

## **The Promise of Postmodernism for Unitarian Universalist Theology** By Susan Ritchie

### **Part One: An Apologetics**

*...in which Susan gradually works through the resistance to postmodern philosophies by noting the many Wrongful Ways in which postmodernism has been Misunderstood and Inadequately Loved by theologians of many Stripes, doing so in order to conclude that postmodern philosophy is the Best Hope for a new articulation of Unitarian Universalist theology, caught as it is in several Theoretical Quagmires of modern invention...*

Although the term "postmodern" has been in currency since 1870, it has only been since the 1960's that "postmodernism" came into common usage as the description of a certain style of art, thought, and culture, and it was really only with the publication of Jean-Francois Lyotard's 1979 *Postmodern Condition* that postmodernism became synonymous with a certain crisis in the legitimation of knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Lyotard saw the postmodern condition as the result of a new cultural incredulity towards the "grand récits" (translated "metanarratives" or "master narratives") of modernism. Science, Marxism, liberal, social-reform minded Christianity: so many of modernity's optimisms proved incapable of delivering their promised *eschaton*. Such masternarratives had promised nothing short of the total emancipation of humanity brought about by human hands: the eradication of disease, old age and poverty, the achievement of a messianic Communist state, the manifestation of God's perfect justice on earth. Yet the disappointment that followed when such ends proved unattainable did not result in the disappearance of the master narratives that gave them birth. People still practiced science, Marxism, and liberal Christianity, even as these narratives were no longer able to (self)legitimize as absolute forms of knowledge. New, though, was the revelation of the totalizing and homogenizing aspects of these grand theories that achieved their descriptive powers by marginalizing difference in the name of universalizing goals. Born in that moment was the postmodern condition: a new legitimacy for the "petit récit," (the small, or I prefer, "local" narrative), the emergent voice speaking from what were the sidelines, finding meaning in and from positions of difference. One of the many exciting results of this change has been a renewal of intellectual interest in and an opening of vistas for that otherness, that way of knowing most persistently pathologized by modernity: theology.<sup>2</sup>

While university-based religious studies scholars have for the most part been celebrating the liberation of theology from modernism's reductionisms, theologians more traditionally based in faith communities have been by and large reluctant to embrace the postmodern.<sup>3</sup> There are of course, some exceptions to the rule; generous attempts to reconcile even relatively orthodox Christian positions with postmodern revelation do exist.<sup>4</sup> Yet far more common is a dismissal of postmodernism and a false equation of "the excessive fragmentation of postmodernism" with all the ills of contemporary society, including immorality and philosophical relativism.<sup>5</sup> Some theologians, for example, have argued that postmodernism has contributed to the "loosening" of important sexual mores by undermining "the metanarrative of the Judeo-Christian sexual ethic."<sup>6</sup>

At the same time others have argued an essential incompatibility between religion's duty to preach the truth and postmodern "relativism."<sup>7</sup>

Both complaints represent grievous misunderstandings of the postmodern. Consider the argument that postmodernism contributes to moral laxity. To note, as the use of the term "postmodernism" allows us to do, that contemporary ways of knowing are being valorized at different and more localized cultural sites than those of classic modernity, is a descriptive, not a proscriptive, move. Nor should we assume that the genuine reluctance of the postmodern to assume obvious or positive linkages between knowledge and morality is in any ways a moral shortcoming. It was none other than Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) who both initiated and temporarily resolved the modern crisis by demonstrating how the delegitimization of theology as objective knowledge only enhances the importance of making religious choices based on judgements of moral righteousness, a move which has had special significance for our liberal religious inheritance.<sup>8</sup> Postmodernism can be construed as a new moral promiscuity only if one assumes that the local value is always less morally grounded than the universalizing value, an odd move given that it is just as possible to see in postmodernism's revelation of the marginal the possibility for a new ethical altruism based on "a desire on behalf of the Other that seeks the cessation of another's sufferings and the birth of another's joy."<sup>9</sup>

Nor does postmodernism promote a philosophical looseness or relativism any more than it advocates moral laxity. Postmodernism's acknowledgment of the increased localization of meanings is in no way a failure to distinguish between their relative use or merit. On the contrary, by focusing on the deeply contextualized character of meaning, postmodernism is uniquely positioned to articulate the importance and significance of differences often elided by modernity. Of course, this does not mean that postmodernism has been well understood. Consider the concept of *bricolage* as a case study for how postmodern philosophy's careful attention to difference becomes transmuted in the imaginations of some into a form of relativism.

