psychology or Demonology?," *Journal of Social Issues*, Vol. 13, Issue 3 (Summer 1957): 41-47. The "demonology" of the Yellow Peril can be situated within a broader American political tradition of demonology that Cold War historian Michael Rogin has described as a "distinctive American political tradition, fearful of primitivism, disorder, and conspiracy, developed in response to peoples of color," which "draws its energy from alien threats to the American way of life, and sanctions violent and exclusionary responses to them." This demonology begins, Rogin argues, with "a rigid insistence on difference…deriv[ing] from fears of and forbidden desires for identity with the excluded object." In the period of the Cold War, the "celluloid medium of secret influence became the message," and the Communist Party its target. Communists were demonized as part of "a secret, international conspiracy to overthrow American government; the Party took orders from a foreign power, and its members committed espionage." Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly."

[60] Gilbert's essay offered a racist, anti-communist, apocalyptic prophecy that built on evangelical millennialist traditions of scriptural interpretation: "We are told in Revelation that the rampaging *Yellow Peril* will launch mass slaughters that will take the lives of one-third of the human race: the 'third part of men' shall be killed. Amongst the survivors, this heathen cult shall be strong. There will be the large-scale worship of 'devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk.' Of these doers of murder and the deeds of the devil, it is written, 'Neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.' Communism sanctions fornication, murder, sorcery, and theft." His conclusion assured his readers that—"thank God"—there was a solution to the materialistic threat of the Yellow Peril: simply supply missionary efforts with more money ("Billions of dollars … instead of a paltry few hundred thousand"). Dan Gilbert, "Why the Yellow Peril Has Turned Red!" (1951)," in Tchen and Yeats, 298-301.

V. A "Dearly Loved and Hated Mother"

In addition to the inscrutable "Orientals" of the resurgent Yellow Peril, Cold War demonology located a new target on the domestic front, as well, turning its gaze inward to a looming threat of maternal corruption. This new peril came to be identified with "Momism"—an evocative term coined by writer and social critic Philip Wylie in his popular and highly controversial 1942 critique of American culture, *Generation of Vipers*.[61] Wylie's notion of "Momism" expressed a post-WWII preoccupation with the cultural and moral authority afforded to mothers and, more specifically, growing suspicions that mothers exploited a veneer of virtuous self-sacrifice to conceal their true idleness and parasitism.

Wylie offered a blistering critique of the American adoration of motherhood as not only a dated cultural construction but a problematic and even dangerous fiction. By extension, the idea of "Momism" he popularized both articulated and helped to foment fears of the corrupting potential of women within their domestic sphere of influence. This development reflected a shifting understanding of a domestic ideology that, since the nineteenth century, had defined the role of mothers as key to the development of self-disciplined children. While the home had long been associated with the shaping power of maternal influence, it now took on additional meaning in public perception and popular culture as "the confined space against which, in fantasies of female vengeance, [Mom] would rebel."[62] Wylie would go on to publish the

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[61] Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York and Toronto: Farrar and Rinehart, 1942). Regarding the popularity of Wylie's book, Rebecca Jo Plant notes that "*Generation of Vipers* continued to sell so well in hardback that Wylie held off releasing a paperback until 1959. In paperback, the book sold thousands more copies and went through ten additional printings, remaining in print until 1968. Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Pocket Books, 1968). The book has been back in print since 1996, when Dalkey Archive Press—a small press devoted to restoring neglected American classics—reissued the 1955 edition." Rebecca Jo Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 188n.

[62] Rogin, "Kiss Me Deadly." Rogin adds that, in contrast to the physical force associated with fathers, the "domestic mother created moral character by giving and withholding love. She entered the self, formed it, understood its feelings, and thereby at once produced it and protected it from corruption"; For an in-depth study of Wylie's concept of "Momism" and its impact on American culture, see Plant, "Debunking the All-American Mom: Philip Wylie's Momism Critique," in *Mom,* 19-54. Here, Plant offers a nuanced interpretation of Wylie's "Momism," noting that "maternal behavior toward children was by no means Wylie's sole concern, for he also railed against women's

twentieth edition of *Vipers* in 1955, including new reflections in annotations by the author, suggesting that for both Wylie and his enduring audience, these fears and fantasies of rogue mothers were not abated but rather amplified amidst the onset of the Cold War— "Mom still command[ed]" and was "more than ever in charge."[63]

The "Mom" of Philip Wylie's concern was, in his description, "a certain, prevalent sub-species of middle-class American woman," a "taloned, cackling residue of burnt-out puberty in a land that has no use for mature men or women."[64] She enjoyed and exploited the "sacredness" attributed to her by a dated domestic ideology—an American "adoration of motherhood" that had become "the basis of a religious cult" of "she-popery." This "megaloid momworship" was "something new in the world of men," a uniquely "American creation" that elevated Mom to "a spot next to the Bible and the Flag." The limited domestic power and moral authority accorded to mothers had, in Wylie's view, "got[ten] completely out of hand," becoming perverted into a nation-wide Oedipus complex, "a social fiat and a dominant neurosis in our land."[65]

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purported habits of consumption and the social and political activities that they pursued, often in the name of motherhood." Additionally, her archival research sheds important light on Wylie's interpretation of his own work: "Wylie regretted the tendency to focus exclusively on the momism chapter and complained that people often failed to discern his humorous intent" (20). Note, also, that Plant provides a corrective to Rogin's assumption that postwar domestic ideology constituted an extension of Victorian domestic ideology, arguing that "in fact, in marked contrast to their Victorian forebears, midcentury psychological experts strongly discouraged 'maternal surveillance' and repeatedly insisted on the need for psychological boundaries between mothers and their children, especially sons. The momism critique was not a byproduct of, nor a counterreaction to, the maternal ideal that achieved dominance in the 1940s and 1950s: it informed and helped to produce that ideal" (200n). While significant, Plant's point is outside the scope of my focus here.

[63] Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers,* annotated ed. (New York and Toronto: Farrar and Rinehart, 1955), 195n. Because Wylie's annotations reveal much about his attempts to theorize his own work in the new context of the Cold War, I will rely on this edition for quotations hereafter.

[64] Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (1955), 194-97n.; Wylie's work is plastered with fantastic, lengthy catalogues of similar descriptions of "Mom." See, for instance, his assertion that Mom's "caprices are of a menopausal nature at best—hot flashes, rage, infantilism, weeping, sentimentality, peculiar appetite, and all the ragged reticule of tricks, wooing, wiles, suborned fornications, slobby onanisms, indulgences, crotchets, superstitions, phlegms, debilities, vapors, butterflies-in-the-belly, plaints, conniving, cries, malingering, deceptions, visions, hallucinations, needlings and wheedlings, which pop out of every personality in the act of abandoning itself and humanity. … But behind this vast aurora of pitiable weakness is mom, the brass-breasted Baal, or mom, the thin and enfeebled martyr whose very urine, nevertheless, will etch glass" (199).

[65] Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (1955), 197n, 197-99, 216, 198, 194.

> 'Her boy,' having been 'protected' by her love, and carefully, even shudderingly, shielded from his logical development through his barbaric period, or childhood….is cushioned against any major step in his progress toward maturity. Mom steals from the generation of women behind her…that part of her boy's personality which should have become the love of a female contemporary. Mom transmutes it into sentimentality for herself. …Her policy of protection, from the beginning, was not love of her boy but of herself, and as she found returns coming in from the disoriented young boy in smiles, pats, presents, praise, kisses, and all manner of childish representations of the real business, she moved on to possession.[66]

Wylie presented his psychoanalytical assessment of the nation's ills as a cultural provision, reflecting a valiant "effort to sever the psychic umbilicus by which millions of moms hold millions of grown American men and women in diseased serfdom." Mom was, in Wylie's view, "taking over the male functions and interpreting those functions in female terms," rendering her husband a "de-sexed, de-souled, de-cerebrated mate," while holding "her captive son or sons in a state of automatic adoration of herself." Once the moral core of national character-building, Mom had now become a "spiritual saboteur," a "Pandora" unleashing so many of the evils of the "degenerating era" in which Wylie found himself. Her public image concealed her role in bringing about the present social ills of "moral degeneration, civic corruption…murder, homosexuality, drunkenness, financial depression, chaos and war."[67]

Whatever patriotic zeal she performed during the course of WWII was merely "an occasion for more show," for even when her own son went off to war, she did not miss him, "only his varletry—but over that she [could] weep interminably." She could quote Thomas Jefferson at length, but in reality, Mom "brush[ed] aside the ideals and concepts for which her forebears perished fighting" and "attribute[d] to the noble dead her own immediate and selfish attitudes." As the anti-Communist crusade emerged with the Cold War, Wylie found that "'McCarthyism,' the rule of unreason, [was] one with momism: a noble end aborted by sick-

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[66] Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (1955), 208-209.
[67] Ibid., 195n., 212, 214n., 208, 201.

minded means." Like Senator Joseph McCarthy, Mom sought "blind tribute to a blind authoritarianism like her own."[68]

If Wylie's "Mom" presented a caricature of contemporary concerns surrounding the subversive potential of maternal influence, so, too, did Condon's Eleanor Iselin. Eleanor was the virtual embodiment of "Mom": a manipulative, selfish, inveterate fraud who performed the emotions that she could not feel, taking advantage of the sacredness attributed to mothers as an opportunity for social leverage and a register of her entitlement to Raymond's love and the nation's respect. Both caricature-mothers fostered in their sons deep Oedipal attachments as strings they could pull for their own gain.

The "secret bond" Eleanor developed with Raymond had severe and lasting effects on his character. Having "always lain under the spell of the wicked witch," Raymond grew up to be a socially timid "sexual neutral" fueled by "total resentment, whose weakness of will was "compounded by his constant need to lean upon someone else's will." Like Wylie's "Mom," Eleanor had rendered Raymond a "captive son" and her husband Johnny a "de-sexed" and "de-cerebrated mate." She had made both men her puppets, and in the process, crafted for herself a tableau of submissive lackeys to do her bidding. She exploited a romantic nationalism in her veneration of the "blessed, blessed [Founding] fathers" of the Republic as she, like Wylie's "Mom," turned patriotic displays into "occasion[s] for more show."

Like Eleanor, Wylie's "Mom" was "organization-minded," too, having "happily discovered" that organizations "are intimidating to all men, not just to mere men" and could thus "compel an abject compliance of her environs to her personal desires":

> [Mom] builds clubhouses for the entertainment of soldiers where she succeeds in persuading thousands of them that they are momsick and would rather talk to her than

[68] Ibid., 205, 206, 196n.

> take Betty into the shrubs. All this, of course, is considered social service, charity, care of the poor, civic reform, patriotism, and self-sacrifice.[69]

Perhaps owing to its scandalous portrayal of "Mom" above all, Wylie's *Vipers* enjoyed a marked popularity in the nascent stage of the Cold War.[70] Yet beyond its entertainment value, Wylie's cultural diagnoses retained a certain explanatory value that became newly relevant when the nation faced a scandal of its own in the wake of the Korean War POW "confessions." As journalists and public commentators attempted to diagnose the defections of patriotic men, they, too, sensed "something new in the world of men," and, like Wylie, some looked to the domestic sphere for explanations. *Chicago Tribune* contributor John H. Thompson seemed to parrot Wylie's critique when he decried this cultural crisis in a 1959 article in which he described the defecting POWs as "a cross-section of our life—big, fat, soft, pulpy America, its youth unaware of its heritage, its man-children unaware of their responsibilities as mature men faced with a subtle enemy."[71]

In 1956, Major William E. Mayer of the U.S. Army Medical Corps invoked similar sentiments in a speech given to an assembly of naval officers and researchers in San Francisco. Based on interviews he'd conducted with returning POWs, he identified those most vulnerable to brainwashing as insecure men who had been raised without proper discipline. He diagnosed the POW defections as a "disease of the passive, the dependent, the rather inadequate, the kid who was awfully insecure who couldn't tolerate this being isolated from other soldiers or from

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[69] Ibid., 203.

[70] The provocative effect and pervasive influence of Wylie's theory of "Momism" can be seen in a letter that one frustrated mother wrote to the editor of the *Washington Post* in 1951: "Mothers are sick and tired of all this talk about momism, Mom's boys, sob-moms, over-possessiveness and sentimentalism. …Since Adam, men have blamed their weaknesses, mistakes and failures on women. Today, psychologists, sociologists, educators, military leaders and politicians, faced with a third world war, and a lot of other problems say, 'the mothers are to blame.'" Elsie King Moreland letter to the editor, "'Momism' Refuted," *The Washington Post* (Jan. 31, 1951), 12.

[71] John H. Thompson, "Why Collaboration in Korea?," *Chicago Tribune* (Feb. 8, 1959), B2, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Review of Eugene Kinked, *In Every War But One* (New York: Norton, 1959).

his unit. … who cried himself to sleep at night" and "talked about his mother a lot." Providing false confessions seemed to Major Mayer "quite a price to let your mommy hear your voice." Physicians may have seen this kind of "psychological surrender" in cases of "abandoned infants," but never "among 18- to 22-year-old adult males."

In Mayer's view, a lack of psychological fortitude among the POWs precipitated a nearly inevitable vulnerability to brainwashing: any guilt or anxiety the POWs felt due to their false confessions would only be abated by further indoctrination. Like Condon's Raymond, their internal psychological conflict rendered them all the more susceptible to the communist brainwashers' machinations. The men seemed to be deficient in the "old fashioned American characteristic" of perseverance, of "fighting against all odds and obstacles." The confessing POWs, Mayer concluded, "naturally" lacked the kind of discipline that should be "taught in homes, and Sunday schools sometimes, in churches," and "from the cradle onward …at parent's knees, and even possibly across parent's knees."[72]

Mayer's assessment of POWs who caved to brainwashing hinged on cultural presumptions concerning domestic discipline as key to the rearing of strong men. From this vantage point, Mayer's conclusions aligned with what Wylie had outlined as the predictable result of child-rearing in a culture of "momworship." The sons of emotionally exploitative mothers, according to Wylie, were "shielded from [their] logical development" and "cushioned against any major step in [their] progress toward maturity." Mayer's description of the soldier who was desperate to "let mommy hear [his] voice" echoed Wylie's concern for the "momsick" soldiers persuaded by Mom that they "would rather talk to her than take Betty into the shrubs." Significantly, for Mayer, psychological strength and "old fashioned American" perseverance

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[72] Major William E. Mayer, *Brainwashing: The Ultimate Weapon*. Transcription of address given at the San Francisco Naval Shipyard in the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory, October 4, 1956.

depended upon exposure to discipline in the home, "across parent's knees," as well as in churches and Sunday schools. For Wylie, men would be robbed of any opportunity for such moral fortitude so long as Mom was allowed her coveted "spot next to the Bible and the Flag."

The mature, disciplined soldier Mayer envisioned emerged somewhere at the nexus of nation, church, and family—an American cultural linkage that both Wylie's authoritarian Mom and Condon's Eleanor Iselin exploited as they sought the power and prestige held by both Bible and Flag. In their defacement of religious sincerity, patriotic ideals, and social expectations of proper maternal influence, both Wylie's "Mom" and Raymond's "dearly loved and hated mother" were exposed in their true, malevolent forms: shrewd exploiters of the weaknesses of men; frauds performing public personae of nurturing, self-sacrificing mothers and wives; two-faced women hiding their lust for control behind veils of pure love and devotion to the pillars of Cold War American ideology: God, country, and family.

In his theory of "Momism," Wylie constructed an image of subversive maternal influence that offered one way for his American audience to explain the perplexing scandal of POW confessions. American military and intelligence agencies were still probing this particular POW scandal by the time Condon published *The Manchurian Candidate* in 1959, but by then the Cold War was escalating at a staggering pace. "Brainwashing" was now firmly entrenched in the cultural lexicon, and concerns about subversive maternal influence were now eclipsed by the growing threat of communist influence and its potential infiltration into the home front. While Eleanor Iselin would thus be legible to Condon's audience as the embodiment of the "Mom" that Wylie's audience had come to know and fear, the dramatic effect of her character had less to do with what she embodied than with her relationship to the disembodied figure of the lurking shadowy communist, who could be anyone, and anywhere, hiding in plain sight—even, perhaps, the Defense Department.

Conclusion: "Dissatisfactions, Drives, and Nostalgias"

By the time of *The Manchurian Candidate*'s publication in 1959, Americans were well aware of their vulnerability to the influence of enemies both foreign and domestic. Yet, as we have seen in the words of Edward Hunter, brainwashing was theorized and presented from the outset as "something new." Thus, for Condon's audience, what was "new" was not the problem of influence *per se* but the image of brainwashing, in particular—an image whose distinctiveness stemmed from the variety of cultural concerns it captured. If indeed brainwashing can be understood as a Cold War "cultural fashion," as I have argued, then we must ask what "dissatisfactions, drives, and nostalgias" animated this image, differentiated it from extant notions of everyday influence, and contributed to its enduring legacy in American popular culture. It was in these motivating factors, after all, that Eliade detected "something religious" about cultural fashions.

The surreal image of brainwashing emerged at the intersection of the play of fiction and the realities of warfare, where long-standing Orientalist tropes converged with racializing, primitivizing assumptions of Western colonialism in imaginations of secret influence deployed by the communist Other. The discourse surrounding the specter and threat of brainwashing not only recruited but reconfigured familiar cultural formations, from the weak-willed "captive sons" of domineering mothers to the "inscrutable," "Oriental" villains of the "Yellow Peril." Yet the mysterious aura enveloping the image of brainwashing rendered it distinctive, wholly Other, and thus set apart from many of these contemporary concerns regarding influence on a domestic front. Brainwashing was a "new secret weapon," as one 1955 article in *The Atlantic* put it—a "conquest not of man's body but of his mind and spirit," powerful enough to accomplish the communists' goal of putting "a person in a state where he will do whatever is wanted *seemingly of*

his own free will."[73] The term itself evoked something magical and evil—the "very dramatic word" that the United Nations representative Henry Cabot Lodge needed as he sought a compelling terminology "which would indicate horror and would condemn (by its sound) Soviet practices of attacking people's minds."

Reflecting on the legacy of Frankenheimer's film adaptation of *The Manchurian Candidate* in 1988, cultural historian Thomas Doherty praised its "more thoroughgoing exploration of what precisely was so fearful about the red, or yellow in this case, menace." From Doherty's perspective, what was most fearful about this brainwashing story was the existential disorientation it provoked. "Ultimately," he wrote, "the invasion from without seems more personal than political, more about an assault on selfhood than nationhood. …The scenes in which a hypnotized Raymond calmly and unaffectedly strangles one comrade and blows the brains out of another remain unnerving because it challenges the very notion (and very American notion) of the autonomous individual and independence of will."[74]

In this chapter, I have examined the story of *The Manchurian Candidate* as a point of entry into the mythic construction of brainwashing, and in turn, I have examined brainwashing as a cultural fashion that allows insight into a distinctive theology of evil that both reflected and reinforced a Cold War entanglement of secrecy and religion in American culture. On the one hand, brainwashing entailed a new point of access into the secrets of the mind, but it also required for its intelligibility certain presumptions regarding secret techniques of the communist enemy. Moreover, its effectiveness as a "very dramatic word" for government propagandists and its subsequent emergence as a touchstone of Cold War popular culture hinged upon a certain religious framework in which that enemy could be situated as not only irreligious but indeed evil.

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[73] Gladwin Hill, "Brain-washing: Time for a Policy," *The Atlantic* (Apr. 1955), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1955/04/brain-washing-time-for-a-policy/641229/.
[74] Thomas Doherty, "A Second Look: The Manchurian Candidate," *Cineaste* 16, no. 4 (1988), 30-31.

It indicated something malevolent, associated with deception, concealment, subterfuge, and an assault on free will—a constellation of characterizations of the communist enemy to which *The Manchurian Candidate* gave full and dynamic expression in the figures of Eleanor Iselin and Yen Lo.

Like the cunning, shrewd serpent of biblical lore, communist brainwashers could manipulate innocent minds through their "evil suggestion and crafty persuasion."[75] Such *maleficium* threatened not only the exploitation of one's free will, but indeed the entire upending of the social boundaries that rendered free will a sacred value and distinguishing feature in American life. Through these means, one 1953 *New York Times* article warned, the communist enemy might "recreate man after their own image."[76]

This is the crux of the issue at hand in this study of the religious dynamics of brainwashing, where brainwashing not only extends to but indeed requires a type of religious discourse in order to think or speak about it. It could be, and routinely was, described as something like a perverse form of religious conversion. Such comparisons served not only to explain the mysterious phenomenon, but more critically, to exemplify its fundamentally irreligious nature. Recall, for instance, Edward Hunter's portrayal of brainwashing as "a distorted evangelism that is cold-blooded and calculating." Recall how it gave him "the eerie sensation of a world turned inside out." This latter point is crucial here, for if brainwashing was anything like religion, it was religion turned inside out—indeed, a defacement of *real* religion. In this qualifying likeness to religion, the Cold War discourse on brainwashing recruited religious language, surfaced sacred values, and reconfigured religious narratives to navigate the "celluloid medium of secret influence."

[75] Godfrey Sperling, Jr., "Religion and the Armed Forces," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Apr. 23, 1958), 18.
[76] Hanson W. Baldwin, "The Road to Total War," *New York Times* (Sept. 13, 1953).

This American confrontation with the specter of brainwashing thus provides one avenue through which historians might think differently about religion in the Cold War. Reexamined in terms of a cultural fashion, the image of brainwashing enables access to some of the "dissatisfactions, drives, and nostalgias" that shaped Cold War American life. Its legacy in American popular culture can be traced to Condon's influential depiction of the making of Raymond Shaw, and as I have endeavored to show, such a tracing reveals some of the formidable cultural concerns that rendered *The Manchurian Candidate* relevant and compelling to its Cold War American audience. I have highlighted two of the most salient examples of such concerns through Raymond's makers—his mother, Eleanor, and his brainwasher, Yen Lo—and in so doing, sketched some of the contours of Cold War preoccupations with the dangers of "Momism," the communist "Yellow Peril," and central to my broader point here, the malevolence of secret influence.

Examining the significance of religion in this case requires an expanded lens to locate its emergences beyond religious institutions, beliefs, doctrines, rituals, and communities. For if there is "something religious" about the cultural fashion of brainwashing, then surely it stems not only from explicit evocations of religious phenomena, as in the alarms rung by POW confessions and conversions, or the evil of brainwashing and its effects on one's soul; it stems also from the more abstract level of its endurance as a cultural touchpoint in American popular culture and what that persistent presence reveals about the various "dissatisfactions, drives, and nostalgias" that have made it so meaningful over time.

The notion of brainwashing threatened to upturn the entire apparatus of moral human machinery, rendering individual free will a permeable membrane, and thereby calling into question this crucial tenet of the Christian logic that has long structured American legal, social, and political discourse: did "American citizens, who live in a nation that glorifies independent

thinkers and individual rights, really have complete control over their actions and beliefs?"[77] How culpable could the POWs who issued false confessions really be, and could their statements truly constitute sins against the nation if issued under the "evil suggestion and crafty persuasion" of their communist captors? What else could the enemy do, what could they make us do, or become, and how far could their influence reach? "At some future date it could be me—or you," *The Boston Globe* had warned. Who else may be brainwashed among us, "The Black Art" dared its viewers to ask, and could we be brainwashed ourselves? The power and persistence of the notion of brainwashing has thrived on such questions, as the secrets of the mind swirl into the secrets of the enemy and beyond. Then, as now, the mysterious image of brainwashing summoned fears and fantasies of the unknown in an enduring line of inquiry into the powers of evil and the limits and consequences of free will—a line best punctuated not by a question mark but by an ellipsis, as the lines between fact and fantasy blur, as the scene fades out.

[77] Matthew Dunne, *A Cold War State of Mind: Brainwashing and Postwar American Society* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013), 2.

Ch. 2: The Pentagon Papers and the Sacred Power of the TOP-SECRET

Introduction: A Trial, a Totem, and a Cardboard Box

There were no windows in Courtroom 9. The acoustics of the courtroom left most observers straining to hear what witnesses and attorneys were saying—as if the room itself required their silence. With its muting brown-paneled walls and its double-doored enclosure, this hermetic space lent structural support to the secrecy surrounding the trial proceedings it housed.[1] For nearly a year, from July 10, 1972, to May 11, 1973, this isolating chamber within the Los Angeles Federal Building would serve as a stage for testing and performing the limits of government secrecy in what came to be known as the Pentagon Papers trial.

There was, of course, nothing unique about this particular room; its insulating design could have been found in any other federal courtroom. Yet to journalist Peter Schrag, covering the case for *The New York Review of Books*, Judge William "Matt" Byrne's court carried the air of something distinctive, something set apart from the everyday world. It reminded him of some inquisitor's chamber that one might find hidden beneath the Vatican. It wasn't just the room that conjured such religious imagery. For Schrag, the entire Pentagon Papers trial was imbued with religious significance: "partly a trial for heresy, partly an obscenity trial—an inquisition into the meaning, use, and control of a sacred, unspeakable text, represented in this instance by a plain brown carton."[2] A quotidian image, this cardboard box might have otherwise been a testament to the everyday, yet upon the table of government prosecutor David R. Nissen, it

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[1] Peter Schrag, *Test of Loyalty: Daniel Ellsberg and the Rituals of Secret Government* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1974).
[2] Peter Schrag, "Heresy in Los Angeles," *New York Review of Books* (Mar. 22, 1973), 24-26.

contained nothing of the profane world. It pulsated with the ambiguous, sacred power of the "unspeakable" record it concealed—the TOP-SECRET history of the Vietnam War.

It is worth dwelling for a moment in the heady vapors of Schrag's courtroom report, for, while certainly embellished with journalistic flair, it is by no means trivial that he looked to the language and conceptual schema of religion to convey the power of the Pentagon Papers, the atmosphere surrounding their revelation, and the "heresy" committed by the trial's two co-defendants—Daniel Ellsberg, who took the Papers from their secure storage site at the foreign policy think tank where he worked, and his former colleague and co-conspirator, Anthony Russo. Schrag was not the only commentator to recruit religious references to invoke the "unspeakable" in this case. Like Schrag, other journalists, trial participants, security officials, and critics of government secrecy made use of notions like sacredness, holiness, taboos, and priesthoods to convey the gravity and internal logic of state secrecy.

While Schrag's account is thus hardly unique in its religious imagery and language, it is nevertheless noteworthy, for it points us to the very nerve center of the Pentagon Papers saga, where issues of state secrecy were entangled with issues of power, freedom, knowledge, and information itself. In this case, these entangled issues and ideals became sacred matters of both individual and national concern. In the wake of the leak of the Papers, the sacred value of state secrecy emerged in religious motifs of martyrdom, heresy, and priestly power; in debates over the acceptable limits of prohibitions and transgressions; and in ritual structures of concealment and revelation. By attending to the entanglement of religion in the saga of the Pentagon Papers, this chapter opens a path for re-reading this political case as a lens onto the myths, rituals, and spectacles of state secrecy in Cold War American culture.

Consider the "sacred, unspeakable text," whose awesome power vibrated beneath a cardboard cloak of materiality. The Pentagon Papers study was unspeakable, first, in the visceral

sense in which all confrontations with the realities of warfare and trauma have the power to render one speechless. It was, moreover, rendered unspeakable by its classified status, a prohibitive commandment of the national security state.[3] From the outset, it appeared that the transgression of this official prohibition was the crux of the trial—an interpretation whose deceptive simplicity appealed to critics of the defendants and which, at a deeper level, affirmed and reinforced an idealized notion of the salvific power of American law-and-order.[4] Yet in addition to these readings, was the TOP-SECRET text not also unspeakable in the sense of the sacred, as when the German theologian Rudolf Otto trembled himself mute before the sacred *mysterium tremendum*?[5] And what would such a reading suggest to us of the intermingling of things sacred and secret in American government?

Schrag was sensitive to the entanglement of secrecy and religion, and his observations on this point suggest a way we might think differently about notions of power as they pertain to this ostensibly secular case. "Inevitably," he reflected, "the testimony during the first weeks in Los Angeles was about the mystery of the Papers, the magical powers they gave to those who read them." How, we might ask, would this have been the "inevitable" case?

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[3] Such prohibitions, according to Durkheim, prove one is face to face with something sacred: "Just as society consecrates men, so it also consecrates things, including ideas. When a belief is shared unanimously by a people, to touch it—that is, to deny or question it—is forbidden…The prohibition against critique is a prohibition like any other and proves that one is face to face with a sacred thing." Durkheim, *Elementary Forms,* 215.

[4] See, for instance, this particularly revealing letter to the *Washington Post* editors in which the leak is framed explicitly as a transgression of "sacred" secrets (note also the anti-communist fears that evidently shape the view presented here): Harold E. Irwin of Philadelphia wrote: "Regardless of the merits of publishing the so-called Vietnamese war summary, these documents were the property of the federal government, had been classified secret and were stolen. These stolen documents were then passed on to the news media and the news media have now become the final authorities in our land as to what documents should be kept secret and what should be published. With our swing towards communism in this country which has been accelerated in the last eight years, this attitude should not really surprise anyone. I imagine even the innermost secrets of our nuclear submarines, missiles, etc., would not be considered sacred by the news media if they felt that it would sell newspapers and I assume would make rather interesting reading. You call yourselves the saviour of freedom in America. You are doing more to destroy American than any single group of people or organizations since the founding of our country. Perhaps you are hoping for great rewards under a new form of government." Letters to the Editor: "The Supreme Court Ruling, Dr. Ellsberg and the Pentagon Disclosures," *The Washington Post* (Jul. 4, 1971), B7.

[5] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, JW Harvey, trans. (Oxford University Press, 1923).

In the course of his reporting on the Pentagon Papers trial, Schrag came to realize that "it had never been the information in the Papers that had been most sensitive—certainly not the military information, and perhaps not even the information that was most embarrassing politically. It had been, all along, the principle of secrecy itself."[6] The plain cardboard box that captured his attention gave material form to this principle of secrecy—such an everyday object, but one whose very everydayness elevated the tension surrounding all of the prohibited, power-conferring information it contained. To Schrag, this box seemed a veritable emblem of concealment, "a kind of totem of the age of information." Like a modern echo of the 'Ark of the Lord'—that vehicle of the sacred power, accursed and holy, of the god of the Israelites—the cardboard edges of this box marked the only certain boundary in this case to separate that which could be known from that which must remain hidden.

It looked like any average box, no doubt, but something about this particular box set it apart from a world of copies and distinguished it from its everyday use-value as mere equipment. There was, in fact, more than one box involved in this drama, which had more to do with the task of containing and transporting the forty-seven volumes of the massive tome that was the TOP-SECRET History of the Vietnam War. But Schrag was little concerned with the utility of it all. He was, instead, compelled by the idea of the box in an abstract register, as both material evidence and metaphor, a material embodiment of secrecy—a "totem," vibrating with the resonant energy of symbolic power.

Before arriving via totem-box upon the numinous scene of Courtroom 9, the official secrets of the Vietnam War had already materialized at various vista-points in a surreal cross-country journey, beginning first with Ellsberg secretly, and illegally, taking the documents from their secure storage site and then working with Russo to copy and leak them. First, tucked

[6] Schrag, "Heresy in Los Angeles."

pragmatically into Ellsberg's briefcase, the documents that comprised the Pentagon Papers were shuttled covertly from one security-controlled depository in Washington, D.C. to another in Santa Monica, California—a process whose completion would require multiple trips due to the bulk of the material and the contingent problem of remaining inconspicuous while transporting so many documents. Then, off to Los Angeles for a brief pit-stop at an advertising agency where, thanks to a friendly favor, Ellsberg and Russo were given access to a company Xerox machine to make copies of the documents. Thereafter, the Papers were transferred through a series of secret dead-drops and dead-of-night handoffs, landing them squarely in the lap of a select group of congressional doves and newspaper editors. Then, spectacularly and irrevocably, the classified documents burst into the public domain as front-page news. Finally, arriving midstream to their own scandal, the now-leaked documents were rendered as material evidence in a trial against the newspapers that concocted their glorious exposure, setting the stage for the criminal trial against Ellsberg and Russo for their roles in this "unauthorized" revelation.[7]

At each stop in this trip across America, from airtight concealment to full-blown leak, the Papers were subject to debates over the ethics and power—both tantalizing and terrifying—of their possession and disclosure. Ben Bagdikian, a *Washington Post* journalist involved in the leak of the Papers, conceptualized this power through the idiom of religion: "Like the relics of St. George, whose spine is in Portofino, skull in Rome, a hand in Genoa, a finger in London, the

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[7] See, for example, *TIME Magazine*'s contemporary coverage of the trial of the *Times* and *Post,* in which the emphasis is explicitly placed on the secret material itself, over and against the issue of press freedom, which more frequently dominates the accounts of historians and legal scholars of this landmark case today: "The dramatic collision between the Nixon Administration and first the New York Times, then the Washington Post, raised in a new and spectacular form the unresolved constitutional questions about the Government's right to keep its planning papers secret and the conflicting right of a free press to inform the public how its Government has functioned. *Yet, even more fundamental, the legal battle focused national attention on the records that the Government was fighting so fiercely to protect.* Those records afforded a rare insight into how high officials make decisions affecting the lives of millions as well as the fate of nations. The view, however constricted or incomplete, was deeply disconcerting. The records revealed a dismaying degree of miscalculation, bureaucratic arrogance and deception. The revelations severely damaged the reputations of some officials, enhanced those of a few, and so angered Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield -- a long-patient Democrat whose own party was hurt most -- that he promised to conduct a Senate investigation of Government decision making" (my emphasis). "Pentagon Papers: The Secret War," *TIME* (Jun. 28, 1971).

bits and pieces of the Pentagon Papers had escaped their secret reliquary in the crypts of the Government and reappeared through the country in a finally credible sense of reality about the Government and the war and a metastasized affront to the Espionage Act."[8] In material form, the papers of the Papers became visible and tangible manifestations of a secrecy system whose power could be felt and handled, transferred and exchanged, and whose hidden logic could be rendered, somehow, "finally credible." Some hands were anxious to hold this power; others were anxious to be rid of it. Some recipients refused to even see the Papers, much less read them, signaling deep misgivings about the transgressions of authority and government property inherent in their very holding.

It was this palpable power of secrecy that Schrag sensed in the totem-box at the center of the Pentagon Papers trial. Yet what matters here has less to do with the secrets (or non-secrets) contained in this box than it does with Schrag's use of the religious metaphor of the totem to convey something more abstract about American society in the early 1970s. The age of Enlightenment had, it seemed, given way to a new "age of information," one marked by new technologies enabling the amassing of new information and new media for its conveyance. Whatever else such a periodization may have meant to Schrag, it is worth recognizing how, in this case, it signified a certain reification of information that invested state secrets with sacred power. This obsession with (secret) information and (sacred) power was, indeed, what the trial

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[8] Ben H. Bagdikian, "What Did We Learn?," *Columbia Journalism Review* (Sept/Oct. 1971): 45-50. Bagdikian observed, furthermore, that "…As the lawyers and later the judges began looking beneath the awesome claim of TOP SECRET they began to see that it was seldom justified. List after list submitted by the Government to the Court in secret was shown to be filled with items already in the public domain or already known to adversary nations. The Government official brought in to testify in secret court session on how bad it would be to publish the documents later told Congress that at least 6,000 pages of the 7,000 should not be classified." Bagdikian, "What Did We Learn?." As it happened, Bagdikian had worked alongside Ellsberg at RAND in D.C., where he spent time researching for a study on the future of communications. He didn't work in defense studies, but he knew Ellsberg, who was at the time working on a classified study of Vietnamese POWs. In an interview in 2010, he would later reflect: "I knew what they were doing but I didn't have access to the classified papers and I didn't want them. And I told Harry [Rowen, friend and colleague] I don't want to see any classified stuff." Ben H. Bagdikian, interview by Lisa Rubens in 2010, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Regional Oral History Office (2011). Accessed online June 2020 at: https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/bagdikian_ben.pdf.

was all about, and what the totem-box, for Schrag, manifested in material form: the power that secret information gave to those who had it, the power it denied to those prohibited from accessing it, and the ambiguous sacred value invested in the power of information itself.

For sociologist Émile Durkheim, the concept of the totem represented an originary desire for some materialization of the overwhelming, ineffable experience of the sacred—that is, the experience of collective effervescence felt in social gatherings. The totem, Durkheim argued, was an external, material form in which societies could represent themselves *to* themselves. So, too, for Schrag's totem-box. For in that box of classified documents at the center of Courtroom 9, Schrag saw something of his own society manifested in material form. Magically, mysteriously, this everyday cardboard box somehow rendered visible a whole hidden realm of state secrecy.

Durkheim's theory, while by no means free from justifiable critique, nonetheless captures something central to the material life and sacred value of state secrecy in the saga of the Pentagon Papers.[9] For, without the material presence of secrecy in this case, the complexity of

[9] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms*. While Durkheim has enjoyed near-unparalleled fame as one of the "founding fathers" of sociology, this fame has been undermined by intensive criticism; scholars have been particularly critical of his perceived "reductionism," "essentialism," and "evolutionary" perspective. These criticisms require serious qualification. In his *Elementary Forms,* Durkheim indeed "reduces" religion to society, demonstrating that society itself is figured in the object(s) of religious devotion, but critics of his "reductionism" have apparently overlooked the degree to which Durkheim appreciates particularity, as well as historical contexts and developments. Critics of his "essentialism" have likewise overlooked the sense in which Durkheim acknowledges nuance even as he indeed seeks "essence." A closer look reveals that it is Durkheim's notion of the "total social fact"—that which encapsulates the dichotomy of sacred and profane as conceived in a particular society—that mediates his perceived reductionism and essentialism; moreover, it is this pivot-point of the "total social fact" that opens out to the entire Durkheimian tradition, offering a redemptive hand to his successors who, by virtue of their intellectual pedigree, have been neglected in the academy. Yet we might consider such critiques of Durkheim to be ironic indicators of his vitality—critics claiming he is too "reductionist" indeed echo the very point Durkheim makes when he emphasizes the human labors aimed at separating the sacred from the profane; those who critique his "essentialism" fear he overlooks the very details that confer meaning on our social worlds—a critique he himself makes of proponents of "animism," for instance. More broadly, these two reigning criticisms of Durkheim are refuted by the significance Durkheim attributes to the "elementary forms of religious life," which cannot be equated with the "primitive"—a notion he critiqued as elitist and problematic among contemporary scholars, particularly anthropologists (e.g., Tylor, *Primitive Culture*; 1871). Marratt's use of *mana* to designate the earliest form of religion, which he locates in tribes of the Pacific Islands; c.f. Freud's identification of the earliest form of religion in the guilt resulting from primordial patricide. Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (1904). His critique of animism for depicting the "primitive" as less cognitively evolved or intellectually capable than modern individuals underscores the sense in which Durkheim's actual work has seemingly escaped those who venture to critique his model of society as (with pejorative emphasis) too "evolutionary." He asserts that the fundamental postulate of sociology, that "a human institution cannot rest upon error and falsehood," forms the foundation of his work, and clearly affirms that he

the issues at hand rendered the Pentagon Papers trial a blur of complicated legal terminology, military acronyms, government insider debates over foreign policy, and academic lectures on the ethics of military détente. Outside of journalists, antiwar protestors, politicians, and military and intelligence officials, broad swaths of the American public, by and large, remained relatively indifferent to the scandalous leak of the Papers and the secrets they revealed.

Yet on occasion, such indifference was displaced by material manifestations of the deadly reality of the war in Vietnam. When *Life Magazine* printed its gory montage of the My Lai Massacre in December, 1969, for instance, the public could hardly ignore the photographic evidence, in full color, of American brutality in the faces of its victims, the burned and bloodied bodies of innocent Vietnamese civilians, both young and old.[10] Just over a year later, and four months before the Pentagon Papers began appearing in the press, the American public would be confronted with first-hand accounts of such atrocities, committed and concealed by members of the U.S. Armed Forces, during the "Winter Soldier Investigation" sponsored by the Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW). This three-day presentation, held in Detroit, Michigan from January 31 to February 2, 1971, aired the testimony of soldiers and military personnel who described their training in racializing and dehumanizing the enemy, as well as the relentless pressure they felt from superiors to increase not prisoners of war but "body counts."[11]

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approaches the study of primitive religions "with the certainty that they are grounded in and express the real" (2). For Durkheim (contra Levy-Bruhl), "*elementaire*" meant something very particular, specifically that which is undifferentiated. Thus, "elementary forms" are not lesser forms of social life, but rather sites where the dichotomy of the sacred and the profane is most evident—sites in which individuals maintain singular social roles, with no social differentiation (e.g., a society where one's role is only to hunt), rendering the most essential elements of social life more readily accessible.

[10] "The Massacre at My Lai," *Life* 67, no. 23 (Dec. 5, 1969); These photographs were taken by U.S. Army Sergeant Ronald Haeberle and were first printed in black-and-white in an article that ran the previous week in a smaller Cleveland news outlet: Joseph Eszterhas, "Cameraman Saw GIs Slay 100 Villagers," *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH) (Nov. 20, 1969); *Time* magazine also ran an article that included some of these photographs: "The My Lai Massacre," *Time*, (Nov. 28, 1969).

[11] Testimony transcripts and related documents have been archived by "The Sixties Project," sponsored by Viet Nam Generation Inc. and the Institute of Advanced Technology in the Humanities at University of Virginia, Charlottesville: http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Resources/Primary/Winter_Soldier/WS_entry.html; Partial

On April 22, John Kerry, who would later become a U.S. Senator, and then Secretary of State, testified on behalf of the Winter Soldiers before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing on Vietnam. While the Winter Soldier Investigation received little attention from media outside Detroit, Kerry's testimony brought VVAW's case into the national spotlight. In his concluding statements, he expressed VVAW's hope that, thirty years from then, "we will be able to say 'Vietnam' and not mean a desert, not a filthy obscene memory, but mean instead where America finally turned and where soldiers like us helped it in the turning."[12] Such occasions momentarily disrupted the fog of war with brutal evidence of its deadly reality, rendering visible and speakable the otherwise occluded realities of the violence in Vietnam.

In the case of the Pentagon Papers trial, materializations of classified information gave substance to the shadows and powers of state secrecy. As this chapter will demonstrate, these materializations of secret information served as vehicles for the expression of deeper socio-cultural concerns with sacred values, identities, rituals, and spectacles of state secrecy. [13] They thus carried a considerable religious significance, for in these material forms and representations, the unspeakable sacred power of state secrecy— *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*— could indeed be spoken.

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footage of the investigation can be viewed at https://archive.org/details/MotionPicture0064; The investigation was also chronicled in a documentary film, *Winter Soldier* (1972), produced by Vietnam Veterans Against the War and the Winterfilm Collective, accessible online via the Adam Matthew special collection, Marlborough, Socialism on Film: The Cold War and International Propaganda, http://www.socialismonfilm.amdigital.co.uk/Documents/Details/N_507007_Winter_Soldier.

[12] John Kerry, Statement of Vietnam Veterans Against the War to the Senate Committee of Foreign Relations (Apr. 22, 1971).

[13] I am guided here by David Chidester's assessment of what he refers to as the "political economy" of basic categories of religion, of religious formations, and of circulations of religion—a framework that enables us to explore the "material conditions and consequences that make materiality matter in religion." As Chidester argues, the conditions and consequences of categories, formations, and circulations of religion "rise to the level of materiality by making a difference in the fabrication of relations between people and things in the world," thus enabling the scholar of religion to attend to the often-overlooked dynamic materiality of religion as an important arena in which human beings construct meaning in their world. *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 14. For a discussion of material dynamics in Cold War American culture, see 89-103.

I. Heretics, Martyrs, and Phantoms

Daniel Ellsberg was hardly the image of the anti-war radical. Once a fully committed war hawk, he defied all stereotypes of the peace movement he'd soon join in protest of the very war to which he'd committed the better part of his career. If in the past he occasioned to dwell on the tenets of Marxism, or the oppressive nature of American colonialism and imperial conquest, it was not for the sake of sticking-it-to-the-man but rather as data points in a graph charting the bigger picture of a greater, more threatening invasion of foreign ideologies.

He'd served previously as a Marine Corps officer from 1954 to 1957, transitioning thereafter to work as a strategist and consultant on various projects for the State Department and the Pentagon. In these hawkish days, his work reflected a staunch advocacy for policies in support of U.S. involvement in Indochina. Barry Farrell, who met Ellsberg in Saigon in 1965, wrote in an article for *Harper's Magazine* that Ellsberg's "gift for analysis, for seeing a plausible scenario behind the illusion of chaotic events, made him a compelling master of the monologue, and he could always be trusted to come up with an intriguing idea of the enemy's game plan."[14] Game theory was Ellsberg's expertise, informing his work on decision-making and foreign policy strategy. His task was to predict what the enemy might do in response to U.S. actions, to understand the enemy so as to defeat them, and to calculate the risks involved in any military or diplomatic plans America might undertake.

By 1969, however, something stirred in Daniel Ellsberg. He had just returned to the RAND foreign policy think-tank in Santa Monica, California after a tour of military posts in South Vietnam, where, under the direction of Major General Edward Lansdale, he'd reported on "pacification" efforts in the region. On a few occasions, his inspection work led him on patrol with American units and directly into the combat zone. Slugging through the marshes alongside

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[14] Barry Farrell, "The Ellsberg Mask," *Harper's Magazine* (Oct. 1973), 79-80, 82-84, 86, 88, 92-93.

U.S. soldiers, he came down with hepatitis and was sent home for longer term recovery.[15] Things were still now back on the home turf, perhaps too still. And in this stillness, as the echoes of bullets and explosions and shouts of military commands faded away, he began to re-evaluate what he had seen and heard, and began to take seriously some reservations he had repressed along the way—when, for instance, he'd learned of the blatant incompetence of the American military under the Tet Offensive; or when he read of the complicity of Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor in dropping the murder charges against a group of Green Berets who murdered a Vietnamese informant in cold blood; or when he saw with his own eyes the classified National Intelligence Estimate detailing evidence that the threatening missile gap President Kennedy described in public speeches was, in fact, a missile gap that was ten-to-one in favor of American troops.[16]

Ellsberg could not shake the dread of his own complicity. More troubling still, he could not shake the growing awareness that, perhaps, the American mission of liberation was not all it was cracked up to be. Did the South Vietnamese people really need, or desire, American protection from a Communist takeover? Did they cry out for help in achieving the autonomy of self-governance? Or were their cries, instead, pleas for mercy from the very forces that came bearing liberation and sovereignty, whatever the cost?

His tour in Vietnam had shown him the real impact of the policies he had worked so ambitiously to guide, raising from their repressed graves the many mounting suspicions that he had previously brushed off over the years when he remained committed to an image of himself as a patriot working for the greater, though still distant, good. Yet here was the lived reality, and it was not freedom and protection but fiery chaos, bloody viscera, self-serving lies and mass

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[15] Chalmers Johnson, "The Disquieted American," *London Review of Books* (Feb. 6, 2003), https://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/feb/06/londonreviewofbooks1.
[16] Ibid.

manipulation. On paper, his policy guidance seemed rock-solid, outlining with Harvard-trained expertise and mathematical precision the conditions for American victory in winning freedom for the South Vietnamese people from the invasion of communist ideology and Hanoi's control. On the ground, things were different, and this difference seemed inconceivable to such think-tankers as Ellsberg, trained in the divinatory arts of military planning.

He was born in Chicago, "by the Gold Coast, where the rich people live," but his family moved eventually to the middle-class Highland Park suburb of Detroit. His mother was a private secretary, his father a structural engineer and a "big, very fanatic Christian Scientist," in Ellsberg's assessment.[17] The mind-over-matter philosophy that underwrote his childhood would continue to shape the approach he brought to the policy-planning table. His professional career was nourished by the reassurance that, so long as the right minds were put to the task, America could not fail as a purveyor of freedom and a democratic light unto the world.