*Bricolage* was a term introduced into the theoretical lexicon by the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss and developed by Jacques Derrida as an important element of the postmodern philosophy of deconstructionism. Lévi-Strauss originally coined the word as a way of handling his distress over the failure of anthropology to discover a single grand theory that could be applied to all cultures and situations and which would make it possible for a single person to master the field.<sup>10</sup>

Given the increasing unlikelihood of discovering such perfect grand narrative, did that mean that anthropology was left without effective theory? He concluded instead that the many failed master narratives that littered the field were not useless simply because they did not work in all situations. Rather, the skilled practitioner, by understanding which theoretical tools were appropriate to which theoretical tasks, could still make headway even with imperfect instruments through a careful understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of all theories. In this way the anthropologist was to be a *bricoleur*— a skilled handy person who gets the job done by using whatever toolbox happens to be on hand.

Derrida adopted Lévi-Strauss' concept of the theoretician as *bricoleur* with only one significant revision: for Derrida, it was not a concession to the failures of theory that caused him to advocate *bricolage*. Lévi-Strauss had always held out hope for the perfect master narrative that would

render *bricolage* unnecessary. Derrida, thinking such grand theory to be impossible, instead celebrated the role of *bricoleur*: without any single perfect tool, it is the diversity of the toolbox, not the perfection of the tools, upon which the thinker relies.<sup>11</sup> The opposite of the *bricoleur* would be the engineer, who in Lévi-Strauss' words, uses instruments "specially adapted to a specific technical need."<sup>12</sup> Derrida wants us to stop believing in the possibility of such engineers and such perfect tools; he wants to abandon the notion that anything is ever totally empirically knowable. In Derridean thought, this means that *bricolage* is placed "under erasure": if we abandon the need for the category of engineer, so we abandon the need for that which is defined as the opposite of engineer, *bricoleur*. But I am ahead of myself in this foray into deconstruction: for the time being it is enough to note the very careful specificity of Derrida's use of *bricolage*.

For when the concept of *bricolage* turns up in the articulation of contemporary religious ideas (such as in the work of Daniel Quinn), *bricolage* is often invoked as a justification for borrowing freely from a variety of religious traditions in order to assemble a pastiche of one's own making.<sup>13</sup> This later use of the term could be properly termed a form of relativism, and yet there is nothing in postmodern philosophy to justify such a borrowing. The *bricoleur* does not use tools in order to rip things out of their own cultural contexts and reassemble them, rather, the *bricoleur* understands that different cultural contexts require different theoretical sensitivities.

Perhaps one of the reasons that postmodern concepts are so quickly misunderstood as relativisms has to do with the cultural distinctions that postmodernism does intentionally seek to blur, specifically, modernity's hard won distinctions between low and high culture. Lyotard himself did not cheer this aspect of postmodernity without reservation. It seems he preferred the abstract authority of the modern intellectual to the proliferation of smaller voices, with their annoyingly unrefined personal narratives of experience and difference, a concern he expressed when he noted that in a postmodern culture, the importance of educated and arbitrated good taste might lose its place.<sup>14</sup> In the middle part of *The Postmodern Condition* Lyotard talks himself out of despair over the seeming triumph of the low by positing that perhaps postmodernism is simply the initiating moment of what will reveal itself to be another modernism; perhaps, in other words, postmodernism was simply a new word for the sort of avant-guard strategy that is required to renew and refresh modernism from time to time.

So it is, however, that the reformulation of the postmodern as merely another cyclical phase of modernity is often a move connected to an explicit interest in maintaining the structures of social privilege just as modernity left them. The protection of "high" versus "low" culture is never simply an aesthetic matter, but a division as well of ideology, and correspondingly it constitutes an oppression of actual people. As Andreas Huyssen has so astutely described, when a modernist-defined avant guard races ahead, it is precisely in order to leave mass culture behind. The defining characteristic of modernism might very well be the "great divide" it demands between high art, usually gendered male, and mass culture, usually gendered female, and as Huyssen suggests, it is precisely by our ability to transverse such a divide at all and see its inequities that we know ourselves as postmodern.<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the most exciting work to emerge from the postmodern field of cultural studies has clearly demonstrated how the advocacy of high culture and the debasement of low or mass culture is directly related to maintenance of modernism's most inequitable and oppressive social systems.<sup>16</sup> We might be cautious, then, of the voices that periodically suggest that problem with postmodernity is the supposedly increasing influence of low, popular, folk, or mass culture. The mere fact that such works deliberately liken our contemporary situation to that of the Roman Empire, complete with images of the barbarians knocking on the gate (where now, the barbarians are our own underclasses) might suggest all by itself a greater interest in conserving older structures of privilege than in finding new expressions of social justice.<sup>17</sup> In all fairness, many of these works argue that high culture should be made democratically available to all; yet once again this ignores the extraordinary body of historical and scholarly material which has thoroughly demonstrated how the notion of a democratically available high culture has in fact served as an alibi for the oppression of modernity's others: specifically women, the working classes, and the citizens of those parts of the globe that were conquered in the various waves of European imperialisms.<sup>18</sup>