That Ellsberg himself identified as a Christian Scientist was "not a *secret*," he said; his father "had given [him] practically a life subscription to the "Christian Science Monitor," and he intended to lay claim to that heritage when he later gave copies of the Papers to the *Christian Science Monitor*, which they published on June 27, 1971. Yet by late 1971, as his trial was underway, he would speak to J. Anthony Lukas of *New York Times Magazine* with some ambivalence on the role religion played in his own life. "Dan thinks his Christian Science upbringing may have instilled in him a certain 'sense of responsibility,'" Lukas wrote, "but he is repelled by the religion's bland optimism. 'It's no coincidence,'" Ellsberg observed, "'that Haldeman, Ehrlichman and two other White House staff men are Christian Scientists.'"[18]

[17] On biographical details of Ellsberg's childhood, see J. Anthony Lukas, "After the Pentagon Papers: A Month in the New Life of Daniel Ellsberg," *The New York Times Magazine* (Dec. 12, 1971), 104.; on Christian Science upbringing, see Ellsberg Interview, May 20, 2008, Richard Nixon Oral History Program, Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, CA, 30-31.
[18] J. Anthony Lukas, "After the Pentagon Papers: A Month in the New Life of Daniel Ellsberg," *The New York Times Magazine* (Dec. 12, 1971), 104. (Italics mine).

There were, in fact, a number of Christian Scientists in Nixon's administration, including his Chief of Staff H.R. "Bob" Haldeman, White House counsel and domestic affairs adviser John Ehrlichman, and Ehrlichman staff member Egil "Bud" Krogh. All three men would later be connected to the Watergate scandal. Ehrlichman and Krogh, in particular, would be charged for their roles in orchestrating a 'bag job' break-in at Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office while working as part of Nixon's secret "Plumbers unit" to dig up private and (they hoped) politically damaging information on the leaker.[19]

Typically, Ellsberg thought, there was "a good deal of collegial feeling among Christian Scientists," and he was plagued by the question of "what it meant for them to be going after a fellow Christian Scientist." Years later, Ellsberg had the chance to ask Ehrlichman and Krogh what they felt about this breach of collegiality. "They had a whole room filled with documents on Daniel Ellsberg, and somehow never picked up that I was a fellow Christian Scientist." For all their attempts to pathologize Ellsberg, these "plumbers" had overlooked the one detail that would have otherwise cemented a fraternal bond. They told Ellsberg "they would have felt very strange about that" if they had known, but he seemed to see something strategic in their

[19] For news on the revelations surrounding this scandal, see, e.g., "The Plumbers," *The New York Times* (Jul. 22, 1973), 197. Nixon was enamored with the power of the Papers, specifically when held in the right hands. His first response to the Top-Secret documents was one of ambivalent excitement. Sure, he detested the "Ivy-Leaguer" mentality of the leaker—an attribute he assumed even before the leaker had been identified—but he sensed also an opportunity for political gain should the Papers reveal anything particularly damning of Democrats past and present. While the defense team, the press, and many historical accounts of the case assume that Nixon sought the complete suppression of the Papers, Nixon actually had great personal interest in leaking information from the Papers, and he instructed his aides to do so by "whatever means." "The White House "Special Investigations Unit" (SIU) was formed in response to the leak of the Papers, comprising a shadowy organization unknown to wider government apparatuses and thus free from legislative and judicial oversight. Popularly known as the "Plumber's Unit," the SIU's task initially concerned the "plumbing" of leaks; the idea was not to eliminate leaks altogether, but rather to gain control of leaking and disseminate confidential information for the President's political advantage. "Leaking is a game," Nixon told chief of staff H. R. Haldeman and White House counsel John Ehrlichman in an Oval Office meeting July 24, 1971. It was a game he played with the delight and audacity of a man who never dreamed he could lose. He had just received word from Ehrlichman that Assistant Attorney General Robert Mardian, who was in charge of the Department of Justice's Internal Security Division, had been secretly passing him information from the grand jury investigation of the Papers leak. Nixon responded with an energetic command, insisting that Ehrlichman take that information and "leak it right out." "That sort of thing can kill the bastards," he hoped. Ken Hughes, *Chasing Shadows: The Nixon Tapes, the Chennault Affair, and the Origins of Watergate* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014), 142-43.

ignorance: "It was much easier for them to imagine that I might be a Soviet agent, not knowing that I was a Christian Scientist."[20]

Beyond the emotional value of nostalgic reflection and the social value of collegial bonding, religion also held analytical value for Ellsberg, who saw its manifestations abroad as keys for the public seeking to decode the euphemistic and misleading official statements on U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia. Ellsberg saw that religion played an explicit role in the strategies and operations the U.S. devised for Vietnam, one that few American civilians noticed but that "every Vietnamese understood." It had to do with U.S. intervention in Vietnamese elections, and specifically, with U.S. preference for Catholic leadership in Vietnam. The U.S. had first backed President Diem, and later, General Thieu, who were both members of a Catholic minority in Vietnam. A Catholic regime was "almost essential" for an anti-Communist policy in Vietnam, as Vietnamese Catholics were among the few "real anti-Communists" in the country (as opposed to more tolerant non-Communists), and "who were prepared…to suppress them [Communist Vietnamese], imprison them, torture them, expel them…." And yet, as Ellsberg reflected, "very few Americans noticed the peculiarity that a Catholic, who represented… 10 percent of the population, should…happen to turn out to be the president in elections." Maybe the situation would have been different, Ellsberg thought, had Diem been Jewish or Muslim; maybe then, "Americans would have noticed something odd happening there."[21]

Incidentally, in musing on religion in Vietnam, Ellsberg offered a theory of the state of religious diversity in late-1960s America, pondering whether a non-Christian identity—America's own history of anti-Catholicism aside—might have encouraged the unknowing public to begin looking askance at what their President claimed their forces were doing in Vietnam. It was clear

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[20] Ellsberg interview, Nixon Oral History Program, 30-31.
[21] Ellsberg Interview, Nixon Oral History Program.

enough to the Vietnamese, who knew that "a regime headed by a Catholic in Vietnam was a foreign imposed regime" that "could not have resulted from a free play of politics." The problem, as Ellsberg saw it, was not just U.S. intervention in foreign elections; it was the hypocrisy of it all—that U.S. intervention "meant an unrepresentative, undemocratic government" in Vietnam, led by a small faction whose anti-Communist policies were favored by only 10-15% of the population. Moreover, against the national values and ideals to which America laid claim, the U.S. intervention strategy excluded the possibility of tolerance. The Vietnamese leadership the U.S. had in mind "had to be essentially repressive, repressive not only of Communists, but of anyone who would tolerate Communists," and so "we backed a dictatorial regime under Diem, and later, under the generals, that used assassination, death squads, deportation, imprisonment, quite widely." [22]

The irony was alarming: Vietnam "couldn't have a really democratic, or open, or representative government, and keep it from being frightening to us in terms of the likelihood it might go Communist some day." Ellsberg's depiction of these covert affairs painted a picture at odds with America's national self-image, but it also sketched a framework with which to understand the entanglement of secrecy, power, and fear in American society. The U.S. government's dissimulation of its role in electing dictatorial regimes in Vietnam was an outgrowth of its fear—fear that the type of government on which America had staked its pride and power would eventually be its undoing. There was, certainly, the fear that the American public would balk at the anti-logic of it all if they only knew the extent of their country's foreign meddling, but this was secondary to the deeper fear of what possibilities might lie in another country's democracy. In other words, U.S. forces responded to the political and ideological exigencies of ensuring the global reach of democracy by putting undemocratic regimes in

[22] Ibid.

positions of power. The truth of the matter was close to what John Locke had envisioned in his political philosophy, but with an Orwellian patina: freedom posed a threat to freedom.

Far from the early optimism of his insulated years of think-tank planning, Daniel Ellsberg had now come to see the Vietnam war as worse than a lost cause—it was an act of genocide disguised under specious ideological justifications, sounding off disturbing echoes of the war crimes recorded in the Nuremberg trials. As he put it, "we were not fighting on the wrong side; we were the wrong side."[23] In later years, he would come to speak of his change of heart in mythic terms as a rock-bottom fall and a miraculous redemption, the tale of a wayward soul whose misguided path was righted by the universal wisdom of world peace.[24] This was Ellsberg's conversion experience, and the mythic power of this story alone would be operationalized as a point of leverage by both the defense and prosecution in the Pentagon Papers trial.

To Ellsberg's prosecutors and public critics, his story reeked of an all-too-convenient yarn spun to obscure his criminal intent.[25] To these critics, Ellsberg was the "Self-Effacing Megalomaniac" whose smarmy self-satisfaction salted the wounds of the rupturing nation.[26] That

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[23] Quoted in Johnson, "The Disquieted American."

[24] See, for example, the chapter "War Resisters" in Ellsberg's memoir, *Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers* (Viking Press, 2002), 262-73.

[25] Gabriel Schoenfeld reflected on the saga in a 2010 article for *National Affairs* in which he took the position that, "While he [Ellsberg] often declares in his memoir that he was prepared to risk life in prison in pursuit of his principles, in fact he took numerous steps to avoid going to jail. To halt what he regarded as deception by the government, Ellsberg had engaged in his own extensive deception that included lying on numerous occasions to longtime colleagues and friends. Almost immediately after the Pentagon Papers came out in the *Times,* Ellsberg was flagged as a suspect; he did not waste much time in going 'underground'—his word—dodging the FBI by moving from one location to the next and communicating via randomly chosen phone booths. Only on the way to surrender to the authorities did Ellsberg publicly declare: 'I acted of course at my own jeopardy, and I'm ready to answer to all the consequences of my decisions.' But that was a last-minute heroic pose in the face of inevitable arrest; the truth was that he had been dodging the legal consequences of his decisions for years. Despite Ellsberg's assertions that his leaking was 'a patriotic and constructive act,' it was simply civil disobedience without accountability. As such, it was not a contribution to the 'sovereign public,' but rather an assault upon it." Gabriel Schoenfeld, "Rethinking the Pentagon Papers," *National Affairs* (Summer 2010).

[26] The terms "Self-Effacing Megalomaniac" and "Modest Martry," cited below, can be found in Barry Farrell, "The Ellsberg Mask"; In an interview with Robert Reinhold of the *New York Times*, Ellsberg emphasized his intentions to be held "responsible" for his actions (he uses the terms "responsible" and "responsibility" no less than seven times in this one interview). Robert Reinhold, "Ellsberg Yields, Is Indicted; Says He Gave Data to Press," *The New York*

"the sonofabitching thief is made a national hero" was the kind of thing that made Richard Nixon wonder aloud to his aides—and to his concealed taping system in the Oval Office—"What in the name of God have we come to?"[27] But for Ellsberg, the defense, and his public supporters, this was the story of a coming-to-God moment. This version of Ellsberg was the "Modest Martyr" whose enduring message for the nation was the prevailing power of truth as the beacon of enlightenment and the means to personal salvation. One's chosen interpretation would shape the rest of the story in predictable ways, but these simulated versions of the actual story, whatever it may have been, would nonetheless have real and lasting effects for Ellsberg and his co-defendant Russo, for the trial procedures and its public reception, as well as for the wider historiography of the saga.[28]

However perceived, Ellsberg's conversion experience ultimately set his momentous operation in motion. A strategy had evolved in the fraught mind of the newly converted

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Times (Jun. 29, 1971); In a letter to the editor of the *Washington Post* issue of July 4, 1971*,* Philip M. Stern of Washington praised Ellsberg and his humility, as he saw it: "In his televised interview with Walter Cronkite, Daniel Ellsberg was hard-pressed to find any heroes in the Pentagon chronicles. But there is, clearly, one authentic, indisputable hero. He is Daniel Ellsberg." The "Letters to the Editor" section of the *Washington Post* issue of July 4, 1971 depicted some of these criticisms at the height of the Papers scandal, just after the Supreme Court decision freed the *Times* and *Post* from their injunctions against publishing on the Pentagon Papers: Eliot P. Y. Powell of Annapolis, Maryland wrote: "With today's (Wednesday's) Supreme Court decision you are now in a position to conclude the destruction of our Country. Congratulations." Robert N. Williams of Silver Spring wrote: "Even those with minimal association with the government security classification system will recognize that those 'Pentagon Papers' could have been released unclassified, after slight technical trimming, through regular government channels. As such they would have gone unnoticed, in all probability. Unfortunately, this was not the case, and they carry that wonderful exotic label, 'Top Secret,' which automatically implies, among other dogmatisms, that they must be the last word in truth and authenticity. What a pity! Now Mr. Ellsberg can smugly declare what a patriotic self-sacrificing genius he is, as he confers with his beaming attorneys who are undoubtedly highly pleased at their windfall of incalculable millions in media exposure, and prepare for the big courtroom theatrics. Undoubtedly Mr. Ellsberg is very proud of himself. Basking in the brilliance of total media exposure, to the accompaniment of ecstatic screams of a small mob of adoring admirers, he has indicated his true entity: an overeducated product sadly lacking in judgment and completely devoid of a once drivable attribute, now almost obsolete, known as 'common sense.' Mr. Ellsberg's punishment, if any, will probably be inappropriate. Justice would best be served if Mr. Ellsberg would fall flat on his face and badly bend the silver spoon in his mouth, along with his abominable ego."

[27] Richard Nixon Tapes, Oval Office discussion, May 11, 1973.

[28] See, for instance, the popular documentary on this saga directed by Judith Erlich and Rick Goldsmith, "The Most Dangerous Man in America: Daniel Ellsberg and the Pentagon Papers" (First Run Features, 2009). Also see John Prados and Margaret Pratt Porter, *Inside the Pentagon Papers* (University of Kansas Press, 2004); David Rudenstine, *The Day the Presses Stopped: A History of the Pentagon Papers Case* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1996] 1998); Kenneth W. Salter, *The Pentagon Papers Trial* (Editorial Justa Publications, 1975).

Ellsberg, one which could contribute to an end to U.S. involvement in the war, but one which came at a great price, risking his professional reputation, his career, and his freedom. Having worked briefly as an analyst on the Vietnam study at RAND in 1967, Ellsberg knew that there was enough documentation available to expose the truth of the war's atrocities as well as the policies that continued to enable them. In January 1969, a limited number of copies of the TOP-SECRET study had been transferred to the RAND office in Washington, D.C., and by February, Ellsberg managed to gain official authorization to access a copy. He then embarked on a series of secret missions from March 4, 1969, to August 29, 1969, transferring copies of the study, bit by bit, from their storage site in D.C. to the RAND office in Santa Monica. Sometime between October and November, Ellsberg called upon RAND colleague Anthony Russo to help him make copies of the study, which led the two to the Hollywood ad agency of a mutual friend, Linda Sinay.

By November 1969, Xerox copies in hand, Ellsberg sought an official route for disclosure, turning first to William Fulbright, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and outspoken critic of the Vietnam War. If official declassification of the Papers was off the table, meaning the documents could not be disseminated through the "authorized channels" of government, Ellsberg figured that he could at least rely on the support of anti-war allies in Congress to supply a certain skeletal legitimacy to the whole operation. They had legislative authority, but they also enjoyed the privilege and protection of congressional speech.[29]

In Ellsberg's vision, Fulbright was the picture of the ideal recipient, a stately counterweight to the war hawks who would eagerly accept the opportunity to see for himself the

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[29] Bruce Lincoln defines "authoritative speech" "in relational terms as the effect of a posited, perceived, or institutionally ascribed asymmetry between speaker and audience that permits certain speakers to command not just the attention but the confidence, respect, and trust of their audience, or—an important proviso—to make audiences act *as if* this were so." Bruce Lincoln, *Authority: Construction and Corrosion* (University of Chicago Press, 1994), 4.

Vietnam secrets that had long been hidden from legislators. These were secrets, moreover, whose existence Fulbright had long suspected and whose revelation he had long called for. And yet, to Ellsberg's disappointment, the senator refused to join him in any such strategic alliance. Privately, Fulbright supported Ellsberg, but the classified documents proved too hot to handle for the senator.[30] His reticence spoke volumes of the dangerous power of secrecy, which evidently transcended political leanings and policy visions. For Fulbright, the prohibitions of classification proved paralyzing. Frustrated but undaunted, Ellsberg determined he would have to take a more direct approach by way of the press. As dawn broke on the morning of June 13, 1971, so, too, did the dam protecting the government's secrecy on the war.

Readers of the June 13 issue of *The New York Times* would have been forgiven for missing the forest for the trees; most eyes would be drawn, first, to a photo at the top-left corner of the front page, showing a beaming President Nixon escorting his newlywed daughter Tricia from her June 12 wedding ceremony at the White House Garden. Yet beside this cheery photo and its accompanying story was a massive block of text, its headline reading "Vietnam Archive: Pentagon Study Traces 3 Decades of Growing U.S. Involvement."[31] The story continued for pages, with three full pages of document excerpts alone, blurring into a gray swarm of fact upon devastating fact, detailing information about the Pentagon Papers study, its origins, and highlights of its most shocking revelations.

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[30] Ellsberg had tried this approach with a few other senators as well, as he recalled in a 2008 interview for the Nixon Oral History Program: "I approached Senator Mathias; I approached Senator McGovern. This was in the spring, now, after I gave up on Fulbright. I did give them to Neil Sheehan, but without the expectation that the 'Times' would put them out. And he didn't tell me they were working on them. He, for reasons still not clear to me, entirely, chose not to tell me that the 'Times' was moving ahead very rapidly, though it took them several months, as they saw it, to get it in order. So, during that time I continued to see Pete McCloskey, a Representative in hopes that he would put them out. Senator Mathias, I tried out, Senator Gaylord Nelson, Senator McGovern. McGovern and McCloskey and Mathias were all very favorable to putting them out at first, but then thought better of it, and just delayed, or, I think, in retrospect, they all thought, 'Let Ellsberg put it out and whatever negative facts that come out will be his.'" Ellsberg interview, Nixon Oral History Program, 21.

[31] Neil Sheehan, "Vietnam Archive: Pentagon Study Traces 3 Decades of Growing U.S. Involvement," *The New York Times* (Jun. 13, 1971): 1, 35-40.

Document excerpts printed in the June 13 issue of the *Times* were primarily taken from the most recent volume of the Papers, covering the years of Lyndon B. Johnson's Presidency. They revealed the secret attacks his Administration waged against North Vietnam as well as its deception of the American press and public concerning its secret decisions to commit American troops to combat in Southeast Asia. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that Nixon did not see a serious threat against his own Administration at first—the secrets published by the *Times* shed a particularly bad light on his Democratic predecessors, and the contents of the study itself were capped at mid-1968, before Nixon's presidency began. According to Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman, it was Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser and chief strategist on the Vietnam war, who first alerted the President to the grim fallout the Administration might face following these revelations of grand governmental deception.[32] Wasting no time, Nixon's Administration filed an injunction against the newspaper giant, warning representatives of the *Times* that any further publication might result in serious damage to national security. Within a day of the government's injunction against the *Times*, *The Washington Post* took up the banner of revelation to run a front-page story detailing further information from the TOP-SECRET study, after which it promptly received its own injunction.

In their attempts to force the newspapers to cease publication of the classified documents, the President and his staff toed a dangerous line. While government prosecutors

[32] Editors for University of Virginia's Presidential Recordings Digital Edition have provided a nuanced review of popular assumptions regarding Kissinger's role in convincing Nixon to bring a case against the *Times*. As Ken Hughes, et. al. (2014) have argued, this perspective guided Rudenstine's popular study of the case of the Pentagon Papers, *The Day the Presses Stopped,* but there was not sufficient evidence in the transcripts of the Nixon Tapes themselves to support Rudenstine's claim. See editors' introduction to transcript of phone call between Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger, and John Mitchell (Jun. 14, 1971): Ken Hughes, Patrick J. Garrity, Erin R. Mahan, and Kieran K. Matthews (eds.), "Richard Nixon, Henry A. Kissinger, and John N. Mitchell on 14 June 1971," Conversation 005-070, Presidential Recordings Digital Edition [Nixon Telephone Tapes 1971, ed. Ken Hughes] (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014), accessible online at http://prde.upress.virginia.edu/conversations/4002139; See also Rudenstine, *The Day the Presses Stopped,* 66–93; H. R. Haldeman and Joseph DiMona, *The Ends of Power* (New York: Dell, 1978), 154.

would argue the injunctions served to protect national security in this unprecedented situation, the defendants and their supporters raged against what they saw as a tyrannical suppression of constitutional freedoms of press and speech. The Supreme Court would eventually side with the newspapers in a 6-3 vote decision on June 30, 1971, overturning the injunctions as violations of the constitutional ban against prior restraint.[33] The papers were free to continue publishing on the TOP-SECRET study, but this saga of secrecy was far from over. The upheaval of law-and-order had only just begun.

From the Justice Department's perspective, any charges against the individual(s) who gave the newspapers this classified material would be a separate legal matter. Thus, the redemption of the newspapers' right to publish the TOP-SECRET documents would not, and could not, suggest the vindication of the alleged "thief" who provided them with those documents in the first place.[34] A warrant for Daniel Ellsberg's arrest had already been issued five days before the Supreme Court case was decided. He willingly surrendered himself to federal authorities in Boston on June 28, 1971, and a formal indictment was issued against him that same day, charging him on two counts: unauthorized possession of top-secret government documents, and failure to return them.[35] A second set of charges were issued when the prosecution decided to prosecute both Ellsberg and Russo as co-conspirators. For their roles in copying the Papers in 1969, Ellsberg and Russo were formally charged with counts of conspiracy, violating the Espionage Act, and "conversion," or misappropriation, of government property. With the addition of these formal charges, the story of the Pentagon Papers trial had become, at least for Ellsberg, a tale of two conversions.

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[33] For more on this case, see Rudenstine, *The Day the Presses Stopped*; Sanford J. Ungar, *The Papers and the Papers: An Account of the Legal and Political Battle over the Pentagon Papers* (New York: Dutton, 1972); Prados and Porter, *Inside the Pentagon Papers*.

[34] Robert Reinhold, "Ellsberg Calls Decision 'Great,'" *The New York Times* (Jul. 1, 1971).

[35] Lee Dye and Gene Blake, "Leak Suspect's Arrest Ordered," *The Los Angeles Times* (Jun. 26, 1971).

Whether Ellsberg or Russo had the right to know the secrets of the Papers, and whether or not they had the right voices to summon this hidden history and evaluate its secrets for a public audience, would be a matter of enduring debate throughout the Pentagon Papers saga.[36] The prosecution's case in the Papers trial built on efforts to (re)define such taxonomic boundaries, hinging as it did on designations of "proper authority" and the "right to know," both negotiated alongside attempts to assess just how much of a threat these revealed secrets could pose to national security.

When public attention was paid to the trial, it was often with an eye to assessing the defendants themselves as either "patriots" or "traitors." Ellsberg, in particular, dominated such conversations and press inquiries, leaving Russo outside the spotlight in the less exciting position of "co-conspirator."[37] Finding Russo in press photographs from the time often means looking over the shoulder of the towering, foregrounded figure of Ellsberg, where, occasionally, one may spot a tuft of Russo's curly hair or a corner of his square-framed glasses peeking out.

The glaring difference in attention paid to the two defendants had been a subject of some debate. In his piece for *Harper's Magazine,* which was not altogether flattering of Ellsberg, Barry Farrell quipped:

> One is obliged to recognize an element of greatness in Ellsberg. He is among the most efficacious persons in America today. His mojo is so strong that John Mitchell gets indicted the week that he goes free. Contemplating Ellsberg moves the President to ruinous excesses, but when he sets the CIA to the forbidden task of psychoanalyzing his upstart nemesis, the spy-doctors can only report that the man is brilliant, patriotic, and possessed of a Nixon-like zeal for achievement.

How to explain this magical power? There was, on the one hand, an issue of class to contend with. Ellsberg looked the part of a professional government insider, and Russo most assuredly

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[36] See, for example, Schoenfeld, "Rethinking the Pentagon Papers."