To conclude my introductory apologetic: the postmodern is already here, and if we paid attention, we would feel its pressure buckling not only the intellectual articulation of our faith, but the living dynamic of our congregations as well. We hear much about a supposedly "new" interest in spirituality in our congregations. Could this phenomenon we note by so observing possibly be more accurately articulated as the gradual erosion of abstract metanarratives and the emergence instead of so many "petit récits?" In any case, it is hard not to notice the new weight given to personal experience as a source of religious truth within our lived faith, a postmodern development that sociologists of religion associate with the baby boomer generation, but which also no doubt also owes a debt to contemporary feminisms.<sup>19</sup> Religious bodies that do not attempt to intentionally understand and incorporate this and other aspects of postmodern experience into their expressions will only contribute to the widespread assumption, especially amongst the so-called "Generation X," that religion is actually the enemy of spiritual experience.<sup>20</sup> Postmodern culture has passed through our doors, like it or not, and the attempt to discuss the failures of modernism in a modernist mode can lead only to impasse.

For this reason I suffer a special despair that our movement, which prides itself on its openness to the best forms of contemporary thinking, has yet to fully extract itself from the modernist paradigm of its 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century articulations, a fact which would tend to give lie to our avowed trust in the continuity of revelation. Given the heavy reliance of our tradition on Enlightenment thinking, we can hardly afford to ignore the way in which the postmodern has recontextualized such commitments. For we are left now in the postmodern with the questions that were not anticipated by Enlightenment thought but which constitute the return of its repressed; questions of Otherness that always will return us to the problems of differentiation that we only inadequately addressed in our modern theological period. Modern theology is often characterized by the specifically liberal attempts to reconcile theology and secular cultural advances<sup>21</sup>. I wonder, though, if it would not be more accurate to note that modern theologies, even in all of their variety, are those theologies which achieve their identity through the articulation, embrace, or rejection of difference. I think here of Friedrich W. J. von Schelling's

(1775-1854) definitively modern embrace of Christianity, and how it was based on his understanding of the Christ-event as the "differentiating decision" which, by separating out good and evil from a pagan primordial unity, made difference the very engine of meaning.<sup>22</sup>

In so far as we Unitarian Universalists are thoroughly grounded in Enlightenment thought and have based our own identity on differentiating decisions which both quietly accepted and not so quietly rejected those of mainstream Protestant thought, it is hardly a surprise that our own movement finds itself most flummoxed with regards to an adequate theology of self-differentiation. On one hand Unitarian Universalism is often accused of purchasing coherence only through the deployment of significantly abstract assertions, which raises the question of how "grand" an inclusionary narrative might become before it universalizes away significant difference. And yet when does the story we tell ourselves—the "récit"—become so small and particular that its difference is no longer a distinction? I think too of Robert Bellah's concern about the tendency of the modernizing religion of the reform inheritance in general and Unitarian Universalism in particular towards the dangerous individualism he terms "Sheliaism"—a faith held by one human being, a nurse in California named "Shelia."<sup>23</sup> Sheliaism is perhaps the ultimate, logical dead end of identity politics, which having begun as an insistence on diversity ends as a celebration of individualizing autochthony.<sup>24</sup>

When we accept these confusions over differentiating decisions to be a part of our modern theological stalemate, postmodernism, far from being irrelevant to our concerns as a living faith, instead reveals itself to be a discourse adequate to assessing whether or not our construction of Beloved Community is a true reflection of our highest ideals, and whether or not it remains prophetic in our contemporary socio-historical context. I continue, then, with an explanation of the promise that an encounter with that postmodern messianic prophecy of difference, deconstruction, holds for such an Unitarian Universalist articulation, but will at the same time gradually work towards a model of mutual complicity between postmodernism and Unitarian Universalism, for it will be my ultimate argument that liberal theology might best recover for itself a non-naive model of optimistic social agency by understanding postmodernism as nothing more and nothing less than the historical consequences of a theological process that was set in motion by the Radical Reformation of our own inheritance.