[37] Journalist Barry Farrell noted that "the mischievous prosecutor, David R. Nissen," had insisted on calling the case *U.S. v. Russo, et al.,* "on the assumption that Ellsberg would be wounded." Farrell, "The Ellsberg Mask," 79-80.

did not. Farrell reflected on the social ascendancy of Ellsberg and his wife, Patricia, which was not destroyed but rather boosted as an effect of his indictment. The Ellsbergs had fame, money, and social clout. They "dined at some of the most fashionable tables of Beverly Hills and Malibu," and it was a testament to their acceptance among the Southern California elite that they were able to raise $75,000 in contributions to the defense in the course of one fundraising party. This wasn't just fame—this was celebrity status. On one occasion, "all the Beatles except Paul once stood in line to get an autograph from Dan."[38] As Farrell put it, "one dinner with the actual Ellsbergs was good for at least a half-dozen others with the phantom Ellsbergs, whose company everyone found delightful."

These circulating phantoms seemed to amplify the mythic appeal Ellsberg held for his supporters among the public and press, as well as for sympathetic historians. In a book-length expansion on his contemporaneous courtroom reports, Peter Schrag reflected on the mythic qualities underpinning Ellsberg's actions. To Schrag, Ellsberg seemed like a modern-day Prometheus for the people, sharing not fire but information.[39] Like the mythic figure, Ellsberg was censured for giving to the people the sacred secrets of a higher realm. He was charged with sharing secrets that were not his to share, or, in the language that permeated court transcripts, for his "conversion" of government secrets "without authority" to do so.[40] Certainly, in Ellsberg's own assessment of his decision to leak the Pentagon Papers, he was a mediator bridging the divide between the realms of the government and the people, bestowing a gift of sorts, and at great personal risk. As Prometheus was expelled from the realm of the Olympian gods, so, too, was Ellsberg's transgression cause for expulsion from the realms of the national security state. From elite government insider to morally driven activist to polished celebrity face

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[38] Ibid.
[39] Schrag, *Test of Loyalty,* 54.
[40] For trial transcripts and commentary, see Salter, *The Pentagon Papers Trial* (1975).

for the peace movement, Ellsberg was for Schrag an exemplary manifestation of the mythic advocate for human enlightenment.

This mythic philanthropist was, however, only one "phantom" version of Ellsberg. In Farrell's survey, Ellsberg's power stemmed from the very circulation of such phantoms, the result of which was a mythic image of American totality: Ellsberg's "life revealed such a constant polymorphous striving after the varieties of American experience that he was less a changed man than a fusion of all he had been, a total American, a Harvard Fellow who was also a once-and-always combat-ready marine lieutenant, an author, scholar, and swinger, a sensitive interpreter of Chopin who could also do amazing card tricks and swim eighty-seven laps in a fair-size pool, an eloquent spokesman against secrecy and war still in possession of war secrets nothing could bring him to divulge."[41] It was the latter that most concerned Russo, whose skepticism of Ellsberg was rooted in the ties his co-defendant still held to the secrecy system. While Russo had effectively denounced the entire system of government secrecy, Ellsberg maintained a distant respect for the requirements of classification long after the trial had come and gone. Ellsberg's ambivalence as a former insider signaled to Russo a lack of grit; Russo laid claim to the margins of society, and thereby clinched the distinction.

Reclining for an interview at his Bunker Hill apartment, Russo told Farrell that it was secrecy that turned Ellsberg "into the victim of dissonance you see before your eyes." With another day of court behind him, Russo settled in to tell the journalist what he really thought of his partner in crime. He sparked up a joint, setting the ambiance with the primordial sounds of

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[41] Compare Walter Cronkite's introduction to his interview with Ellsberg, filmed at a secret location as the latter was still 'underground': "During the controversy, a single name has been mentioned most prominently as the possible source of the Times' documents; Daniel Ellsberg, a former State Department and Pentagon planner, and of late something of a phantom figure, agreed today to be interviewed at a secret location. But he refused to discuss his role, if any, in the release of the documents. I asked him what he considers the most important revelations to date from the Pentagon documents." Ellsberg interview with Cronkite: CBS Special report, "The Pentagon Papers: A Conversation with Daniel Ellsberg," Correspondent Walter Cronkite talks to the Pentagon papers mystery man in an exclusive interview." (10:30 p.m., station: WCBS-TV and the CBS Television Network, New York).

"an environment-improving record of Pacific Ocean waves" playing on his phonograph, and revealed the truth of Ellsberg, as he saw it: "Dan Ellsberg is a cover story. He's so deep into the secrecy system that he can't reveal to himself who he is. It's classified." Russo saw a "yawning chasm" between them, which broke open with a "ruling class split…[that] was analogous to an earthquake, and one of the faults ran right down the hall of the RAND Corporation." While Russo had "managed to escape it and hang onto one side," Ellsberg, the inveterate government lackey, "fell into the hole."

Russo may have receded into the background of press photographs and public interest, but this low visibility was a poor register of his energetic presence both during and outside the trial, from anti-war demonstrations to the muting chamber of Courtroom 9. He was poetic, often hyperbolic, with an intellectual gravity that was most strongly felt in the penetrating sarcasm he reserved for hypocrites and apostates of the anti-war cause. He made no question of his distaste for authority and bourgeois aesthetics, standing as a middle-finger to the polished bureaucrats and fashionable Hollywood elite that Ellsberg courted. Whenever Russo was covered in courtroom reports, it was typically with the kind of witty observations that Russo himself was not averse to applying when the moment called for it. "He is large and round and wears loud houndstooth-tweed jackets," one report began, adding that Russo's "thinning hair, which used to be a lot longer than it is, stands out in tufts just above his ears. Occasionally he interjects protests at something particularly outrageous from the prosecutor. … When the trial is over, he says, he wants to buy a cabin in the woods and not tell anyone where it is."[42] Russo stood in stark contrast to Ellsberg, who, according to Farrell, was "[c]ontentious, pedantic, forever infatuated with the power of his intellect," and "could educate but seldom entertain."[43]

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[42] Michael Lowe, "The Ellsberg Trial," *New Statesman* (Feb. 23, 1973), 262-65.
[43] Farrell, "The Ellsberg Mask."

Comparing their views of the trial, the contrast between the co-defendants seemed a "chasm" indeed. Speaking at a news conference assembled in front of the courthouse, the two differed in both perspective and tone. "Dr. Ellsberg expressed hopes that the trial would 'greatly inform the American people how we have been ruled for the past 25 years, and what censorship and deception do to democracy,'" one report said, while "Mr. Russo denounced the trial as 'nothing more than a repressive action in which the court is allowing itself to be used by Nixon.'" [44] Unlike Ellsberg, Russo had no interest in the diplomatic spin. One morning, members of the prosecution arrived to find that someone had carefully arranged a number of dominos on their table, each individually labeled—Nixon, Hunt, Liddy… and Nissen.[45] Many suspected Russo, and it wouldn't be a far stretch. Russo frequently chided Nissen as a puppet for the President, and on one occasion, he made the association crystal clear by feigning a slip-of-the-tongue and referring to the attorney as "Mr. Nixon."[46] He would use his biting wit not to make light of the issues at stake but as a tool for defacing bourgeois liberal assumptions, which constituted an erasure of all the racism, colonialism, imperialism, and corruption that Russo could see in the history of U.S. policy in Southeast Asia.

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[44] Fred P. Graham, "Ellsberg Lawyers Can't Question Jurors," *The New York Times* (Jul. 11, 1972).
[45] Schrag, *Test of Loyalty*, 333-34.
[46] Russo appeared for grand-jury testimony on October 18, 1971, but before entering the grand-jury room, he ran into Nissen in the hall. Nissen informed Russo that he had spoken to Mike Balaban [one of Russo's attorneys from the Federal Public Defender's Office] that morning about his decision to deny Russo's request for a copy of the transcript of his grand-jury hearing. That request had already been granted in a controversial court decision, and Russo wasted no time and clarifying that Nissen's decision was "in violation of the court order." Nissen wanted to know whether or not Russo would testify under new conditions, but Russo pressed the prosecutor: "I am trying to understand the process—the judicial process as opposed to the executive process and the legislative process. These constitute the law of the land. You are standing there telling me that you are going to be judge, jury—you are going to decide this? … Mr. Nissen, I am shocked." Nissen replied: "You are free to express your shock. I have told your counsel that the court order requiring the government to produce a copy of your transcript is an unlawful order…" Mike Balaban stepped in to quiet the defiant Russo, who had by that point turned to the foreman of the grand jury, Patricia Jones, to ask whether she represented the people, presumably with the aim of triangulating the conversation and thereby enlisting the authority overseeing Nissen's investigation in order to take down Nissen himself. "Tony, we really can't go into that," Balaban advised, noting that Mrs. Jones was "not the protagonist in this particular issue." No matter what rebuttal or contradictory evidence the relentless Russo could summon, Balaban could see no way around the issue and had to concede that this was just the grand jury process. Russo quipped back, this time with a final shot aimed at the prosecutor: "It is a rubber stamp process, Mr. Nixon—I mean, Mr. Nissen…" Schrag, *Test of Loyalty*, 137-38.

While Ellsberg and his legal advisers sought to simplify the case to its bare bones, Russo wanted "to call everyone from Lyndon Johnson to Angela Davis." Eventually, it was Russo's side that won out, and "a list of anti-war witnesses was drawn up that began with the mild and humane Howard Zinn, author and professor," based on the idea that "if the jury could handle the softly stated radical analysis of Zinn," then the defense could take on the risk of calling on more radical witnesses like Tom Hayden, Noam Chomsky, and Donald Luce. Farrell evidently admired Russo's commitment to shocking the jury into awakening to the anti-war cause, noting that the anti-war figures they called to the stand "were among the witnesses who most impressed the jury, and they gave the trial its only deeply felt encounters with the gravest lessons of the war."[47]

Less radical witnesses never made such a concrete mark, which may have had something to do with the sense in which they failed to fit the cardboard cut-out image of the anti-war activist—a phantom image that, accurate or not, hovered over both defendants in a case that was poised in the press as a battle of opposing ideological factions. Morton Halperin was one such witness who had little impact on the jury. He had regularly appeared in court as a defense consultant, having taken a leave from his job at the liberal think-tank Brookings Institution, but he didn't quite live up to the expectations of such a policy-focused figure. He'd "gone a little Hollywood," and was thus "an image in transition," and it seemed evident to Farrell that "the jurors were not yet ready to cope with the idea of an ex-Deputy Assistance Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs who wore sandals and a shoulder bag." What spectators wanted was, quite simply, a spectacle, and Russo, for one, was ready to give it to them.

Never one to back down from an opportunity for awkward confrontation, Russo called it as he saw it. After General Alexander Haig offered rebuttal testimony on behalf of the

[47] Farrell, "The Ellsberg Mask."

prosecution, "Ellsberg shook his hand and recalled to reporters that he had dined with Haig at San Clemente in December 1968," while Russo "raced after Haig's departing figure, waving a copy of a radical digest of the Pentagon Papers and shouting, 'Hey, general! Genocidal warrior! Don't you want to learn about the credibility gap?'"[48] Russo had no truck with the other side, and it unnerved him to see his co-defendant cozying up to those with blood on their hands. This, Russo would not let slide either. In a spectacle designed specifically for Ellsberg, Russo started to carry with him to court a copy of *The Secret Team* by retired Air Force colonel L. Fletcher Prouty. In timely fashion, the book had just been released, and in its survey of the manipulation of political events by members of a shadowy invisible government, it named as a CIA asset none other than Daniel Ellsberg himself. Each day, Russo would set the heavy, bright red copy on the defense table "as though planning to introduce it as an exhibit, pleasantly aware that three chairs down sat Daniel Ellsberg, who knew that the book named him as a CIA man."[49]

Russo's was a moral fight to the proverbial death that pointed to the widespread death he saw elsewhere, not only in Vietnam among the innocent civilians murdered by U.S. hands, but also right here at home, in the death of our very system of governance. True to form, he would make a rallying cry of his closing statement to the court, upholding revolutionary activism

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[48] Farrell, "The Ellsberg Mask."

[49] In Farrell's summary, "The thesis of *The Secret Team*, argued with some force by L. Fletcher Prouty, a retired Air Force colonel with a CIA background of his own, is that most political events are manipulated by an invisible government of industrialists, scientists, military officers, intellectuals, and people from the intelligence community. One such event, Prouty says, was the release of the PP, which he describes as 'a neat rewrite' of the war from which the activities of the covert side of American intelligence have been carefully laundered out. The papers put the best possible face on the performance of the CIA during the war, and by making them public Ellsberg was doing an important service to his secret colleagues, while at the same time providing himself with the best of all possible cover stories. Russo said it was the only analysis of Ellsberg that made any sense to him." Ibid.

as the bearer of truth and the savior of a democracy caught in the stranglehold of secrecy: "Secrecy is the death of democracy. Truth is on the side of the Revolution."[50]

II. The Contagious Power of the Rubber Stamp

The Pentagon Papers comprised a 47-volume study, officially titled "Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force," which consisted of a collection of analyses (3,000 pages of narrative) and historical records (4,000 pages of supporting documents) surveying the U.S. political and military presence in Vietnam, beginning with the Truman Administration around the end of WWII in 1945 and continuing through to 1968 during the Johnson Administration. At the request of U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, a team of analysts in his department began collecting classified material from the archives of the Department of Defense, the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency, including official memoranda, military cables, battle plans, and troop estimates. From these documents, analysts then collaborated on summary reports and assessments of the conclusions that could be drawn from this massive history of U.S. government and military decision-making in Vietnam.

Secretary McNamara's decision to commission the report was reflective of his coming to terms with what many government officials, intelligence sources, and critical civilians had surmised—that the situation in Vietnam presented a "quagmire" that increasingly appeared "unwinnable" by both military and political standards.[51] A former president of the Ford Motor Company, McNamara entered government ranks in 1961, serving as Secretary of Defense first

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[50] This quote is taken from Russo's closing statement to the court, in which he concluded that the Pentagon Papers "belong to the American people. Secrecy is the death of democracy. Truth is on the side of the Revolution. The trial will be won. Vietnam is one." Quoted in Schrag, *Test of Loyalty*, 281.

[51] See, e.g., David Halberstam, *The Making of a Quagmire* (New York: Random House, 1964); Also see the "Quagmire Model" in Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage* (rev. ed.: New York: Fawcett World, 1968), 47, cited by Ellsberg in his critique of the notion of the Vietnam quagmire as "myth," in Daniel Ellsberg, "The Quagmire Myth and the Stalemate Machine," *Public Policy* (1971), 217-74; Much of this essay was reproduced in summary in Daniel Ellsberg, "The Quagmire Myth," *The New York Times* (Jun. 26, 1971), 29.

under President Kennedy and later under President Johnson. He was known for his hawkish stance on the war, initially encouraging President Johnson to further expand U.S. military involvement in Vietnam, but by 1964, McNamara stirred privately over the state of U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia. He was having a change of heart, parallel to Ellsberg's shifting views on the Vietnam War.

McNamara assigned Leslie H. Gelb to coordinate the massive project. Gelb had worked previously as an executive assistant to U.S. Senator Jacob K. Javits, but he entered the orbit of the secrecy system in 1967 when he became the director of policy planning and arms control for international security affairs at the Department of Defense. It was then that the Secretary of Defense tasked him with overseeing the project that would become the Pentagon Papers, a project that, as Gelb saw it, was never really about history in the first place. He would later lament in 2001, in an op-ed for *The New York Times* that media reporting on the Pentagon Papers had "been based more on mythology and folklore than fact—everything from how the project originated to what it proved."[52] It all began when McNamara sought classified answers to what Gelb termed "dirty questions." There were around one hundred such questions, by Gelb's account, and they "had little to do with history." They were, rather, "the kind of questions that would be asked at a heated press conference: Are our data on pacification accurate? Are we lying about the number killed in action? Can we win this war? Are the services lying to the civilian leaders? Are the civilian leaders lying to the American people?" Of course, some of these questions were indeed historical, a few more directly so: "Could Ho Chi Minh have been an Asian Tito? Did the United States violate the Geneva Accords of 1955?"

In order to answer these questions, Gelb was assigned a staff of three military officers and three civilians from the Pentagon. Yet as they began reviewing selected classified

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[52] Leslie H. Gelb, "Misreading the Pentagon Papers," *The New York Times* (Jun. 29, 2001), A23.

documents, they "all quickly concluded that serious answers to these questions would require looking through these documents and others far more carefully." The analysts would have to go back and start from the beginning, like cold case detectives, re-examining long-forgotten cables and memos. They proposed, and McNamara approved, 36 individual studies to tackle the expansive records across multiple institutions of government. As Gelb recalled, McNamara "ordered the study to be 'encyclopedic' and 'let the chips fall where they may.'"[53]

Whether or not the project began as history, it was ironically Gelb himself who secured the study its place in history when he put sacred ink to profane paper and stamped the documents TOP SECRET—SENSITIVE.[54] McNamara had insisted upon this powerful mark of prohibition, which indicated that not only the contents of the study but the existence of the study itself would be concealed from military officials, federal agencies, and even the President. This label was not covered by the official provision for the government's classification system, "Executive Order 10501." Issued by President Eisenhower on November 5, 1953, this order designated three categories of classified material: CONFIDENTIAL, which meant that the unauthorized disclosure of the information could be "prejudicial" to national defense interests; SECRET, which meant unauthorized disclosure could pose "serious damage" to national security; and at the highest level, TOP SECRET, which meant that unauthorized disclosure could pose "exceptionally grave damage to the nation."[55]

The classification status of the Pentagon Papers was distinctive in at least two ways. On the one hand, the Papers were classified through a process exclusive to the Defense Department known as "derivative classification." This process pertained to the assessment of unclassified

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Schrag, *Test of Loyalty*, 65.
[55] The official provision for the government's classification system came from Executive Order 10501, issued by President Eisenhower on November 5, 1953. For an in-depth study of the history of classification in American government, see Timothy L. Ericson, "Building Our Own 'Iron Curtain': The Emergence of Secrecy in American Government," *The American Archivist,* 68, no. 1 (Spring-Summer 2005): 18-52.

documents that cited "originally classified" materials. Thus, while not officially classified, these documents derived their status from the highest level of classification represented among their cited sources.[56] On the other hand, the additional marking of the Vietnam study as SENSITIVE exceeded the bounds of the official three-tier classification system, operating as insider terminology to disclose that which cannot—or must not—be disclosed. SENSITIVE documents, as the Pentagon Papers trial would eventually reveal, were "embarrassing" documents.[57]

William G. Florence was a former Air Force officer with professional experience in procedures of government classification, and he had a bone to pick with this "system of secrecy." He had once been a member of the so-called "rubber stamp brigade," that group of faceless federal bureaucrats authorized to classify government documents. Florence testified to the Congressional subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Government Information on May 3, 1972, that the "contagion of the classification philosophy long ago reached the point where the security system in Executive Order 10501 represents the greatest hoax of this century…." If its early implementation was "loose" at best, Florence surmised, the administration of this policy of secrecy had become "incredibly inept" in recent years as those with the authority to assign classification status with a simple rubber stamp had apparently gone hog-wild with the job.

There were three reasons behind the "mania for classification," as far as Florence could see. The first had to do with the inadequacy of Executive Order 10501 itself, which he would describe to Congress in 1972 as "the source of most of the secrecy evils in the Executive branch," shedding light on the American government's particularly sinister "philosophy of

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[56] Martin Arnolds, "Ellsberg Witness Explains Secrecy," *The New York Times* (Mar. 21, 1973).
[57] Rudenstine, *The Day the Presses Stopped*; Schrag describes one theory concerning the distinctive classification of the Papers, namely, that they were marked SENSITIVE because one official, Robert Komer, would be embarrassed if he saw his depiction in one volume on pacification. Schrag, *Test of Loyalty,* 296-97.

secrecy."[58] In a December 1971 editorial for the *Washington Post*, Florence had described the order as "The Stamper's Bible," "The Bible of security-stamping," and the government's "security bible," writing:

> Issued Nov. 5, 1953, by President Eisenhower, its nine pages contain commandments on what the executive branch shall classify, how sensitive information shall be stored and other rituals for keeping big secrets. It does not, however, make it very clear who shall decide what is a secret. It commands only that affected departments limit this power 'as severely as is consistent with the orderly and expeditious transaction of government business.' That, which can mean almost anyone, is one reason for the classification craze. It is why thousands of bureaucrats have rubber stamps, which they can order fairly easily from supply units. At the Pentagon, desk after desk has a little tree-like stand with 'Secret' and 'Top Secret' hanging from its wrought-iron branches.[59]

Classification had served in the rising Cold War as a protective measure against the suspected omnipresence of Soviet spies, Florence recalled in a November 1972 interview for leftist antiwar *Win* magazine. Government officials "felt they had to keep information about what they were doing to themselves—or, at least, to distinguish between those authorized to see information and the alleged communists." But, he cautioned, "[w]hen these distinctions are represented by mechanical things like classification marking, the human trait is to use them in every possible way." Such an authority could not be contained by human hands, for it was the "human trait" to lose control when given the power to draw and redraw the lines separating "us" from "them."

Florence's depiction of the American "philosophy of secrecy" prompted a dystopic image; bureaucrats, diplomats, military officers, and government officials, drunk on the power of

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[58] For Florence on "secrecy evils," see Congressional Record, Statement of William G. Florence, Security Consultant on Issues in Classifying and Protecting National Defense information before the Foreign Operations and Government Information Subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations, House of Representatives, U.S. Congress, May 3, 1972, E4706 (included in the record by Hon. William S. Moorhead of Pennsylvania, in the House of Representatives, May 4, 1972); For Florence on "philosophy of secrecy," see Karen Blasingame and John Kincaid, "State Secrets: An Interview with William G. Florence," *Win: Peace and Freedom Thru Nonviolent Action* (Nov. 1, 1972), 24-26, UCSB Special Collections Library, Sheinbaum Collection, box 279.
[59] William G. Florence, "A Madness for Secrecy," *The Washington Post* (Dec. 12, 1971), C1.

classification, entangled in a web of secrets in which what one knew became as important as what one knew-not-to-know. By Florence's estimate, approximately 95-99% of classified Pentagon documents were illegitimately stamped. In this atmosphere, guided by the biblical commandments of Executive Order 10501, "the buying of toilet paper for some military men becomes a national secret," and "[p]urchases of paper clips and paint and long winter underwear can turn into guarded statistics." It was nothing more than "a mass exercise in wish-fulfillment, a giant attempt to keep secret what is already public knowledge, what is bound to become widely known, or what is so trivial that it cannot possibly be of use to anyone."[60]

The mechanical design of the system of classification tapped something—a wish?—already embedded within us, which, once released, let loose on the scene of official secrecy. It was the materiality of the rubber stamp and the visibility of its iconic label that called that 'something' to the surface. Rarely concerned with distinctions regarding legitimately classifiable information, the rubber-stamp workers "simply stamp away." The simplicity of the mechanical classification system thus gave way to something powerful stirring deep within the unconscious human mind.

"A second reason for the stamping binge," Florence wrote, was the intimidating security orientations through which the power and danger of secrecy would be impressed upon new Pentagon workers. He recalled from his own experience that, through films on the horrors of communism and lectures on security practices, "the orientations tend to intimidate new arrivals with myths about classification—that there is some mysterious 'law' dictating what must be kept secret, which there isn't, or that divulging classified information is necessarily a crime, which it isn't." And yet, through all this, orientations "rarely, if ever, …stressed that stamping should be

[60] Ibid.

done sparingly."[61] He expounded upon his early training in his 1972 congressional testimony, describing the creative materials through which the Defense Department attempted to reinforce its secrecy system and secure faith in its mission. Through catchy, often kitschy, forms of workspace propaganda, the Defense Department aimed "to convince every person that security is *his* responsibility" and to reiterate threats of punishment for those "radical" or loose-lipped enough to transgress the boundary lines that policy had established.[62]

This particular form of workplace propaganda had its roots in the early 1950s with the National Security Agency's "Security Education Program." The project began, modestly enough, as an in-house competition in which employees could submit designs for security-oriented posters, with winners receiving a small cash prize and the honor of seeing their artistic renderings of secrecy dotting the walls of government office spaces.[63] Soon, the project expanded into a full-blown domestic propaganda program, embedding reminders to employees of their duties to ensure the security of classified information. The earliest of these posters warned of the Communist enemy lurking in every corner, ever ready to swiftly destroy religion, tradition, and the family at the core of Cold War American culture. One of these early posters portrayed the ominous threat of death posed by the mysteriously vague Other, advising "Security Today or They Ride Tomorrow!" Behind those words of warning rode the four horsemen of the apocalypse, skeletal hands conspiring and pointing to the next target, leaving a burning city behind them.[64]

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[61] Ibid.
[62] Congressional Record, Statement of William G. Florence, May 3, 1972.
[63] Over 100 of these posters were retrieved in response to a Freedom of Information Act request (FOIA case #83661) submitted by individuals from the website Government Attic, which is dedicated to publishing released and declassified materials. Images retrieved are cited hereafter with their date and corresponding item identification number (if available /legible in the facsimile). All posters retrieved by Government Attic via FOIA case #83661 can be viewed at https://www.governmentattic.org/28docs/NSAsecurityPosters_1950s-60s.pdf.
[64] Government Attic (FOIA case #83661), item # 6614853.

Later posters of the 1960s and 1970s reflected the changing times and shifting objectives of security agencies, playfully winking at the new generation of security officials. Over time, these graphics would become more noticeably conversant with popular culture, recruiting the groovy, psychedelic aesthetics of the era to remind employees of their responsibility to remain, in a popular refrain, "security conscious." Browsing through these posters, one senses the recruitment efforts at work, tasking illustrators with appealing to a younger audience whose attention was believed to be drawn not to the legal and security ramifications of loose-lipped behavior as outlined by government policies but rather the brightly colored, dramatic, and occasionally poetic advice offered by these posters.

These posters shed light on the means by which security officials actively recruited developing cultural aesthetics as a tool to safeguard American secrets. But they also point to the craft of the American security apparatus, revealing its strategic entangling of American secrets with any number of cultural values, and a reliance on the medium of material culture as an expedient vehicle for the transmission of those entanglements. For instance, one poster showed two young children gleefully pulling aside clothes in a closet to reveal wrapped Christmas gifts from Santa, advising that "Secrets must be protected." Another depicted a small child looking up with hands clasped in prayer, light glinting off their innocent eyes, reminding observers, "In God We Trust—But On You We Depend."[65] In these cases, the traditional family, religious freedom, and the gift-giving rites of a corporate Christmas were cast as core values just as vulnerable as American secrets, and furthermore, contingent upon the protection of those secrets.

It wasn't just the posters that stuck with Florence. It was also a matter of "overzealous enforcement" that kept defense workers ever-alert, not to security *per se*, but to the "constant

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[65] Ibid., "Secrets must be protected" (1966), item #6614907; "In God We Trust—But on You We Depend" (1962), item #6614884.

threat of punishment hanging over [their] heads" if they should breach security protocol. For Florence, this overhanging threat marked the third reason for all the "madness for secrecy" in American government: "Nightly and on weekends, security police prowl the Pentagon in search of any evidence that the commandments of Executive Order 10501 are not being heeded. In the mornings, those whose offices have been searched usually find on their desks a calling card from their service's security force. The Air Force's version of this greeting is: 'The USAF Security Force did not discover any improperly stored classified information during its check of this area.'" Taken together, the flimsy executive order, intimidating security orientations, and constant fear of punishment "for what the government may consider a violation of its security bible," had wide-ranging consequences for the entire secrecy system that, from Florence's perspective, constituted something of a forced conversion affecting government employees and the public at large:

> Attitudes of literally millions of people everywhere have been influenced toward secrecy and the sanctity of the three classification markings. The people have been so thoroughly misled that they accept as fact the gigantic falsification that a conflict exists in the Constitution between (a) the right of citizens to know and discuss the activities of their government and (b) a need for the Executive branch to keep information secret. … Officials occupying even the highest positions in our government have been conditioned to promote the belief that the words 'Top Secret,' 'Secret' and 'Confidential' on a paper automatically gives it a substantive value of extraordinary importance, and beyond the ken of most people.[66]

Florence's assessment of this secrecy system was not far off from opinions that Ellsberg himself had expressed. Ellsberg had spoken on occasion of mysterious levels of classification higher than TOP-SECRET, and of the effects such access and power could have upon the human psyche. He would recall later a meeting he had with Nixon's then newly appointed National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, in which he advised:

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[66] Congressional Record, Statement of William G. Florence, May 3, 1972.

> After you've started reading all this daily intelligence input and become used to using what amounts to whole libraries of hidden information, which is much more closely held than mere top secret data, you will forget that there ever was a time when you didn't have it, and you'll be aware only of the fact that you have it now and most others don't... and that all those other people are fools... You'll be thinking... 'What would this man be telling me if he knew what I know? Would he be giving me the same advice, or would it totally change his predictions and recommendations?' And that mental exercise is so torturous that after a while you give it up and just stop listening. I've seen this with my superiors, my colleagues... and with myself.[67]

This matter-of-fact advice implied a seemingly natural connection between secrecy and power, the power that comes from holding and having secrets, his "closely held" information recalling the image of "the hand which never lets go" that once struck Elias Canetti as "the very emblem of power."[68] To hold "whole libraries of hidden information" in one's hands, Ellsberg seemed to argue, was to hold a dangerous power capable of not only elevating one's status, but of doing so in a way that makes one forget the very conditions of possibility for that status. Sooner or later, those with access to the hidden world beyond "mere top-secret data" would succumb to the terrible temptation of such information and the power it carried and extended. From Ellsberg's narrative, such a slip seemed almost practical, a matter of realistically questioning the advice of others whose perspectives were less informed.

Power and secrecy intermingled organically in Ellsberg's advice to Kissinger: once "you become used to" this proximity to secrecy—to beyond top-secrecy—"you will forget that there ever was a time when you didn't have it."[69] Suddenly, your awareness narrows to the simple fact

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[67] Cited in Johnson, "The Disquieted American"; Sociologist Irving Louis Horowitz lamented precisely these sentiments in his analysis of the Papers and the role social science played in their development: "For years, critics of the Vietnam War have been silenced and intimidated by the policy-makers' insistence that when all the facts were known the hawk position would be vindicated and the dove position would be violated. Many of the facts are now revealed—and the bankruptcy of the advocates of continued escalation is plain for all to see." Irving Louis Horowitz, "The Pentagon Papers & Social Science," *Trans-Action* (Sept. 1971), 37-46 (citation at 46).

[68] Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, [1960] 1984), 204.

[69] Compare, e.g., government witness in Pentagon Papers trial Allen S. Whitting, who also claimed to have clearance higher than TOP-SECRET. Whitting explained his limited travel to Vietnam as intentional, because he possessed information so sensitive that the government could not risk his capture. Schrag, *Test of Loyalty*, 292-93.

of your superior position, your informed opinion over and against those of others barred from such secrets. Suddenly, secrecy comes to signify power, superiority, and advantage. One does not just know secrets, one lays claim to them, establishing oneself as a fixture in this transcendent realm of the higher-than-TOP-SECRET, whose rarefied elements are composed, in part, by the mists of power.

It was at this intersection of secrecy and power that Florence came to join forces with the defense team in the Pentagon Papers trial. Just as the mechanical nature of the rubber-stamp process led to problems of over-classification, it also enabled suppressive state action in the case against Ellsberg and Russo, where the classification system was operationalized as a "a definable mechanical excuse for the charge involved." Florence saw the actions of Ellsberg and Russo as "an attack on Executive power… viewed by the White House and the National Security Council as a contradiction of their idea of thought control."[70] The case against them, he thought, was really "a purposeful political attack…hurriedly and falsely drawn from what people now call a fetish for security classification and secrecy."[71] Florence was eager to support the defense's case as both consultant and expert witness, and in the former capacity, he offered key insights on how the defense might strategize their case; namely, around an attack on the fetishized secrecy system he so loathed.

In a memorandum dated August 3, 1972, Florence wrote to Stanley Sheinbaum, who had taken on the task of fundraising for the defense, insisting that "[t]he contradiction by Ellsberg and Russo of the 'sacred' classification markings of security-minded Executive branch officials triggered the prosecutive action."[72] In his consulting, Florence raised the specter of the fetish for

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[70] Blasingame and Kincaid, "State Secrets."
[71] William G. Florence, "Secrecy Agreements and Statements Involving Classified Information," National Classification Management Society, Ninth Annual Seminar, Washington, D.C (July 19, 1973), UCSB Special Collections Library, Sheinbaum Collection, box 279.
[72] William G. Florence, "Memo for Stanley: Subject: Secrecy in Government," August 3, 1972, UCSB Special Collections Library, Sheinbaum Collection, box 279.

secrecy, gleaning from the prosecution's case that what was really at issue was the transgression of something deemed "sacred," though contestable as such. Yet this case also brought to Florence's mind issues of sovereign power, a lens that rendered the actions of Ellsberg and Russo a justifiable "attack on Executive power."

In his November 1972 interview for *Win* magazine, Florence had explained that the actions of the defendants were viewed by the government "as a contradiction of their idea of thought control." His language here paralleled his words to Sheinbaum regarding the defendants' "contradiction" of the classification markings deemed "sacred" by "security-minded Executive branch officials," suggesting that Florence saw an internal connection between, on the one hand, the government's power to control the minds of the people and the circulation of information, and on the other, between transgressions of 'the sacred' and acts of righteous political subversion. What White House and NSA officials saw as heresy, Florence and the defendants saw as a reclamation of freedom of thought and self-determination.

In Florence's opinion, the entire case rested on contesting the classification status of the Papers by showing they were improperly classified to begin with. That is, the defense would need to argue that the information contained in the TOP SECRET study was not really secret at all, and certainly not a risk to national security.[73] As he advised Sheinbaum, "the indictment we are defending against is the fruit of the Executive branch misrepresentation of national defense interests as a basis for broad secrecy."[74] In Florence's assessment, if the defense lost on the issue of the study's classification, they would "automatically lose" on their case contesting the prosecution's argument that the Papers related to national defense. The latter issue was a matter of some urgency for the defense, insofar as the government's case for charging the defendants

[73] "For Your Information: Re: Security Classification Terminology," copy of document sent by William G. Florence to Stanley Sheinbaum, March 21, 1973, UCSB Special Collections Library, Sheinbaum Collection, box 279.
[74] Florence memo to Sheinbaum, August 3, 1972.

with "conspiracy" and "espionage" depended upon whether or not the leaked documents contained information that could be proven to pose harm for national security.

What Florence brought to the defense team was the voice of another former government insider who, like Ellsberg and Russo, had the expertise and experience to back up his criticisms of the official classification system. As Florence had testified to Congress, officials were taught to regard classification labels as denotations of "substantive value of extraordinary importance," one "beyond the ken of most people"—in short, set apart from the profane world, transcending the grasp of the everyday American, "sacred," in the classic Durkheimian sense. Leslie Gelb, the former Defense Department official who coordinated research for the Pentagon Papers study, would later come to observe similarly "the courtly conviction that the American people cannot appreciate the problems and have to be 'brought along.'"[75] Florence, in particular, had an acute sense of the psychological and religious elements involved in institutional practice and policy, and he saw in the American secrecy system an opportunity for deeper reflections on the human condition.[76] Notions of sanctity and belief, of the "contagion" of a pure system by contact with impure motivations, rendered his testimony a protest against desecration.

III. "The Mystique of State Secrets"

Florence's advocacy against the official secrecy system resonated with certain leftist journalists and publications that were accustomed to looking askance at promises of government

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[75] Leslie Gelb, quoted in Schrag, *Test of Loyalty*, 63-64.

[76] Florence was not alone in speaking out about excessive government secrecy. Speaking alongside Florence to Moorhead's Subcommittee on May 3, 1972, Senator Mike Gravel of Alaska tagged the system of secrecy as "the most important problem facing our democracy today": "I think the cocoon of secrecy that we have woven over the years, particularly since the Second World War, is what has permitted us to go into Vietnam, permitted us to waste not only our blood, our young people, but also to waste our economic fiber." He observed, moreover, that this "secrecy system" was a relatively recent development—that things had not always been so. "Excerpts from Extemporaneous Statement Given to Mr. Moorhead's Subcommittee by Senator Mike Gravel (May 3, 1972), Congressional Record, Extensions of Remarks, May 9, 1972, E4858, UCSB Special Collections Library, Sheinbaum Collection, box 279.

transparency. The multipurpose imagery of the sacred offered to these observers a tool with which to critique the abuses of the secrecy system, often by way of a double-critique that juxtaposed this system to structures of power and secrecy associated with institutional religions. In these cases, such comparisons looked to terms from the field of comparative religions, crafting disciplinary terms to new social problems.

In their editorial introduction to their 1972 interview with Florence for the War Resister League's *WIN* magazine, Karen Blasingame and John Kincaid theorized the power of secrecy as they probed deeper into that psychological and sacred space Florence opened in his genealogy of the American classification system:

> State secrecy is more than information control accomplished, in the United States, through the formal mechanism of Executive classification. It is also a process of mystification by which the ruling class seeks to establish a powerful mystique of state omniscience and infallibility. From the ancient pharaohs to Richard M. Nixon the functions of state secrecy have hardly changed. Ever since kings and priests arrogated to themselves certain bodies of knowledge, the people have been led to believe that there are secrets which can only be known by a few initiated, educated elites who by virtue of this knowledge are able to carry out the functions of state and determine what is best for the people.[77]

In tracing this history, Blasingame and Kincaid produced an image of the American secrecy system that echoed Marxist critiques of ideology and mystification as well as the comparative methodology associated with the field of History of Religions.[78] Locating state secrecy within a broader system of exploitation (by "the ruling class"), the authors adopted a Marxian lens that had dynamic cultural currency for the era's civil rights and anti-war movements. The language of "mystification" is particularly instructive, signaling a deep

[77] Blasingame and Kincaid "State Secrets."
[78] The authors' historical account of the oppressive "mystification" of state secrecy may also be usefully compared in its style and methodology to de Beauvoir's historical account of the oppression of women in *The Second Sex,* 87-157.

skepticism of the state as a "fetish," which was interpreted to be devoid of real power but imbued with the illusion of power by virtue of its reification.[79]

> Although the President of the United States [Nixon] cannot (yet) keep secrets and claim infallibility by divine right, even with Billy Graham, he can accomplish the same ends in the hallowed name of national defense. By manipulating the appropriate symbols of traditional mythology and by defining the international situation in terms of hot and cold warfare, Presidents have been very successful in convincing the people that they should let the government do their thinking for them. The mystique of state secrets is reinforced by a cult of enforced rituals, high priests, indoctrination, initiation into the mysteries of different levels of secrecy, secret passwords, and even secret classifications.

Here, the mystique of state power became an opportunity for reflecting upon the mystique of religious and political secrecy. For Blasingame and Kincaid, the similarities they identified between ancient pharaonic mythologies of secrecy and those of American presidents illuminated the relevance of certain religious traditions for theorizing U.S. intelligence and classification procedures. There were also other forms of secrecy to consider, as in the "mystique of professional secrets" among medical doctors, lawyers, scientists, and college professors, as well as the everyday occasions in which we "keep secrets from each other in order to manipulate situations or to present our best selves to others." However, when it came to understanding America's policy toward national defense secrets, the authors looked to the terminology of comparative religion in order to reveal the real face of the nation. That face, it turned out, was a

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[79] Compare the somewhat analogous argument offered by Horowitz, who wrote in 1971 on the role that social science played in the development and concealment of the Pentagon Papers. Horowitz found the notion of the "priesthood" useful for analyzing class solidarity among political elites. He observed with some surprise that Nixon did not take the "stunning opportunity" to use the Papers to his advantage by "join[ing] the chorus of those arguing that the Democratic party is indeed the war party, as revealed in these documents; whereas the Republican party emerges as the party of restraint—if not exactly principle." It would have been an opportunity "to make political capital at a no risk basis," but the fact that Nixon did not follow this route "illustrates," for Horowitz at least, "the sense of class solidarity that the political elites in this country manifest; a sense of collective betrayal of the priesthood, rather than a sense of obligation to score political points and gain political trophies." These political elites, he argued, "operate behind a cloak of anonymity," and one of the signal political effects of the leak of the Papers was a forcible lifting of this cloak and a subsequent "collapse of anonymity, no less than secrecy." I would debate the latter point, arguing alongside Taussig that secrecy is not destroyed (or "collapsed") by its revelation—it is magnified. Horowitz, "The Pentagon Papers & Social Science," 45. For more general academic parallels in the History of Religions, see Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Z Smith. See, especially, Smith's essay "Wisdom and Apocalyptic" in Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is Not Territory* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 67-87.

religious one, complete with its own "cult of enforced rituals," priestly hierarchies, and practices of indoctrination and initiation.

The notion of a "priesthood of national security," was a popular turn of phrase for journalists and government insiders alike, its words conjuring something ideologically flexible. Its usage could serve as a critique of the government's security apparatus as a cloistered order whose power signaled an intrusion of the sacred into the secular. Such a reading echoed, though presumably unintentionally, a long history of anti-Catholic and anti-Mormon suspicions among Protestant Americans who viewed the power of the priesthood as a challenge to democratic governance and national ideals of a *properly* secular state.[80] Alternatively, though sometimes simultaneously, its usage could serve as a point of pride for those who delighted in the status that such a sacred order commanded. Whether for critique or clout, the idea of a "priesthood of national security" operating somewhere within government ranks implied a commentary on politics as a site for the intermingling of things secret and sacred.[81] It registered doubts regarding the power and secrecy of the sacred order of the priestly class, assuming readers may connect the dots regarding the commonalities between submission to religious authorities and passivity toward the government's transcendent power.

Blasingame and Kincaid's comparative work illuminates their perception of the entanglements of secrecy, state power, and the sacred. Of course, the "sacred" things the authors identified in their analysis were not sacred to them, but rather evocations of what

[80] See, e.g., "Protestant Unity and the American Mission—The Historiography of a Desire" in R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders* (Oxford University Press, 1986), 3-21; see also J.Z. Smith's critique of polemical intra-religious comparisons between early Christianity and the religions of Late Antiquity on the one hand, and Protestant Christianity and Catholicism on the other. Most relevant to my purposes here is Smith's discussion of the emergent Protestant discursive formulation of Catholicism as essentially secretive, in contradistinction to Protestantism's supposed openness. Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (University of Chicago Press, 1990), 57-58.

[81] For related theoretical reflections on the politics of meaning tied to identifications of religious dynamics in ostensibly secular spheres of social life, see, e.g., Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 90.

government officials regarded as sites of exceptional meaning, requiring respect, submission, and devotion. In commenting on the Pentagon Papers trial, for instance, the authors celebrated Ellsberg and Russo for unmasking the nation's secret priesthood and divesting it of its political power: "In exposing government crimes, lies and deceit they undercut the whole mystique of state secrets." Regardless of the authors' faith in the system, or lack thereof, it is instructive to note how their understanding of the American system of secrecy is premised upon the notion that secrecy confers state power, and that this relationship was akin, if not directly related, to the process by which secrecy can confer sacred power in religious traditions. The intertwining of secrecy and power in religion made for a useful referent, its patterns revealing an ancient model through which their current political reality could be understood.

If religious comparison offered one way to conceptualize the "mystique of state secrets" in Cold War American politics, humor provided a short-cut to the complex issues at the heart of the Pentagon Papers trial.[82] Journalist Barry Farrell's witty take conveyed through the medium of humor the very point at hand: "The indictment had all the elegance and logic of an accident on the freeway, with a dozen overpowered synonyms piling into the appearance of a calamity…"[83] In this capacity, humor also registered and evidenced a certain sense of incongruity concerning the official secrecy system, a gulf between the presumptions of a rational, sterile, and legitimate

[82] I am reminded here, also, of the ways in which humor factored into trials involving anti-war actions and draft resistance during the Vietnam War, recounted by Richard Hecht in his memorial essay for Jonathan Z. Smith. He recalled the draft consulting career of former Air Force Captain William G. Smith, who trained draft counselors in Los Angeles during the Vietnam War: "In one case of lesser importance he mounted a successful defense for two anti-war protesters who dressed as army officers – General Hershey Bar (the Director of the Selective Service at the time was General Lewis Hershey) and General Wastemoreland (General William Westmoreland was the commander of the US military forces in Vietnam during the massive escalation to over one-half million military personnel) – who were arrested for impersonating military officers. Smith won another case involving a Navy enlisted man who was charged with assault for throwing a pie in the face of his commander. Smith brought the comedian Soupy Sales into court and he testified that he had thrown perhaps 20,000 pies and had never been prosecuted. The sailor was acquitted." Richard D. Hecht, "In the Laboratory of Taxonomy and Classification (When the Chips Were Really Down)," in *Remembering J.Z. Smith: A Career and its Consequences,* eds. Emily Crews and Russel McCutcheon, NAASR Working Papers Series (Equinox Pub,, 2020).

[83] Farrell, "The Ellsberg Mask," 82.

system of secrecy on the one hand, and the real conditions, the lived reality, of the human encounter with secrecy, in which the frailty of the human will gave way to irrational obsessions with secrets as such. Depictions of the latter in particular contributed comic value to a scene of cosmic disarray, serving as an index of comparison that marked the limit-point of the government's secrecy system at the boundary between the controlled image of the mythic ideal and uncontrollable human impulses of the real.[84] Like the myths, symbols, and rituals of religion, humor expressed and confronted the incongruity between expectation and real experience. Humor may therefore be understood in this saga as a material configuration of serious—and indeed, religious—import.[85]

Four days following the newspaper's Supreme Court victory, exactly three weeks to the day following the first public revelation of the Papers in the *Times*, a cartoon by John Fischetti appeared in the *Washington Post* issue of July 4, 1971, animating a page of various responses to the scandal of the Pentagon Papers—a bit of comic relief, balancing the chaotic flurry of commentary.[86] In this image, we see a towering box filled with successively smaller boxes, all open with their tops scattered about, each marked TOP-SECRET. A government official stands

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[84] In this way, humor approximates J.Z. Smith's definition of ritual. Smith's most forceful statement in this regard concerns the "gnostic element" he identifies in ritual: "It [ritual] provides the means for demonstrating that we know what ought to have been done, what ought to have taken place. But, by the fact that it is ritual action rather than everyday action, it demonstrates that we know 'what is the case.' Ritual provides an occasion for reflection and rationalization on the fact that what ought to have been done was not done, what ought to have taken place did not occur. From such a perspective, ritual is not best understood as congruent with something else—a magical imitation of desired ends, a translation of emotions, a symbolic acting out of ideas, a dramatization of a text, or the like. Ritual gains force where incongruence is perceived and thought about." Smith, *Imagining Religion,* 63.

[85] I am inspired here by David Chidester's problematization of William James' famous formulation of religion as a response to what is regarded as divine, necessarily signifying a "serious state of mind." Drawing on Ninian Smart's attention to laughter in religion as a means for dealing with paradoxes, Chidester highlights the role that humor has played in religious thought, as well as its surprising role in shaping some of the predominant theories of religion. In Chidester's rendering, humor registers, evinces, and responds to incongruity. Building primarily upon J.Z. Smith's work on myth and ritual as religious means of conceptualizing, explaining, controlling, and transcending incongruity, Chidester concludes, "like religious symbols, myths, and rituals, laughter might provide resources for confronting, mediating, and thinking through incongruity." Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 58-63, 69-71.

[86] This cartoon appeared alongside the "Letters to the Editor" section in *The Washington Post* (Jul. 4, 1971), B7. John Fischetti (1918-1980) political cartoonist for *Chicago Sun*, *Chicago Daily News*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, and *Stars and Stripes*, won the Pulitzer Prize for political cartooning (1969) for his work covering 1968 riots in Chicago re. Democratic National Convention.

below, miniaturized by the mountainous collection, communicating by radio to another official who has braved the climb to search the boxes. Shaking the smallest box with apparent frustration, the man at the apex radios to his colleague down below, "Sir, the last box is empty." These bumbling officers made for excellent caricatures of those real authorities with high-level security clearance who had contributed to the newly apparent problems of over-classification and nonce taxonomy in the American system of secrecy.