## **Part Two: The Promise of Deconstruction**

*...in which Susan demonstrates the usefulness of the theological applications of the work of the man who once styled himself "Rabbi Derrida" to theology in general, unitarian theology in particular, and to the Betterment of Life as a Whole. Gradually, she moves on to a discussion of the very religious traditions that have been associated with Derrida's work in order to discredit all such association and hence prepare the way for Section Three's Bold Claims.*

Deconstruction is first and foremost the examination of the "epistemological violence" that lies at the heart of modernity's mechanism for the derivation of meaning through difference. Deconstruction teaches that when Western thought constructs itself through pairs of binary opposites (i.e., nature/culture, man/woman, Christian/nonChristian) even as centralizes or normalizes one half of the binary and marginalizes the other.<sup>25</sup> Through relentless attention to

difference and contradiction, deconstruction attempts to, in any given text, resurrect the repressed binary term, thereby revealing the fact and method of the marginal term's repression. Often the resurrection of the marginal term is accomplished by revealing how a text might be made to support a meaning quite opposite from its seemingly most obvious one. It is an ignorant misunderstanding of this strategy that causes some critics of deconstruction to say that the point of deconstruction is to show that texts have no meaning. How can texts have meaning if they can be shown to mean their own opposites? By revealing more than one possibility for meaning, deconstruction reveals the ways in which texts are *made* to have meaning, and thus deconstruction performs its real service, which is to lay bare the authority by which meanings are established.

The importance of deconstruction to theology lies not simply in its strategies for reading texts, but in its critique of ontology. "Destruktion" was itself a word first used by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) as he called for a philosophy free of the hegemony of ontology. Resistant to the notion that Being was the only philosophical category both determinate and indicative of a rock-bottom level of reality, Heidegger took to referring to Being as ~~Being~~, to suggest other possibilities. Derrida adopted this style, taking it one step further by also stylizing it as ~~is~~.

For both Heidegger and Derrida, the importance of a critique of ontology lay within a certain critique of metaphysics, specifically the metaphysics of presence--a critique that itself has always been closely aligned with theological issues. Nietzsche (1844-1900) shocked the modern world in his ever contrarian way by proclaiming the death of God. But was it really God who was dead, or was Nietzsche simply noticing the inadequacy of the metaphysical-ontological conceptions of God?<sup>26</sup> If the latter was the case then Nietzsche in fact changed nothing by noting God's death--the notion that God it is appropriate to refer to God in terms of Being (dead or alive) remained perfectly intact. What would it mean to think of God not as ~~Being~~? Heidegger foregrounded the unnecessary dependence of theology on the actually quite limited notion of Being by referring to this way of thinking as "ontotheology," a word again that Derrida would also adopt.<sup>27</sup> But if Heidegger pointed out the restrictiveness of Being as a category for theology, he was not quite able to articulate a deontologized theology. Such a thing only becomes truly possible with Derrida's deconstruction.

What is a thoroughly deontologized theology? In many ways it is a negative theology.<sup>28</sup> Derrida himself writes that he has always been fascinated with the paradox of a negative theology which affirms on one hand, the idolatry and incompleteness of any talk of God, but which on the other hand continues to speak as theology.<sup>29</sup> Deconstruction and negative theology do share the conviction that any conceptualization of God is automatically inadequate and potentially idolatrous. In the words of John Caputo, "deconstruction desires what negative theology desires and it shares the passion of negative theology--for the impossible....Like negative theology, deconstruction turns on its desire for the *tout autre*" (totally other).<sup>30</sup> And like negative theology, what a deontologized theology keeps alive is the notion of meaningful difference, which is why those contemporary students of religion who want to insist (mostly after Jung) on the absolute sameness of all world religions under the name of a primordial or perennial

philosophy, do so by first arguing for the return of a deliberately Hellenized metaphysical ontology.<sup>31</sup>

But the specific hope of a deontologized theology is for, in the words of the French theologian Jean-Luc Marion, a "God without Being."<sup>32</sup> The high modernist theology of process theology sought to resolve the tension between the Being of God and the changing forces of nature as described by science by making God not a Being but a becoming—part and parcel of the creative processes that characterizes all. The postmodern solution to the same dilemma is to continue the project of Heidegger and Derrida to realize that it is unnecessary and limiting to characterize God in terms of Being at all, making "becoming" only a temporary solution the theological problem.<sup>33</sup> To paraphrase Jean-Luc Marion, is it reasonable to suppose that God is to be known only along the horizon of Being, or might there not be a more radical horizon?