What Fischetti's cartoon only vaguely suggested was another reading of this problem, one that Florence captured in his analyses of the secrecy system, which is that these characters were also human—that indeed, the real officers upon whom these caricatures are based were also human. The underlying connection between this comic portrayal and the reality it conveyed and transformed was a statement concerning the deeply human response to conspicuous concealment. From this perspective, the cartoon may have provided a laughable target through which readers could channel their feelings of bafflement and betrayal in response to the Papers, but it also depicted the desperate urgency we all feel to dive further and further into the tunnel that secrecy illuminates.

Thus, the humor in Fischetti's cartoon was two-fold, illustrating the slapstick scrambling of two disappointed government officials, as well as their (and our) realization that, in this Russian nesting doll of TOP-SECRETS, no matter how far one climbs, all of the boxes are empty. Humor was one way to work through the rising tempest of public discontent, translating rage and confusion into satire, maintaining emotional distance through comedy. Yet this image of the desiring yet ultimately deflated government officers still managed to convey something about the very real concerns that were beginning to rise within the press and among critics of the secrecy system like Florence, Kincaid, Blasingame, and certainly Ellsberg himself—the undeniable reality of curiosity as a constitutive element of being human, and the grim

possibilities arising within power structures that gave government officers free rein to indulge that curiosity. Box after box may turn up empty, but for those with the curiosity and authority to know, nothing will deter a climbing search for secrets, not even the final empty box.

IV. "…a secret in which the apocalypse dwells"

"The season of Startling Disclosures and New Revelations was upon us, and there at the catalytic center of events was Ellsberg, violated, outraged, triumphant."[87] Such was the social scene surrounding the unraveling secrets of the Vietnam War, in the playful religious phrasing of journalist Barry Farrell. As with the poetic imagery of Peter Schrag's courtroom report, Farrell's account of this "season" of scandals adopted the idiom of religion as a means to convey something set apart from the everyday world. Farrell did so, in part, by suturing gospel rhetoric to the antiquated titling conventions one might see in popular atrocity tales of the 19th century. *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk* (1836), for instance, appealed to the Protestant reader's ambivalent feelings of fear and fantasy toward Catholics in America. Its subtitle, *Secrets of the Black Nunnery Revealed,* attracted readers with the promise that their most salacious imaginations of the secrets of convent life would be revealed in its pages.

The "Startling Disclosures" of the Pentagon Papers promised a revelation of the secret world of military strategies, intelligence operations, and the mysterious scaffolding behind foreign policy decisions which typically resided in realms far above the everyday events and concerns of Cold War American life. Few readers of the revelations in the *Times* or *Post* would have actually ventured to read the entirety of the Papers once they were finally published, but the cold hard facts of the Papers mattered less to the American public than the principle of secrecy they represented. In any case, it did not take a thorough reading of the Papers to know that the

[87] Farrell, "The Ellsberg Mask."

TOP-SECRET history of the Vietnam War would be, to borrow the words of sociologist Edward A. Shils, "the kind of secret which fascinates and which disrupts."[88]

Shils's now-classic study, *The Torment of Secrecy* (1956), was first inspired, he claimed, by his sense of duty to expose the flaws of McCarythism and similarly fanatic threads of obsession with identifying and outing the subversive elements believed to be hidden in the midst of American public and political life. In this aim, he mirrored the message Condon sought to convey in *The Manchurian Candidate.* For, in Condon's parody of the extremism and spurious politicking of McCarthyism, he also warned of the real danger such extremism could pose for a nation vulnerable to the secret influence of politicians.

If the spell of McCarythism taught us anything, Shils observed, it was the lesson "that those who traffic with extremism become its victims." His advocacy for a "pluralistic moderation" involving secrecy in Cold War American security policies must thus be understood in light of its political urgency and attendant moral imperatives. "The passing of passions of ideological politics," he urged, "should…be followed by the evaporation of the mythology of 'left' and 'right' as the two poles of political life at which reside the sacred and the diabolical." He was careful to distinguish his moderate view from the "utopian" aims of leftist political idealism that would eschew government secrecy as a fundamental problem. "There is no yearning here for any 'good old days' before the Fall," he assured his readers, "and there are no expectations of salvation." What he envisioned for American society was, rather, a humble "balance of publicity, privacy and secrecy which will maintain liberties," but achieving this would

[88] Edward A. Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1956).

require "avoid[ing] the temptation to honor those who live at the poles of enthusiasm for the sacred and hatred for the diabolical."[89]

The soteriological significance of secrecy, Shils seemed to suggest, lay only in its moderation and proper balance, as a problematic but nonetheless necessary component of national security. "The fulfillment of perfection, of completeness, of total security is not for man here below," he cautioned, echoing the warning from John Milton's Archangel Raphael to the relentlessly curious Adam: "Heaven is for thee too high to know what passes there."[90] As with any values, Shils said, the search for a "perfect realization" of secrecy was a fruitless quest, whose proponents "had better be avoided by men who cherish the order of their lives and the decency of their society." When maintained in balance with demands for publicity and privacy, secrecy served as the guarantor of American liberty; disequilibrium and extremism in matters of secrecy, on the other hand, foretold the dissolution of order and decency in American society. "There are times for heroism and for tilting at windmills," Shils would admit, but, "if vain disorders are to be avoided," these idealistic aims "must always be countered by matter-of-factness, the acceptance of the intractability of the world and the obstinacy of the old Adam

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[89] Shils, "Foreword," *The Torment of Secrecy,* 9-18. While Shils' *Torment of Secrecy* is not often cited in the field of Religious Studies, it has been a regular source for government studies of secrecy. Interestingly, it is, in fact, the first work cited in the Church Committee's Appendix II on "Government Information and Security Classification Policy" (313). I am grateful to Richard Hecht for bringing to my attention Shils' work on sacred space as the subject for which he is more regularly cited and deemed most influential among scholars of religion (see, e.g., Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (University of Chicago Press, 1975)). In a review of Jonathan Z. Smith's *To Take Place* (1987), Hecht's summary of Shils' contributions to the study of sacred space is worth quoting, for it not only captures the gist of Shils' argument, but also offers important suggestions for refining his conclusions: "Edward Shils's classic argument of course is that 'center' and 'periphery' are not exclusively about geometry or geography. 'Center' refers the realm of values and beliefs, and we can also add 'behaviors' and 'actions,' which govern the social world. He continues his description by noting that it is the center because it achieves a consensus among the members of a society that it is the ultimate and irreducible, even though they may not be able to give explicit articulation to its irreducibility. Here, some revision may be necessary. Ritual may be a communal or individual mechanism of articulation." Richard D. Hecht, "'Rites Require Rights': J. Z. Smith's *To Take Place*: Toward Theory in Ritual After 20 Years Space, Place, and Lived Experience in Antiquity Consultation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 3 (Sept. 2008): 790-805 (citation at 793n).
[90] John Milton, *Paradise Lost,* Book VIII, (New York: The Heritage Press, 1940), 186.

within us." It was in similar spirit that Raphael concluded his angelic countenance to that old Adam: "Be lowly wise."

Like Schrag, Farrell, Blasingame, and Kinkead, Shils found religious language a helpful medium for conveying the weighty issues at hand when facing the specter of secrecy. His foreword to *The Torment of Secrecy* is inundated with the language and imagery of religious formations. He condemned the "mythology" he saw as the bedrock of political extremes. He warned of the temptations of "enthusiasm," using terminology that bears the trace of early sectarian debates of colonial New England, when critics looked askance at the "Enthusiasms," or embodied expressions of religious experience, observed among Quakers and Shakers.[91] His critique of those seeking the "perfect realization" of American security policy calls to mind the 19th-century perfectionist movements born out of the famed Burned Over District of New York and sewn thereafter along the expanding frontier. He distinguished himself from other theorists by placing himself firmly on the side of realism, on the other side of "the Fall" that sought not the restoration of some Golden Age of national security but the pragmatic acceptance of "the obstinacy of the old Adam within us." He may not have promised "salvation," but Shils certainly demonstrated the ease with which religious language mapped onto the political landscape of his time, whose territory was marked, depending upon one's mytho-political inclinations, by the limit points of "the sacred" and "the diabolical."

Shils's sociological study of secrecy interpellated a Cold War audience for whom the discursive terms of religion had broad cultural currency. In his attempt to vanquish the "mythological" windmill of extremist views toward secrecy in American security policies, Shils demonstrated the value of religious formations as conceptual tools for political analysis. Yet

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[91] See, for instance, Ann Taves' analysis of "enthusiasm" as a foil against which religious experience was constructed in mid-18th to early-19th century American history. Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

beyond its rhetorical presence, religion shaped Shils' depiction of the tension between necessary and excessive secrecy in American security policies. There were, for Shils, two kinds of secrecy to contend with when it came to American culture. There was, on the one hand, the "technical secret," which was rooted in the powers of reason and autonomy, values befitting American democracy and enabling its delicate "equilibrium" of publicity, privacy, and (necessary) secrecy. This kind of secrecy was official, authorized, and rational; it was a technical instrument of the modern state, clothed smartly in a puritan sheen of Protestant propriety. Yet on the other hand, there was another kind of secret, whose "aura of fatefulness" trembled with apocalyptic potential. This was the secret of revolution: a "secret in which the apocalypse dwells."

The apocalyptic power of the secret of revolution differed from the technical secret in that it was defined from the perspective of the subject who feared the revolutionary machinations it concealed. While Shils himself was not altogether clear on the matter of this distinction, he did give special prominence to its effects on Western society, arguing that the pattern of conspiratorial beliefs engendered around this secret comprised a characteristic feature of modern politics. Shils traced the life of this secret to the French Revolution and the social upheavals that spread globally in its wake. The ruling classes of Europe found themselves at that point in a precarious position as the vulnerable targets of reformist discontent. These European elites were plagued by "the worrying belief that hidden away in some sink of society, conspirators were plotting to do away with the existing social order." For the aristocrats and pearl-clutching bourgeoisie of the Western world, the hidden activities of revolutionaries had become "the prime objects of the obsession with the dangers lurking in secrecy." Such fears registered the destabilizing power of revolutionaries and resignified secrecy as the handmaiden of revolution. It then became possible—even necessary, for the fearful—to speak of secrecy as a serious threat to social order, related in its essence to danger, illicit activities, nefarious

intentions, conspiracy, the insecurity of property and wealth, and the disturbance of the status quo.

Ellsberg himself evinced a particular ambivalence toward the dangers of secrecy by withholding from the press certain volumes of the Papers. Though these volumes dealt with past foreign policy negotiations and thus no longer posed an immediate risk to national security if revealed, Ellsberg claimed that they "obviously involved the possibility of private channels that could be used in the future." He explained: "I did not want to contribute to even the possibility that I would get in the way of negotiations. Therefore, I did give those materials to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee which I felt had an overriding need to know and not to any newspapers." This recourse to taxonomic expertise had the double-effect of establishing Ellsberg's voice as both authoritative and moral:

> What made it seem urgent to me to get this history out is that officials of the Nixon administration were falling into the same traps of arrogance as the administrations before them. When we invaded Cambodia [1970], no doubt was left in my mind that the papers should be released. The ability of this country to keep secrets has gotten *too good for our own good*. It's time citizens be given the chance to *judge for themselves* where secrecy has led us.[92]

Ellsberg framed the issue of secrecy, ironically and perhaps strategically, in terms of American excellence. This assessment would seem to put his previous advice to Kissinger in a new light, wherein the secrecy system's temptations of power and arrogance lay in dynamic tension with the enduring promise it offered as a national security provision. When it came to secrecy, Ellsberg explained that the American government had simply excelled past the point of national security, investing so much in the public good of secrecy that it had plunged into the deep end—"too good for our own good," he thought. Where, indeed, had secrecy led us, if not to the very boundaries of democracy, beyond boundaries we ourselves had drawn? What would

[92] "Withheld Some Data: Ellsburg [sic]," *Chicago Tribune* (Jul. 2, 1971), A1 (italics mine).

Shils, in all his "pluralistic moderation," think of this state of State secrecy? Secrecy, like some kind of Janus-faced psychopomp, had led us into the quicksand of colonial power, where the occupier's heavy hand cast occluding shadows over the lines separating allies and enemies, domestic protests and foreign threats, truth in fact and the wish of Truth.

Ellsberg gestured to the will of the people, challenging American citizens to use the Pentagon Papers to "judge for themselves" where the now-blurred boundaries of righteous secrecy should be re-drawn, if not drawn entirely anew.[93] The public impact of the Pentagon Papers depended upon their offering of an insider's peek behind the scenes into the negotiations and manipulations of the military and Executive branch. Sociologist Irving Louis Horowitz found it "fascinating—at least this once—to be privy to the process [of foreign policy decision-making] and not simply the outcome, and to see the foibles of powerful men and not just the fables manufactured for these men after the fact." From Horowitz's description, the Papers seemed to offer something of a Cold War cultural provision, "a human drama that makes the political process at once fascinating and frightful; fascinating because we can see the psychology of politics in action, and frightful because the presumed rationality is by no means uniformly present."[94]

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[93] In light of the tantalizing secrets the Papers offered, this challenge presented an opportunity, not unlike the opportunities P.T. Barnum strategically advanced in advertising his curiosities and wonder shows. According to Barnum's self-theorizing, he was not a performer of tricks, but rather a purveyor of "humbugs," one who does not conceal but rather makes a spectacle of their own fraudulence. Barnum's ads had beckoned audiences to come see for themselves whether or not the monstrous "Feejee Mermaid" was really real, or really made up. There was only one way to find out, and audiences nationwide paid for the opportunity to debunk Barnum's magnificent claims. This was Barnum's signature "operational aesthetic," a strategy that does not entirely conceal but rather points to the presence of some technical operation behind the mysterious phenomenon or artifact, and thereby entices the audience member to join in the delight of unmasking its inner workings. The technique and machinery of humbuggery thus offered an opportunity for audience engagement with the display or performance, namely, by offering the intellectual space to figure out how it was done or made. Neil Harris, *Humbug: The Art of P. T. Barnum* (University of Chicago Press, 1973). What I am suggesting here is that the Papers also bore a certain "operational aesthetic," whether in the hands of their promoters among Ellsberg's defenders or their censors within government. For an analysis of Barnum's "operational aesthetic" as a mode of religious work, see David Walker, "The Humbug in American Religion: Ritual Theories of Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism," *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 23, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 30-74.

[94] Horowitz, "The Pentagon Papers & Social Science," 46.

In his opening statements to Judge Byrne's court, Ellsberg's lead defense attorney Leonard Boudin seemed to echo the ambivalent mix of fascination and fear that Horowitz expressed. He proclaimed that the Papers gave Congress, maybe for the first time, "an inside look into how presidents and secretaries of state and secretaries of defense really operate, and how they try to manipulate public opinion, and how they actually say to one another, 'Let's do this, because this is the right time to affect Congress; let's present it this way, so the public won't realize that we are really accelerating the war; we will say we are following the same old policy with slight modifications.' These Papers explain to Congress what it had long suspected, namely, that it had been deceived, and that you had been deceived…"[95] Here, surely, was a "secret in which the apocalypse dwells."

V. The Procession of the Totem

The Pentagon Papers trial of Daniel Ellsberg and Anthony Russo was still months away when, on June 28, 1971, the image of the totem-box—along with multiple identical others—made its debut before the press. It had been just over two weeks since the *New York Times* had revealed the existence of the Pentagon Papers to the public, and after much noise from congressmembers insisting on their need-to-know, the Department of Defense finally agreed to furnish members of the House and Senate with copies of the study. Each would receive only one set to share among their members, and only under the conditions that the documents be kept in locked vaults and that no copies would be made nor notes taken by those congressmembers who asked to view them. Representative F. Edward Hébert of Louisiana, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee and designated custodian of the House's copy of the study, hadn't the slightest confidence in the ability of his colleagues to follow the

[95] Opening statement cited in Salter, 35-36.

Pentagon's guidelines. "I don't think you could keep a secret in Washington if you told it to a mirror," he told the press.[96]

Camera crews scrambled to catch the first glimpse of the boxes in a moment of palpable excitement as they were ushered to the office of Senate president pro tempore Allen Ellender of Louisiana, the designated recipient of the Senate's copy. A throng of senators and armed guards paraded boxes upon dollies through the hallowed halls of the Capitol, gorged on pride of place in this procession of the TOP-SECRET. Not unlike a community ribbon-cutting ceremony in which a special honor is bestowed upon the person privileged enough to wield those gratuitously large scissors. Not unlike a Holy Week procession in which a penitent few carry the figural representation and material embodiment of the patron saint. Not unlike either of these cases, and perhaps somewhere in between; that is, something simultaneously evocative of the awesome power of the hoisted saint and the farce of the giant scissors.

John Chancellor, reporting for the NBC Evening News, observed that "it seemed to be one of those little moments on the Washington scene designed primarily for photographers."[97] Illuminated under the pre-arranged setup of television crew lights and the flashing bulbs of photographers, Senator Ellender greeted the press alongside his colleagues, Democrat Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana, and Republican Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania.

Ellender was known for his enduring tenure of thirty-four years in the Senate, his shameless anti-black sentiments, his bouncing energy, which he claimed to be "a result of the fact that [he] neither smoked or drank and refrained from chasing women," and for the pots of

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[96] Marjorie Hunter, "Congress Gets Pentagon Papers, Locks Them Up," *The New York Times* (Jun. 29, 1971), 8; "Hill Gets Secret Files on War," *The Washington Post* (Jun. 29, 1971), 12; "Supreme Court Extends Term to Rule on War Data," *The Chicago Tribune* (Jun. 29, 1971), 3.

[97] This quote, and the description of the scene that follows, are taken from John Chancellor's report for NBC Evening News, "Congress/Pentagon Papers," June 28, 1971, #458518 Vanderbilt Television News Archives, accessed online at https://tvnews-vanderbilt-edu.proxy.library.ucsb.edu:9443/broadcasts/458518.

homemade gumbo that he cooked regularly in his Capitol office for colleagues and press delegations.[98] But if he was known for patience, it wasn't evident here. He stood waiting anxiously as two uniformed military officers took great care removing the paper wrapping from the boxes. Ellender could wait no longer, jumping in over the two men and ripping the paper off like a child excitedly tearing the gift wrapping off a present. With an open-mouthed grin, laughing with proud delight, he held the wrapping paper in front of his chest, its eagerly torn edges bordering an all too prominent label, which did not read but rather exclaimed: TOP-SECRET. He smiled for the cameras, cementing in history his momentous unveiling.

Ellender retrieved a volume from the box, handing it over to Senator Scott with grandfatherly advice, "Now, don't lose it," as the room erupted in laughter. Scott responded, confessing his own impatience, "I'm dying of curiosity!" Ellender then lifted a volume to hand to an exceedingly uncomfortable Mansfield, but the collegial gesture was promptly refused. "No, no, you hang onto it," Mansfield replied, prompting renewed laughter from his colleagues and reporters. Scott then quipped, to no one in particular, "He won't even touch 'em!"

Ellender raised from the exhibit a memorandum that accompanied the precious cargo, adopting an attitude and tone whose performative seriousness magnified the play that had, up to that point, conveyed a proverbial wink at the specter of secrecy. "Let's see, it says 'TOP-SECRET information,'" he said, with a content nod to the cameras. Scott chimed in jokingly, "Coversheet: Where is Mr. Ellsberg?" Scott waited for reporters to get the joke, and in that gap between performance and reception, the room stood still with the unanswered question that conveyed in jest the very real consequences at hand. Ellender muttered, "I hope he's in jail." Mansfield, for one, did not laugh. Finally, Ellender read aloud the enclosed warning from Secretary of Defense

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[98] "New Senate Patriarch," *The New York Times* (Feb. 5, 1971).

Melvin R. Laird, which stated in no uncertain terms that the secrets within this box, if disclosed, would pose "grave and immediate dangers to the national security."[99]

There was nothing pedestrian or everyday about this ritual procession and display of government secrecy. Judging from the faces of the congressmen, scurrying amidst the armed chaperones carting these totem boxes through the halls of the Hill, the occasion was evidently less formal than one might suspect given the gravity of the situation. The simple act of transporting these boxes became an escape hatch for the heavy fog of requisite solemnity. With one degree of cardboard separation from the revelations the Papers contained, solemnity gave way to pride, pomp, and in some cases, a not-so-subtle delight in the reverie of it all. This was, in short, a spectacle, which revealed to American audiences the limits of revelation through its dramatic performance of rituals of government secrecy. Yet as the Papers' congressional handlers struggled to maintain composure before the ambiguous power of the secrets they held, this case of political theater also revealed the animating tensions underlying those rituals, suggesting the TOP-SECRET history of the Vietnam War was no mere "technical secret," per Shils' definition, but rather, "the kind of secret which fascinates and which disrupts."

The following day, Democrat Senator Maurice "Mike" Gravel of Alaska coordinated a spectacle of his own. Unlike the performances of his colleagues, Gravel's spectacle would be punctuated not by laughter but by tears. Though a mere freshman to the Senate, Gravel had been quickly establishing himself as something of a maverick among his colleagues. He'd recently expressed his stance against U.S. involvement in Vietnam by threatening to filibuster a draft extension bill. Another avenue for resistance presented itself on June 24, 1971, when Gravel obtained copies of the Pentagon Papers from journalist Ben Bagdikian of the *Washington*

[99] "Hill Gets Secret Files on War."

Post.[100] Bagdikian had received two boxes of the classified documents from Ellsberg earlier that month, and while he took one box to the *Post,* one lay hidden in a closet in the reporter's D.C. apartment. He had arranged for a rendezvous at the Washington Hotel with Gravel, toting his secret box of secrets to their next hand-off. He arrived, setting the precious cargo before the senator, but just as he began to open the box, Gravel stopped him: "Don't touch them. Don't touch them," he told Bagdikian, as he would likewise tell his staff, each of whom lacked the authority of congressional immunity and were therefore prohibited from touching the documents.[101] Anxiously reminding his colleagues of the national security commandments that precluded their rights to know and to touch such secrets, Gravel echoed the fearful unease that his colleague Senator Mansfield expressed when confronted with the Papers in all their material reality. The young senator would spend nearly a week familiarizing himself with the classified documents before deciding how to take matters of revelation into his own hands.

On the night of June 29, after trying and failing to arrange a Senate quorum, Gravel convened instead a meeting of his Senate Public Works subcommittee. He would pick up where the press left off by reading aloud from the Papers in his official capacity as the subcommittee's chair, thereby "converting" the still-classified information into the public record. [102] He took to

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[100] Mary Frances Berry, *History Teaches Us to Resist: How Progressive Movements Have Succeeded in Challenging Times* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2018), 55-56; Gravel would not say publicly at the time how these copies came into his possession, telling reporters only that they were offered, and that he accepted. "Sen. Gravel Reads Documents, Ends Report on War in Tears," *The Los Angeles Times* (Jun. 30, 1971).

[101] "Ben H. Bagdikian: Journalist, Media Critic, Professor & Dean Emeritus, UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism," conducted by Lisa Rubens 2010, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2011, https://digitalassets.lib.berkeley.edu/roho/ucb/text/bagdikian_ben.pdf.