Of course in negative theology, the totally other, that which is sublime beyond representation, is God. Deconstruction, while sharing the interest in the unrepresentable, easily unpacks how it is that even this use of "God" is itself a construction. For this reason Derrida himself has referred to deconstruction as a "negative atheology," by which he would seem to try to make it unavailable to those, presumably like Marion, who nonetheless use it to recoup "God."<sup>34</sup>

In deconstruction, it is only "differance" that lies outside of construction, thus making it in Derrida's explicit formulation, older than either "being" or "God."<sup>35</sup> "Differance," refers to the way in which meaning is not only made through reference to difference (i.e., what God is not) and often opposition (i.e., good is the opposite of evil), but how meaning is always infinitely deferred—how it is that it is finally impossible to arrive at a rock bottom level of reality, where meaning, being and presence might all neatly align. One has to go no further than the footnotes at the bottom of this page to illustrate this concept. Tracing the citations at the bottom of this page leads to other citations, citations which would, if traced far enough, would be much more likely lead in a perfect circle right back to me than they would point to some absolute knowledge. Perfectly manifested meaning never arrives, and "differance" is the reason, that which keeps all meaning in free play and which ensures the possibility of any final closure. That does not mean, though, that nothing can be learned from the process. To return to the footnotes, if one cannot find there absolute knowledge, one does easily find there a perfect record of the ways and means by which knowledge is constituted, and through which academic authority is constructed and employed within the boundaries of a clearly defined and constructed community.

"Differance" itself is a deliberate misspelling, a deliberate misspelling in what was first meant by Derrida to be a speech, not a written article. Spoken, it is impossible to hear the difference between "Differance" and "Difference." Only in a written text would the distinction be clear. And here we find Derrida playing with one of his favorite binary oppositions—that between speech and writing. In an ontotheological world that likes to imagine connection between presence (being) and meaning, speech is usually privileged over writing as a source of authentic meaning. We imagine speech to be more natural than writing, less subject to artifice or manipulation, more closely aligned with presence. Writing after all usually carries with it the

reminder of the author's absence; it takes place at a greater remove, presents greater opportunities for manipulation. Or does it?

Derrida calls the privileging of the spoken word over the written word "logocentrism." The logos is of course, the Greek word for the immanent principle within all things that guarantees a unity between speech (the word) and an absolute and original truth. Not incidentally, of course, Logos is also the Hellenized Christ of the Gospel of John—where in the beginning was the word, the word was with God, and God was the word. Logocentrism, then, is a system of meaning that claims a perfect alignment of meaning, presence, speech, being and truth, all guaranteed by the function of a heavily constructed Transcendental Signified (God). As Jean Baudrillard, that great Bard of Postmodernism has written, "all of Western faith and good faith was engaged in this wager on representation: that a sign could refer to the depth of meaning, that a sign could exchange for meaning and that something could guarantee this exchange—God, of course." After Derrida, then, Baudrillard sees modernism as the failure of what he terms the "iconolaters," who, "underneath the apparition of God in the mirror of images...already enacted his death and disappearance in the epiphany of his representations."<sup>36</sup>

What is left after the exposure of the false guarantee of the Transcendental Signified? Not the death or disappearance of God; that was modernism's move. What is left is the exposure of weakness of the modernist paradigm that made it possible to talk of the death of God by establishing God first into the language of Being. Now, it might be possible, finally, to think of God "otherwise".<sup>37</sup> Modernism spent, it is only new theological possibility that emerges.

Practically speaking, such theology offers the possibility of escape from the ridiculous and particularly modern divisiveness in liberal religion between those who "believe in God" and those who do not. With "God" freed from ontotheology and the horizon of being, it becomes perfectly possible to say, for example, that "God is Love" without in any way diminishing God or Love, or without claiming an ontological status for either, which after all, amounts to the same thing as diminishment. If we all truly learned to speak a non-ontological theological language, there would be no need anymore of evasive constructions forged in the language of lowest common denominators, no more confusion about the supposed opposition of theology and atheology, concepts which deconstruction teaches us simply invent the (false) necessity of the other.

Consider as well the explicitly unitarian quality of such a thoroughly deontologized theology. To construe Jesus as divine is to construe him first in Being; indeed the very being of Jesus is essential to Trinitarian doctrines of incarnation and most significantly, to Trinitarian soteriology. It is exceedingly difficult, then, if not impossible to imagine a deontologized Trinitarian Christianity; to do so would be to surrender the Logos. Unitarian theology, on the other hand, has resisted from the beginning the fusion between ontology and soteriology that is required by Logocentrism. Obviously, to see Jesus as Teacher and Example is to avoid the ontological problem entirely, although even those theologies that insist on the compatibility of unitarianism with a high Christology tend to ground the salvific power of Jesus in something other than Being.<sup>38</sup>



Indeed, amongst those Christian theologians who have embraced the possibilities of a de-ontotheologized theology, a coherent Christology has proven to be the significant stumbling block. The French Catholic theologian Jean-Luc Marion has done more than any theologian in attempting positively embrace the possibilities of a God beyond Being, and yet even Marion must eventually foreclose the postmodern question precisely at the site of Christ and the Eucharist. Christ for Marion must be capable of bridging the gap between sign and referent; Christ must for Marion remain Logos, a fact which rather defeats the purpose of the foray into the Derridean project.<sup>39</sup> There are also those theologians such as Mark Taylor who have attempted to argue that deconstruction is in fact a "radical Christology," and yet this argument seems to rely on a confusion between the "Word" (the logocentric unity of being and meaning guaranteed by God as Transcendental Signified) and the "infinite play of interpretation" opened up by deconstruction and the erasure of the Transcendental Signified.<sup>40</sup>

These points of incompatibility between Trinitarian Christianity and deconstruction, combined with deconstruction's playful dismantling of theistic dualisms have caused some to speculate whether or not there is not some inherent connection between Derridean deconstruction and the Eastern traditions. It is true that forms of Buddhism, to name only one possibility amongst many, like deconstruction, plays binary opposites against each other in order to denaturalize what might otherwise appear as an absolute thing, being, or truth. And yet the aim of such usage in deconstruction is to betray constructedness of established institutions and the philosophies that protect them, while the aim of Buddhism is to dismantle internal structures that leading to emotional clinging.<sup>41</sup> It is certainly instructive to open up a dialog between Derridean thought and, say Indian philosophy (as Harold Coward has admirably done), but at the same time perhaps we should learn to recognize as Orientalist the assumption that any non-linear handling of opposites must be Eastern.<sup>42</sup> Moreover we should be sensitive to any easy equation of postmodern thinking with non-European traditions when the contemporary expressions of so many religions, especially the new Islamic fundamentalisms, are postmodern in so far as they deliberately reject the modernism of the Western imperialist inheritance.<sup>43</sup>

At least two critics of very different inclinations placed Derrida's work with the context of Jewish theology almost as soon as his work began to attract serious attention. Harold Bloom noted a consistency of Derrida's thought with Kabbalahism, and most compellingly, Susan Handelman was one of the first of what would become many to place Derrida's arguments within the context of a certain centuries long dialog between Western Greek-inspired logocentric metaphysics, and rabbinical thought, with its supposedly greater emphasis on a diversity of meaning and the role of human interrelation relative to meaning.<sup>44</sup> Handelman's account of Derrida celebrates how rabbinical thought has overcome the weaknesses of logocentrism: because of the stress on the need for both the written and oral Torah, and the tendency to see the oral Torah as the revelation of the innermost meaning of the written Torah, rabbinical thought avoids privileging either oral or written communication as a special and absolute manifestation of truth. Moreover, since the oral Torah presumes speaking within the context of human relationship, Handelman suggests that such philosophies of language that Derrida shares with the rabbinical tradition bear an intrinsic connection to profoundly ethical thinking.<sup>45</sup>

As compelling as Handelman's argument is, its complete equation of Derrida and Judaism seems unlikely. Even if Judaism does not rely on an ontological truth certified through the vertical logocentric guarantee of the Transcendental Signified, there are still the ontological truth claims of the covenant, in which truth is made manifest in the very being of the people in history. Walter Benjamin, that famous precursor to postmodern thought who disturbed even his fellow members of the Jewish-identified Frankfurt School of Critical Theory with his strong theological leanings, personified this redemptive ontology found within Judaism as the angel of history. It is hard to imagine Derrida embracing this angel of history, who even with its embrace of chaos, disruption and resultant suffering comes serve the function of the particularly modern God of progress.<sup>46</sup> Derrida's work, then, is not a Judaism, it is a strategic