[102] In fact, two "conversion" events would draw the attention of those who turned in for the NBC Evening News. Not only did news break on Gravel's public "conversion" of classified material, but that same day, the Supreme Court had freed heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali on charges for draft avoidance, ruling 8-0 that the prize fighter could not be charged because the draft Appeal Board had failed to provide sufficient reasons for denying Ali's claim to conscientious objection. Though essentially voided on a technicality, the case hovered around the central issue of Ali's claimed conversion to Nation of Islam, framed in legal code and in emphases among the Court's *per curiam* as a tripartite configuration of Ali, his religion, and "war in any form." The Court questioned the Appeal Board's judgment when it came to issues like whether or not the Nation of Islam truly opposed "war in any form," or whether Ali was "sincere" in his belief. Such questions also brimmed in the background for NBC reporter Dennis Swanson who interviewed Ali following the decision. Between takes of Ali pummeling heavy bags in a boxing studio, Swanson returned again and again to the issue of Ali's high-profile conversion, leaving the

the dais before a hastily assembled collage of staff members, reporters, and members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War movement. A few fellow Democratic doves were also in attendance, including Senators Alan Cranston of California and Harold Hughes of Iowa; Representative John G. Dow of New York had found himself a seat in the witness chair, as if to signal the spectacle's lifting of everyday order, suggesting the outer limits of that order in the process of its transgression.[103] Gravel was ready to fulfil what he claimed as his "constitutional obligation to protect the security of the people by fostering the free flow of information absolutely essential to their democratic decision-making." He then proceeded to transmit the TOP-SECRET to the Public (Works), reading for nearly four hours straight. By 1:15 a.m., he could read no longer. He was "physically unable," he said. As he reflected on the evening in his closing statements, he gestured toward a collective spirit, inviting his audience to identify themselves with him as true patriots: "What I do today—what we do here today—is because we love this country." Few news reporters failed to note that the senator was, by that point, openly weeping.[104]

Just as Capitol guards swooped in to usher Gravel out of the room, his audience rose to give him a standing ovation. He had only made it through part of the volume on Eisenhower's Administration that evening, but it was the symbolic value of his defiance that mattered to those

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impression that the Court's decision was somehow an affirmation of religious belief. Ali told Swanson that once he took on Joe Frazier to regain his boxing title, which had been stripped following his indictment, he'd be retiring to devote himself to religious practice. NBC Evening News for Monday, June 28, 1971, "SUPREME COURT," #458504 Vanderbilt Television News archive; The *per curiam* noted: "In order to qualify for classification as a conscientious objector, a registrant must satisfy three basic tests. He must show that he is conscientiously opposed to war in any form. *Gillette v. United States*, 401 U. S. 437. He must show that this opposition is based upon religious training and belief, as the term has been construed in our decisions. *United States v. Seeger*, 380 U. S. 163; *Welsh v. United States*, 398 U. S. 333. And he must show that this objection is sincere. *Witmer v. United States*, 348 U. S. 375. In applying these tests, the Selective Service System must be concerned with the registrant as an individual, not with its own interpretation of the dogma of the religious sect, if any, to which he may belong. *United States v. Seeger*, supra; *Gillette v. United States*, supra; *Williams v. United States*, 216 F.2d 350, 352." *Clay v. United States*, 403 U.S. 698 (1971), accessed online June 2020 at: https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/403/698

[103] David E. Rosenbaum, "Gravel Speaks 3 Hours," *The New York Times* (Jun. 30, 1971).

[104] See e.g., "Sen. Gravel Reads Documents, Ends Report on War in Tears," *Los Angeles Times* (Jun. 30, 1971).

reporters and like-minded colleagues in the room. As the senator had explained in his opening statements, he refused to "accept the notion that the President of the United States can manipulate the United States Senate into silence." That message would have certainly resonated with the members of the press in attendance, who were no doubt preoccupied with the limits of their own freedom under the President's heavy hand; they were still awaiting the Supreme Court decision that would determine whether or not the Nixon Administration could indeed silence the *Times* and the *Post* by suppressing further publishing of information from the Pentagon Papers.

Gravel had assembled his revelatory subcommittee session in conscious protest against the state of the nation under the polluting fog of war: "The greatest representative of democracy the world has known, the nation of Jefferson and Lincoln, has had its nose rubbed in the swamp by petty warlords, jealous Vietnamese generals, black-marketeers and grand-scale dope pushers."[105] These were the words he had planned to say to the Senate, but finding no welcome arms there, he read aloud the solemn speech to the assembled group before him, and would further cement his statement, for the record, by including an adapted version in his introduction to the "Gravel Edition" of the Papers, published by Beacon Press later that year, in which he glossed the harrowing lessons arising from the Papers:

> The Pentagon Papers show that the enemy knew what we were not permitted to know. Our leaders sought to keep their plans from the American people, even as they telegraphed their intentions to the enemy, as part of a deliberate strategy to cause him to back down. The elaborate secrecy precautions, the carefully contrived subterfuges, the precisely orchestrated press leaks, were intended not to deceive "the other side," but to keep the American public in the dark. Both we and the enemy were viewed as "audiences" before whom various postures of determination, conciliation, inflexibility, and strength were portrayed. The American public, which once thought of itself as a central participant in the democratic process, found itself reduced to the status of an interested, but passive, observer. The people do not want, nor should they any longer be subjected to, the paternalistic protection of an Executive which believes that it alone has the right answers. … For too long they have been forced to subsist on a diet of half-

[105] John W. Finney, "Action by Gravel Vexes Senators," *The New York Times* (Jul. 1, 1971), 1.

> truths or deliberate deceit, by executives who consider the people and the Congress as adversaries.

Taken together, his statements made clear that the America of the Papers was not the America Gravel knew and loved; this was America, nosediving straight toward its own Fall. Like the subject of so many jeremiads, his nation had fallen into iniquity, its institutionalized "barriers of secrecy" having enabled "the national security apparatus to evolve a rigid orthodoxy which excludes those who question the accepted dogma." Yet while Gravel called for ritual purification, what was at issue was not restoration but revolution: "If ever there was a time for change," he wrote, "it is now," and he hoped to see that "the past, as revealed in the Pentagon Papers, will help us make a new beginning, toward that better America which we all seek."

To that end, Gravel seemed somewhat optimistic; from his vantage point, the nation hovered on the verge of revelation: "But now there is a great awakening in our land," he declared, like some modern-day Jonathan Edwards. "There is a yearning for peace, and a realization that we need never have gone to war. There is a yearning for a more free and open society, and the emerging recognition of repression of people's lives, of their right to know, and of their right to determine their nation's future. And there is a yearning for the kind of mutual trust between those who govern and those who are governed that has been so lacking in the past."[106]

Like the defendants in the Pentagon Papers trial, Senator Gravel managed to find a way around bureaucratic barriers and reveal classified information to the public, but he framed his actions, in speech and in writing, through religious terms and constructions. Gravel evoked the mythic formations of American history with reference to the popular motif of the Founding Fathers as spiritual patriarchs, uniting his audience under the banner of "the nation of Jefferson

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[106] Mike Gravel, "Introduction" in *The Pentagon Papers: The Defense Department History of United States Decisionmaking on Vietnam, Vol. I*, Senator Gravel Edition (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), ix-xii.

and Lincoln"; he adopted culturally significant representations of religion to communicate the unequaled power of the revelations arising from the Papers, leading, in his account, to "a great awakening." He relied also on the religious narrative structure of the jeremiadic lamentation, addressed here to the nation at large and producing as its effect a dramatic tale of the tarnishing of American greatness.

Considering the charges against Ellsberg and Russo, it is telling that Gravel did not face any lasting consequences for his actions.[107] There were, of course, disapproving voices among his more conservative colleagues like Senator William Saxbe of Ohio (soon to be appointed in January 1974 to replace the Watergate-flooded John Mitchell as U.S. Attorney General under the Nixon Administration). But even Gravel's detractors could be understood within a religious framework, as in legal scholar Lawrence R. Velvel's contemporary critique of the institutional barriers set up by "those men, like Senator William Saxbe, whose statements on Gravel's conduct indicate that their view of morality is that revealing the evil deeds recorded in government archives is a greater sin than committing the evil deeds."[108]

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield of Montana worried aloud to reporters that some might think Gravel's act violated the "decorum and dignity" of the Senate, but he declined to take official action against his colleague.[109] The contrasting receptions of these two leaks spoke to the conditions under which prohibitions against revealing state secrets may be lifted. The conditions of possible transgression, in this case, trace the limits of the rational order of the

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[107] Gravel gambled on the prospect that he might be protected from prosecution under a constitutional provision that would grant immunity for "official acts." John W. Finney, "Action by Gravel Vexes Senators," *The New York Times*, (Jul. 1, 1971), 1. Incomplete original video footage of Gravel's subcommittee meeting can be found online at https://archive.org/details/GravelPapers1971.
[108] It is worth noting that, at the time of his writing, Velvel was a Professor at Catholic University of America (Washington, D.C.), an observation that does not undermine the point made here, namely, the evident utility of religious language for political discourse and legal scholarship more broadly. Lawrence R. Velvel, "The Supreme Court Tramples Gravel," Kentucky Law Journal 61 (1972-1973), pp. 525-37, accessed through HeinOnline Law Journal Library at https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.journals/kentlj61&i=546.
[109] John MacLean, "Rogers Urges Calm on Secrets," *The Chicago Tribune* (Jul. 2, 1971), A1.

"technical secret," as did the outraged Saxbes of the Senate who traced these limits, from another angle, through a labor of the negative. In their calls to restore order (as though the frailty of that order were not the issue at hand), Gravel's critical colleagues sought to purify the territory of the technical secret, and in so doing, to reterritorialize a certain image of congressional purity. Calls for the restoration of "decorum and dignity" alerted legislators to the permanent state of emergency that comprised that secretly permeable border, their fears giving shape and substance to the spectral presence of the "apocalyptic secret" that haunted this border and, more terrifying still, the destructive chaos it all but guaranteed.

In Gravel's case, the authority to reveal, or at least to do so without serious punishment, required at least three things: the right space, the right voice, and the right to know. The authorized space of the Senate subcommittee legitimated Gravel's late-night spectacle, providing a stage set apart from the everyday world of the public, transcendent with Tradition and the mythic gravity it conveys. Congressional space commands order and respect; it provides the official platform for the rituals of government, signaling to observers and those forbidden to observe that the events it houses are of critical significance and value. The leak with which the defendants were charged occurred in no such space. As the Papers were carried along their journey from RAND to RAND, to Sinay's advertising agency, and to the trunks of cars of newspaper editors and congressmembers, they were transported in liminal space—each stop an instance, according to the prosecution, of "unauthorized possession" in unauthorized space and, where transferred to other hands, "unauthorized conversion of government property."[110]

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[110] Notably, Gravel's position as a freshman senator afforded him a dual leniency. As an elected official, Gravel had the authorized voice to speak secrets into existence. This authority was, ostensibly, socially sanctioned by voters, and the status thereby attributed to Gravel provided special privileges. He was an authorized speaker, whose voice thereby commanded attention and respect not granted to others. But he was also afforded the privilege of access to at least some of the secrets deemed government property. This right to know was a privilege denied to the public, which lacked not only the right but also the "need to know." The secret information to which a senator is privy is, of course, a matter of that senator's own designated need-to-know, which was one condition that haunted Gravel as he considered the possible consequences for his revealing information to which he was not granted access by

Conclusion: Marks that Confer Sacredness

In this saga of the Pentagon Papers, the notion of classification took on multiple meanings. There was, at a surface level, the issue of classification markings, which gave TOP-SECRET information a special significance relative to ordinary information.[111] But there was also a different sort of classification to consider, which was being conducted in real time by participants in the trial, by the press, and by spectators and public audiences more broadly. This concerned the proper classification of the defendants themselves: were they traitors or patriots, attention-seeking or self-sacrificing, malicious or heroic? It was difficult to pin down their real characters among the swirling phantoms circulating in the press, setting the shape-shifting defendants parallel to the equally indeterminate issue of secrecy at the center of their case.

Classification in both senses relied on acts of comparison to locate ambiguous subjects, to set them apart or classify them together, to designate them with labels, both physical and social. Properly labeling secrets and their purveyors (or leakers, or 'thieves') would require, in Durkheim's terms, a mode of "religious thought"—that is, a logic of comparison typified by "a natural taste as much for unrestrained assimilations as for clashing contrasts," and thus "given to excess in both directions." Religious thought "knows neither moderation nor nuance but seeks the extremes," Durkheim argued.[112] Such zeal for extremes in the art of classification was, in fact, the very issue William Florence identified among the "rubber stamp brigade," but it was also the social engine mobilizing the various attempts, within and outside the courtroom, to

official means or channels. But the leniency Gravel was granted was not just a matter of his right to know. He was eager and spry, and perhaps he could be forgiven for letting his youthful zeal get the best of him. If he indeed violated the "decorum and dignity" of the Senate, this infraction was mitigated by his junior position, which gave him a latitude of freedom known only by those with the privilege and power to foul a time or two without thereby losing the game.

[111] One former CIA official put it bluntly in an affidavit submitted by the defense in the trial: "People won't read it if it's not classified." Schrag, *Test of Loyalty,* 186.

[112] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms,* 241.

define Ellsberg and Russo through the cardboard cutout figures of culturally meaningful archetypes.

In defining "religious thought," Durkheim sought to explain a fundamental and enduring religious element that could be found in all societies, owing to its rootedness in the human mind itself. The "extremes" he had in mind were the distinctive modes of social life, the profane and the sacred—the everyday, individual existence, and that which is set apart from it and expressive of certain collective representations of the society itself.[113] And, according to Durkheim's theory, the totem serves as the reference point for classifying things as either sacred or profane; indeed, it "is the very archetype of sacred things."[114]

Throughout this chapter, I have maintained that material manifestations of secrecy have much to teach us of the entanglement of secrecy and the sacred in American life. For Schrag, the totem-box was a reference point for assessing the sacred dynamics of Cold War national security as revealed in the trial of the Pentagon Papers; it was, moreover, a material expression of the "age of information," such that the box seemed to materialize something of Schrag's society more broadly. Seeking a more general assessment of what things could be made sacred by reference to this "totem," we have followed the box throughout this saga: as material evidence in the "inquisitor's chamber" of Courtroom 9, still bound by the sanctioning hand of the regime of the "technical secret"; as an object of simultaneous fascination and fear, carried with great care in its spectacular procession through Capitol Hill; and, in the liminal spaces of its cross-country race to the newsprint scene of its revelation, as a potent vessel of power, both dangerous and empowering, at times too hot to handle. The unrevealed has been, in this case, revealing,

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[113] "Whether simple or complex, all known religious beliefs display a common feature: They presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes—two opposite genera—that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words *profane* and *sacred* translate fairly well. The division of the world into two domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane—such is the distinctive trait of religious thought." Ibid., 34.

[114] Ibid., 118.

delimiting the types of individuals granted access to national secrets, the means by which such precious cargo could be transported between access points, and the practices of labeling necessary for identifying the classified materials without breaching the seal of their enclosure.

Before venturing to draw any final conclusions about the totem-box, it is worth revisiting Durkheim's theory of the totem to reflect on the important distinction he drew between the totem as a collective label for the society on the one hand, and the totemic emblem, "a design representing the totem of this group," on the other. In his discussion of sacred things within simple clan societies, Durkheim examined the "churinga"—a ritual instrument used among certain tribes of central Australia—as a case in point. Some wooden churingas, also known as "bull roarers," are constructed to be "rapidly whirled in the air," producing a "deafening noise" with "ritual meaning [that] accompanies all religious ceremonies of any importance." Durkheim argued that "every churinga, however used, counts among the most eminently sacred things. Nothing has surpassed it in religious dignity."[115] Thus, they "are not merely useful to individuals; the collective fate of the entire clan is bound up with theirs. Losing them is a disaster, the greatest misfortune that can befall the group." They are "merely objects of wood and stone like so many others," and yet "they are distinguished from profane things of the same kind by only one particularity: The totemic mark is drawn or engraved upon them. That mark, and only that mark, confers sacredness on them."[116]

Like all sacred things, as Durkheim insisted, the churingas are guarded by certain prohibitions that effectively withdraw them from everyday profane usage, prescribing rituals and various designations of authority for their handling. They "are not left for individuals to do with as they please;" they are kept in "a sort of small cave hidden in a deserted place," where the

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[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid., 120-21.

group's chief controls access to them. Individuals can thus "use them only with the consent of the chief and under the chief's guidance." They are handled with respect, "cared for, oiled, rubbed, and polished," and "when they are carried from one place to another, it is in the midst of ceremonies, proof that this travel is considered an act of the very highest importance." The churingas, with their sacred power concentrated in their hidden cave, seemed to Durkheim "a collective treasury, the Holy Ark of the clan."[117]

For Durkheim, the comparative case of the "Holy Ark" of the Israelites captured something of the ambiguous power of the "collective treasury" of the churingas—objects of veneration, treated with supreme respect, carried with solemnity and great care, and protected by prohibitions whose transgression promised disorder (at the very least). His parallel is fitting if we consider, for instance, the biblical narrative of the theft, and dramatic return, of the ark during the Israelites' battle against the Philistines. The Israelites brought their god with them to ensure their success against the Philistines. The ark, inhabited by the sacred power of their god, was delivered to the Israelite's encampment at Shiloh, but in the ensuing battle against the Philistines, the ark was stolen by the enemy, and the two men tasked with guarding the sacred vessel were consequently killed. From city to city, under the Philistine's watch, the ark afflicted the thieves with tumors, or boils, and rat infestations—pestilence and pests, contaminations simultaneously embodied and exteriorized, and in any case signifying that the ark was evidently in the wrong hands. Recognizing this as a curse from the Israelites' god, the Philistines returned the ark, sending it away on a cart to Beth Shemesh. Yet once again, the wrath of the Lord would be felt, and this time by Israelites themselves, when seventy inhabitants of Beth Shemesh were struck down for "looking into the ark of the LORD.[118]"

[117] Ibid., 121.
[118] 1 Samuel 4-6 (all biblical verses cited are from *New Revised Standard Version*).

The Ark was no mere container. It was a powerful sacred object, extending its power to, and against, whoever dared approach it without proper authority. For sacredness, as Durkheim argued, "is highly contagious, and it spreads from the totemic being to everything that directly or remotely has to do with it."[119] Take the case of King David and the ark, for example.[120] David had "found favor" in the eyes of King Saul, being "a man of valor, a warrior, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence." He was taken into Saul's court as a low-level hitman and part-time musical exorcist who used his lyre to cast out the "evil spirit" that tormented Saul.[121] But one can only pluck strings for so long, and eventually, Saul's evil spirit overcame him, sending him on a murderous rage against his beloved David, who barely escaped with his life by fleeing to the wilderness of Judea.

On his journey into the wilderness, David was inspired to challenge King Saul's reign; it had been foretold by the Lord to Samuel, and evidently, David saw fit to mount this attack against the king by surrounding himself with emblems of power.[122] With support from Judah, the largest of the twelve tribes of Israel, David found a strategic ally in his ascent to power. David would eventually overthrow Saul, but it took more than the backing of powerful allies to do so; he needed the sacred power of the ark. David had some concerns about the power of the ark, having witnessed previously what befell poor Uzzah, who tried to save the ark when a team of oxen carrying it stumbled and "shook it." As Uzzah reached out to steady the holy commotion, the Lord struck him down in one swift blow, materializing His wrath against the man's "irreverent act."

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[119] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms,* 224.
[120] I am indebted to Richard Hecht for his insight and advice regarding my use of the biblical accounts of David.
[121] 1 Samuel 16.
[122] Ibid.

Like the curious people of Beth Shemesh, Uzzah had broken the divine law prohibiting one from touching or seeing the Ark without proper ritual preparation, and thus without proper, divinely sanctioned authority.[123] Thus, to play it safe, David ordered that the ark be stored temporarily in the neutral house of Obed-edom. David rejoiced upon learning that the Lord had "blessed the household of Obed-edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." Glimpsing a shimmering opportunity, David determined that he would bring the ark into his kingdom after all.

The ark was, by then, both mythically and historically loaded with political significance. Seizing control of the ark—by divine right, not by his hands!—afforded the ascending king much needed political power, but what is most interesting here is the powerful effect the ark had on David's behavior: As the ark was carried into the city of David by "all the house of Israel," the crowd reached a fever pitch, shouting and dancing to the sound of trumpets blasting. The new king was carried away, or rather lifted up, transformed, by the effervescence of the procession. Nearly naked, girded only by a linen ephod, "David danced before the Lord with all his might."

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[123] 2 Samuel 6:6-7; Maureen Bloom notes a parallel injunction in Exodus 30:31: "This shall be an anointing oil sacred to Me throughout the ages. It must not be rubbed on any person's body, and you must not make anything like it in the same proportions; it is sacred, to be held sacred by you. Whoever compounds its like, or puts any of it on a layman, shall be cut off from his kin. ..." Bloom's assessment of the sacred power and prohibitions attendant to the Tabernacle are also helpful here: "The Tabernacle is a holy place, but within it, separated from the enclosed space within the Tabernacle, is another holy space, the "most holy"…A veil separates the two spaces [Exodus 26:31]. Within the sanctuary are objects which are *qadosh* …All these vessels and therefore their contents were rendered holy by the action of anointing …No-one outside the priestly family was permitted to enter the sanctuary, and only the high priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies—the *qodesh haqodashim*." Maureen Bloom, "The Legacy of 'Sacred' and 'Profane; in Ancient Israel: Interpretations of Durkheim's Classifications," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1998): 103-123. Rachelle Gilmour has argued for a reinterpretation of the narrative of the ark with respect to Slavoj Žižek's theory of divine violence, which "gives a framework for understanding the act of violence in 2 Samuel 6 as resisting meaning, being irrational, and disconnected from law or retribution." Rachelle Gilmour, "Divine Violence and Divine Presence: Reading the Story of Uzzah and the Ark in 2 Samuel 6 with Slavoj Žižek," *Biblical Interpretation* 27 (2019): 1-19. Note that this reading is also reminiscent of Long's, Smith's, and Chidester's theories of incongruity, cited here in discussions of myth, ritual, and humor (respectively) as acts of religious comparison.

Heading home from the festivities, David was met outside by his betrothed, Michal—awkwardly enough, the daughter of the king whose throne he had just usurped—who was none too pleased with the scandalous spectacle she had observed, and suddenly "despised him in her heart." "How the king of Israel honored himself today," she mocked, "uncovering himself today before the eyes of his servants' maids, as any vulgar fellow might shamelessly uncover himself!" How far, indeed, he seemed to have strayed from the young man of "valour" and "good presence" her father once adored. To her chiding, David replied: "It was before the Lord, who chose me in place of your father and all his household, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the Lord, that I have danced before the Lord. I will make myself yet more contemptible than this, and I will be abased in my own eyes; but by the maids of whom you have spoken, by them I shall be held in honor." David would not be censured, for he was a changed man. So, too, was Michal, for in her bold criticism of David's reverie, she challenged not only her fiancé but the Lord's new chosen king and divinely sanctioned custodian of the ark. As with Uzzah and those felled by the Lord in Beth Shemesh, Michal would be punished for dishonoring the ark: she would never bear children again.

The ark—a "ship of state launched on a voyage to a Promised Land," as W.J.T. Mitchell put it—was a focusing lens for Israelitic identity, both political and religious, in exile and in mythic recollection.[124] Yet as we have seen, it was also a signifier of prohibition, analogous to the cardboard box in its conspicuous concealment of TOP-SECRET information.[125] Like the ark of

[124] W.J.T. Mitchell, "Iconology, Visual Culture and Media Aestetics," *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne Seria Literacka* 30 (50). For a political interpretation of the power of the ark, in which the narrative of the ark is read as a literary composition, see G.W. Ahlström, "The Travels of the Ark: A Religio-Political Composition," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 43, no. 2 (April 1984): 141-49. Of interest here is a footnote in which the author considers the ambiguity of the ark, as argued by Blenkinsopp (*Gibeon and Israel*, p. 73), to be "due to the fact that the ark narrative is a religio-political 'thesis' constructing its own history" (149). For a related discussion see Benjamin D. Sommer, "Conflicting Constructions of Divine Presence in the Priestly Tabernacle," *Biblical Interpretation* 9, no. 1 (Brill, 2001): 41-63.

[125] Rainer Albertz argues that the ark "is probably not originally a cultic object but a kind of standard which guaranteed the presence of God in battle (Num.10.35f.; 14.44; cf. I Sam.4.3ff.; II Sam.11.11; 15.24ff.). It first

the Lord, the totem-box at the center of the Pentagon Papers trial became a material manifestation of the prohibition against improper access to the sacred. It served as a reminder to the American people of their covenant with the State, a visible representation of all the commandments, prohibitions, and faith required of them. True, a more profane object could hardly be imagined for a holy vessel. It bore no "sacred" qualities in its everyday appearance, certainly no winged cherubim or gilded rods like those that adorned the ark, but then again, the plain brown box was not sacred in itself. It was *made* sacred.

Durkheim argued likewise of sacred symbols: "The sacredness exhibited by the thing is not implicated in the intrinsic properties of the thing: *It is added to them.*"[126] In the case of the Pentagon Papers, much of this "making sacred" turned on the moment of revelation itself. The leak of the Papers was considered, in the legal terminology of the court proceedings, an act of unauthorized "conversion" of government property. It was the revelation of these classified documents that turned official secrecy inside-out, rendering insider knowledge part of the public domain, and bringing to the surface an internal tension between the system of secrecy in America's government and the ostensible openness of its democratic society. Not unlike the Durkheimian totem, the materiality of the box gave form to the juxtaposition of official

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became a cultic object in the sanctuary of Shiloh where it was preserved, and then later in the Jerusalem temple, where it was seen as part of God's throne in the Holy of Holies (II Sam.6; I Kings 8.6ff.; Pss.99.5; 132.7), until the Deuteronomistic theologians gave it a new function as a container for the covenant document, the Decalogue (hence 'ark of the covenant' in Deut.10.1-5)" (57) In Albertz's account, when the ark is cemented to the Davidic kingship, it comes to signify a bond predicated upon reciprocal exchange—social, political, and economic—between Yahweh and the royal house of David (118). Like the Maussian gift, whose social value is ensured by the obligation of prestation, i.e., to return the gift, Albertz's rendering of the ark in the era of Davidic rule suggests the institutionalization of a social bond, between Yahweh and his chosen king on earth, that is mediated through memory, oath, obligation, and ritual cycles of investment and return. That "the bringing of the ark can be seen as a skillful political move by David in connecting his state cult with pre-state Yahweh religion," as Albertz has argued, does not mute the sacred power invested in the ark (130). Rather, the sense in which the ark could intelligibly serve to negotiate political power via claims to divine right, whatever David's motives might have been, necessitates a reading of the ark as a material manifestation of sacred power with corresponding political consequence. Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period: Volume 1: From the Beginnings to the End of the Monarchy*, trans. by John Bowden (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

[126] Durkheim, *Elementary Forms,* 230.

government secrecy and national ideals of transparency in Cold War American politics, prompting further inquiry into how both of these terms—secrecy and transparency—could be justified simultaneously as vital elements of a free and democratic society.

It is this essential ambiguity that social theorist Roger Caillois discerned as the animating power of the treasure, whose "peculiarity" he identified "in the tension between the splendor it should radiate and the secrecy which is its protection." The totem-box, at once material and symbolic, expressed and extended for reflection the tension between forms and formations of secrecy, individual sovereignty and mandated submission, classifications of persons and of information, civil rights and civic duties. Like the totemic emblem, which Durkheim saw as "expressing the social unit tangibly," and thus, "mak[ing] the unit itself more tangible to all," the material manifestations of classification—the rubber stamps, classification markings, and 'security education' posters—were tangible expressions of America's official secrecy system. As we have seen, some critics of the classification system anchored their arguments around a theory of sacred power that, incidentally, paralleling Durkheim's observations concerning the totemic emblem and its effect on objects, ideas, and persons: "That mark, and only that mark, confers sacredness on them." The totemic emblem, as Durkheim insisted, is "not only a convenient method of clarifying the awareness the society has of itself: It serves to create—and is a constitutive element of—that awareness."[127] From this perspective, the material life of government secrecy may be reconceived as a constitutive element of secrecy in Cold War American life, and a lens onto new links between religion and politics therein.

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[127] Ibid., 231.

Apocalypse: Sacred (National) Secrets in a "New Cold War"

> …with new light having been shed on it, this everyday life reveals novel wealth: the unsaid in what is said; the dramatization, at last unveiled, of human relations; the revelation as spectacle of what had been left in the dark…
>
> — Henri Lefebvre[1]

> … the secret takes on the burden of protecting not merely the deceit practiced by the initiated men but of protecting a great epistemology… the epistemology of appearance and reality in which appearance is thought to shroud a concealed truth—but not the truth that there is none.
>
> — Michael Taussig[2]

In a public lecture given in 2018, physicist Allan Adams described the profound significance of recent strides made by researchers using measurements of gravitational waves to "hear the universe and hear the invisible." [3] This work would, in principle, make it possible to hear what could not be seen—a remarkable feat, surely, but one that nonetheless left Adams ultimately unsatisfied. What he really wanted to explore was something we could never see, "the first few moments of the universe." Here lay an obstacle bordering on the theological, yet more remarkable, still, was Adams' stunning description of that cosmic limit point: we would never see those first few moments of creation, he said, "because the Big Bang itself is obscured by its own afterglow."

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[1] Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Vol. III: From Modernity to Modernism (Towards a Metaphilosophy of Daily Life),* trans. Gregory Elliott (London & New York: Verso, [1981] 2005), 7.
[2] Michael Taussig, "Maleficium: State Fetishism," in *The Nervous System* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 111-40 (citation at 132-33).
[3] Allan Adams, "Can Gravitational Waves Tell Us How the Universe Began?," "TED Radio Hour," *NPR* (Feb. 9, 2018), transcript available at https://www.npr.org/templates/transcript/transcript.php?storyId=584322845.

As he mourned the inaccessibility of those first few moments of the universe, Adams seemed to capture something of the nature of secrecy itself: palpable yet intangible, resonant yet invisible, something whose power can be felt in the magnetic pull of the known unknown, but whose true content can be grasped only by the imprint it leaves on the imagination. Yet so, too, did Adams capture something of the historian's task—one that seems increasingly urgent today, if we are to take David Brooks at his word that "we're in a new cold war."[4] For, the afterglow of the Cold War culture of secrecy obscures the historical developments that have led to and shaped the culture of secrecy animating American political and social life today. The case studies examined in this dissertation may shed some light on these historical linkages—linkages that, while occluded by the functions and effects of state secrecy, can be illuminated by a cultural history of the entanglements of secrecy and religion in Cold War American life.

In the cultural fashions of popular culture examined in chapter 1, the fears and fantasies of secret influence channeled a theology of evil that both evinced and problematized the sanctity of free will and moral consciousness. The notion of brainwashing that emerged first in the shadows of the intelligence community offered a theory of secret influence to explain the mystery of false confessions as the result of communist mind control. In the hands of Richard Condon, this theory became a subject of popular fascination and a platform for critiquing the political paranoia of McCarthyism's anticommunist crusade.

At the same time, Condon's story captured some of the "nostalgias, dissatisfactions, and drives" animating Cold War American life: the perils of secret influence, the villainous figures of perverted mothers and Oriental Others, and the ever-present threat of an impending nuclear apocalypse.[5] These cultural fixations all cohered around the vulnerability of the individual

[4] David Brooks, "The Cold War with China is Changing Everything," *New York Times* (Mar. 23, 2023), https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/23/opinion/cold-war-china-chips.html.
[5] On "nostalgias, dissatisfactions, and drives," see Eliade, "Cultural Fashions and History of Religions."

subject, whose sovereign free will and moral dignity had so long been cherished as pinnacles of American values. The secret of secret influence, Condon implied, was that we were both its victims *and* its source.

In the case of the Pentagon Papers examined in chapter 2, the material forms of boxes and classified labels made the invisible presence of state secrets visible, tangible, and thus accessible for wider public scrutiny and debate. The leaked Pentagon Papers and the criminal trial against the leakers revealed the lengths to which the American system of state secrecy could be exploited against the interests of the people it was ostensibly made to protect. These revelations amplified the growing domestic tensions of a new era of civil rights and antiwar protests. They contributed, furthermore, to what Edward Shils identified as a new sensitivity to a "kind of secret which fascinates and which disrupts," one with an ominous "aura of fatefulness," ripe for conspiracy theories and revolution—a "secret in which the apocalypse dwells."[6]

The Papers revealed that, throughout the four preceding presidential administrations, the system of state secrecy was used to deceive and manipulate the American people; in the course of the trial against Ellsberg and Russo, the Nixon Administration's own abuses of power became the death knell of the prosecution's case when it was revealed how Nixon's "Plumbers" had breached Ellsberg's constitutional right to privacy and sought to justify their illegal activity in the name of national security. Condon's theory that *we* were the real source of secret influence had now come full circle: there were no real national security secrets in the totem-box, only a mirror reflecting Cold War America's own fetish for secrecy.

As the global conflicts and domestic divisions of the Cold War haunt the periphery of contemporary American life, these two snapshots of the culture of secrecy in that fraught

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[6] Edward A. Shils, *The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1956), 27.

historical era appear newly relevant, and indeed illuminating—*apocalyptic*, even, in the classical sense of an unveiling of hidden things.

Consider, first, this remarkable moment in recent American history—a single photograph, described here by journalist Ed Pilkington as a depiction of "the stuff that truly matters":

> …the six folders of documents strewn across the floor marked "Secret/SCI" or "Top Secret/SCI." Immediately, the papers point the viewer in a very different direction: this image is not about excess or tackiness or ego; it is about secrecy, danger, illegality…..The full horror may never publicly be known of what lies inside the more than 320 classified documents that have been recovered from Mar-a-Lago since January. Some of the items listed in the property receipt the FBI compiled after the 8 August search are intriguing…. Others are titillating and alarming in equal measure….As an unnamed source familiar with the search told the *Washington Post*, the stash contained "among the most sensitive secrets we hold". All of this leaves several burning questions. Could any of this hyper-sensitive material already have found its way into the wrong hands?[7]

Photograph of classified material found at Donald Trump's Florida resort, Mar-a-Lago. Image attached to August 30, 2022, filing submitted by U.S. Justice Department in case of *United States of America v. Donald J. Trump*.

[7] Ed Pilkington, "Trump in increasing legal peril one month on from Mar-a-Lago search," *The Guardian* (Sept. 3, 2022), https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/sep/02/trump-mar-a-lago-search-doj-photos.

This photograph was captured by FBI officials in an early-morning raid of former President Donald J. Trump's Florida resort and post-presidency residence, Mar-a-Lago. This unprecedented search of Trump's "Winter White House" was the result of a months-long federal investigation concerning Trump's retention of classified documents in violation of criminal statutes under the Espionage Act.[8] Since Trump's departure from the White House in January 2021, the National Archives and Records Administration had fought, unsuccessfully, for the return of these and other materials that were, by law, the rightful property of the United States government and, by extension, the American people.

Trump would soon make a series of defiant public appearances on television, right-wing radio shows, and political rallies proclaiming that these materials belonged to him. He said that he was allowed to keep them based on, above all things, the Presidential Records Act—legislation enacted in response to President Nixon's refusal to turn over his secret White House tape recordings to Watergate investigators, and thus designed to ensure the very opposite of what Trump was claiming. Speaking to former *Fox News* anchor Megyn Kelly, Trump insisted: "I'm allowed to take these documents, classified or not classified. And frankly, when I have

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[8] The photograph first appeared in an attachment to a Justice Department filing in response to the defense's request for the assignment of a special arbiter to review the classified materials at issue. United States District Court, Southern District of Florida, West Palm Beach Division, Case 9: 22-CV-81294-AMC; Document 48, entered on FLSD Docket August 30, 2022, Attachment F. This filing is available online at https://int.nyt.com/data/documenttools/doj-response-to-trump-request-for-special-master/1b30feb331082a68/full.pdf. The first indictment in this case was brought by Special Counsel Jack Smith against Trump and his employee and alleged co-conspirator, Waltine Nauta. Trump was charged with 38 counts of criminal violations of the Espionage Act, and Nauta was charged with 6 counts of criminal violations of the Espionage Act. *United States of America v. Donald J. Trump and Waltine Nauta*, United States District Court, Southern District of Florida, Court Division West Palm Beach, Case 9:23-cr-80101-AMC (Cannon/Reinhart), Document 3, entered on FLSD Docket June 8, 2023 (49 pp.). For news coverage of the unfolding investigation into Trump's retention of classified documents, see, e.g., Devlin Barrett, Josh Dawsey, Perry Stein and Shane Harris, "FBI Searched Trump's Home to Look for Nuclear Documents and Other Items, Sources Say," *The Washington Post* (Aug. 11, 2022), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/08/11/garland-trump-mar-a-lago/; Michael Mitsanas, "The Investigation into Trump's Handling of Classified Documents: A Timeline of Events," *NBC News* (Jun. 13, 2023), https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-classified-documents-investigation-timeline-rcna88620.

them, they become unclassified. *People think you have to go through a ritual*. You don't. At least in my opinion you don't…."[9]

As political and cultural commentators noted with some regularity in the immediate aftermath of this breaking news, the photograph itself carried a significant degree of cultural weight. Additional photographs appeared in new court filings by the prosecution showing boxes of classified information stacked in an unlocked storage space, on the stage of one of the resort's ballrooms, and most iconically, a bathroom.[10] Not unlike the "totem" box of classified documents that struck Peter Schrag as he covered the Pentagon Papers trial, these photographs rendered material and tangible the hidden presence of state secrets. Like the TOP SECRET label covering the cardboard totem-box, announcing the presence of national security secrets on the very box that concealed them, the Mar-a-Lago photographs displayed various classification markings on folders and documents, whose secret information was concealed conspicuously by coversheets and photo-edited redactions.

Left-leaning nightly news segments were for months dominated by coverage of the case, with frequent guest appearances by former federal agents and national security officials who were invited to instruct the audience on just how dangerous a situation this scandal posed for the nation and how truly egregious a crime this photograph captured. Their cries of outrage suggested, and on occasion, stated explicitly—that these documents, hoarded in the unprotected

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[9] Donald Trump, interview by Megyn Kelly, *The Megyn Kelly Show* (Sept. 14, 2023), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA5Z5WTcpIg. (italics mine)

[10] These additional photographs appeared in a superseding indictment filed against Trump and alleged co-conspirators Waltine Nauta and Carlos De Oliveira. *United States of America v. Donald J. Trump, Waltine Nauta, and Carlos De Oliveira*, United States District Court, Southern District of Florida, Case 9:23-CR-80101-AMC, Document 85, entered on FLSD docket July 27, 2023 (60 pp.); For news coverage of these additional photographs, see, e.g. Stephen Smith, "See Pictures from Trump Indictment That Allegedly Show Boxes of Classified Documents in Mar-a-Lago Bathroom, Ballroom," *CBS News* (Jun. 9, 2023); Michael R. Sisak, Jill Colvin and Lindsay Whitehurst, "A Timeline of Events Leading to Donald Trump's Indictment in the Classified Documents Case," *Associated Press* (Jun. 10, 2023), apnews.com/article/trump-documents-investigation-timeline-087f0c9a8368bb983a16b67dd31dcd4c; Josh Dawsey, Rosalind S. Helderman, Jacqueline Alemany, Devlin Barrett, "Trump's Secrets: How a Records Dispute Led the FBI to Search Mar-a-Lago," *The Washington Post* (Aug. 13, 2022), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/08/13/trump-mar-a-lago-search/.

spaces of Trump's public resort, comprised some of America's *most sacred* national security secrets—secrets that seemed, somehow, to become sacred through their very display.[11]

Viewed against the backdrop of the case of the Pentagon Papers leak, the media's response to this contemporary case presents a striking political reversal in attitudes toward state secrecy. For, in the case of the Papers, Ellsberg was exalted by the press and left-wing supporters in Congress as a national hero, a true patriot, and a martyr. Despite glaring differences in his motivation and conduct, Trump now faces some of the very same charges as Ellsberg did just over fifty years ago, and mainstream press outlets that still laud Ellsberg today have described Trump, in contrast, as a traitor to the Constitution, an offense to the system of justice, and a national security threat, "spitting on our sacred documents."[12]

Characteristic of this trend, in an interview for the liberal news and opinion website *Salon*, former federal prosecutor Dennis Aftergut described this indictment against Trump as a narrative of a "betrayal of a nation and its most precious secrets by a man who was the commander in chief for four years and who seeks that mantle again."

> There's never been anything remotely like it. Just think about it. The disregard for the lives, the risk and the individual courage that goes into gathering information vital to our national security and our safety is incomprehensible. There is no way for the brain to wrap itself around what is described in this indictment, the violation of sacred trust, a

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[11] For commentary on "sacred" national security secrets, see, e.g. Stephen Collinson, "New Glimpse into Documents Case Suggests a Fateful New Reckoning is Looming Over Trump," *CNN* (May 18, 2023), https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/18/politics/donald-trump-documents-classified-2024/index.html; "The Source with Kaitlan Collins," *CNN* (Oct. 05, 2023), https://transcripts.cnn.com/show/skc/date/2023-10-05/segment/01; "ABC: Trump Allegedly Shared Nuclear Submarine Information with Foreign National," *CNN* (Oct. 5, 2023); "Irreparable Damage: The Trump Administration's Callous Disregard for Classified Intelligence," *Medium* (Dec.18, 2023), https://medium.com/@lncnetworksdoral/irreparable-damage-the-trump-administrations-callous-disregard-for-classified-intelligence-ac554169cfab.

[12] On Trump "spitting on our sacred documents," see Neal Katyal, speaking with anchor Chris Hayes on "All in with Chris Hayes," *MSNBC* (Mar. 1, 2024). For other examples of these trends, see, e.g., Amy Davidson Sorkin, "Trump's Brazen and Breathtaking Defense," *The New Yorker* (Jun. 18, 2023); "Former Top CIA official on the 'Top Secret' Documents Found at Mar-a-Lago," All in with Chris Hayes, *MSNBC* (Aug. 12, 2022); "Former CIA Director on Classified Docs at Mar-a-Lago: 'The Damage Potentially is Incalculable,'" The Reidout, *MSNBC* (Aug. 31, 2022); Matt Bai, "Opinion: Inside Trump's Chamber of Secrets," *The Washington Post* (Aug. 13, 2022), https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/08/13/trump-mar-a-lago-classified-documents/; "Sue Gordon Says Trump 'Thought That He Was Above a Lot of Rules,'" Deadline: White House, *MSNBC* (Sept. 1, 2022), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6OEjL24Rw0.

> one-man demolition crew working against the American intelligence system that has been built, brick by brick, over 80 years.[13]

There are, of course, clear differences between the cases of Ellsberg and Trump. To cite but a few, Ellsberg was a former military analyst who converted to the anti-war cause and thus aligned himself largely with the political left-wing, while Trump was a Republican President; Ellsberg claimed he acted out of a sense of patriotic duty, willing to risk his own freedom to end the American involvement in Indo-Chinese conflicts, while Trump claimed he was entitled to keep classified documents because, quite simply, he said so; Ellsberg was careful to exclude from the leaked Papers any documents he considered rightfully classified, while Trump has been notoriously haphazard with classified information, and has on numerous occasions used it for both social leverage and political gain; the documents that Ellsberg leaked were proven to be already in the public domain, and as his defense team argued, improperly classified in the first place, while Trump kept documents related to, among other things, nuclear capabilities and human source acquisitions.[14]

Perhaps the contemporary left wing's contrasting reception of Trump's case can be explained as mere kneejerk politicking in a country increasingly divided by partisan politics. Yet when viewed in light of the historical developments between and since the two snapshots of

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[13] Andrew O'Hehir, "Trump's "Peril is Extreme": Former Federal Prosecutor on the Historic Mar-a-Lago Indictment," *Salon* (Jun. 12, 2023), https://www.salon.com/2023/06/12/never-been-anything-like-it-former-prosecutor-on-the-historic-indictment/.

[14] On Trump's mishandling classified information, see, e.g., Philip Rucker and Ashley Parker, "How President Trump Consumes — or Does Not Consume — Top-Secret Intelligence," *The Washington Post* (May 29, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/how-president-trump-consumes--or-does-not-consume--top-secret-intelligence/2017/05/29/1caaca3e-39ae-11e7-a058-ddbb23c75d82_story.html; Shane Harris, "As an Ex-President, Trump Could Disclose the Secrets he Learned While in Office, Current and Former Officials Fear," *The Washington Post* (Nov. 10, 2020), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/trump-possible-security-risk/2020/11/09/f19c853e-229e-11eb-952e-0c475972cfc0_story.html; Philip Bump, "Event Venues (Like Trump's Mar-a-Lago) Are Not Good Places to Store Nuclear Secrets," *The Washington Post* (Aug. 12, 2022), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/08/12/trump-fbi-search-nuclear-documents-mar-a-lago/; Ashley Parker, Jacqueline Alemany, Josh Dawsey and Tom Hamburger, "15 boxes: Inside the Long, Strange Trip of Trump's Classified Records," *The Washington Post* (Feb. 12, 2022), https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/02/12/trump-15-boxes/.

Cold War secrecy examined in this dissertation, deeper threads of continuity emerge that complicate any reading of this reversal as a strictly political matter. Ironically, it was Trump himself who pointed to this underlying continuity in his offhand remark to Megyn Kelly: *People think you have to go through a ritual*.

Why *would* people think that? Consider a similar question raised in chapter 2 regarding Peter Schrag's description of the first weeks of testimony in the Pentagon Papers trial. "Inevitably," he said, the testimony "was about the mystery of the Papers, the magical powers they gave to those who read them." *Inevitably,* from the outset, the case of the Pentagon Papers trial turned on two distinct but interrelated dynamics of secrecy in Cold War American culture and politics—namely, the ambiguous, seductive "mystery" of state secrets and the "magical powers" they conveyed in their very holding.

Keeping in mind this mystery and magical power, both tempting and terrifying, recall the June 1953 meeting of CIA officers inquiring into the mystery of that "'blank' period or period of disorientation" that POWs reportedly experienced "while passing through a special zone in Manchuria." Consider the mystery of "some unknown force" that could compel false confessions, a mystery rendering the secret of secret influence open to limitless possibilities, such that one could imagine, perhaps even find credible, Edward Hunter's description of the hallucinatory "phantasmagoria" of brainwashing. Here the sacred quality of the secret arises when this mystery is viewed alongside Roger Caillois's definition of the sacred as "a mysterious aura that has been added to things," whose "abiding truth…resides simultaneously in the fascination of flame and the horror of putrefaction."[15] Insofar as the sacred is "added to things," it is, as David Chidester has argued, not "merely given" but rather "produced through the

[15] Caillois, *Man and the Sacred*, 20, 138.

religious labor of interpretation and ritualization as both a poetics of meaning and a politics of power relations."[16]

Such religious labor surfaced in the poetics of meaning by which the Cold War notion of brainwashing was imagined into existence, rendering the perils of secret influence an enemy weapon as magical as it was malevolent. It surfaced, also, in the politics of power relations constituted by contentious debates over the proper limits of state secrecy in the case of the Pentagon Papers—and indeed, in the case of Donald Trump's retention of classified documents—and generated in the public rituals of their concealment and revelation. These cases point to what Michael Taussig identified as the religious significance of the drama of unmasking secrets, a drama that renders secrecy not simply a "barrier between men," as Georg Simmel would have it, but a binding cultural provision in American life.[17]

Considering the fascination and horror of the sacred alongside the fantasies and fears of the secret, we might recall, also, the mystery of the secret, and the magical power imagined therein, in the "questions left unanswered and the problem merely stated" with which the final scene of the CIA training filmscript *The Black Art* faded out: "Are any of our people subject to the hypnotic control of others?" Is this not just such a "burning" question as that raised by Pilkington when he raised the horrifying possibility of the leak of those state secrets Trump kept unsecured in his Florida resort: "Could any of this hyper-sensitive material already have found its way into the wrong hands?"[18]

As we entertain such mysterious possibilities surrounding the known unknown, a thread of continuity appears linking these American Cold War cultures of secrecy, old and new: the spectacle of the secret whose potential energy lies in the promise and peril of its revelation. For,

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[16] Chidester, *Religion: Material Dynamics*, 96.
[17] Taussig, *Defacement,* 107-108; Simmel, "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies."
[18] Pilkington, "Trump in increasing legal peril" (Sept. 3, 2022).

are we not in today's New Cold War facing that same "fascination of the brink" of that "precipice" that Simmel identified as the enduring quality of the secret, the same "seductive temptation to break through" the secrets of the state, no less than the secrets of the enemy?[19] In the afterglow of the Cold War there thus emerges the sacred aura of secrecy—an aura that is, at once, obscured and illuminated by the historical legacy of this tense era. For, while the mystery of secrecy invited religious references to imagine the magic of secret influence and speak of unspeakable secret histories, ritual structures of concealment and revelation both projected the power of these secret things and, simultaneously, protected from exposure an enduring public secret—that we, ourselves, are the source of that sacred value ascribed to, and perceived in, the secret.

[19] Simmel, "The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies."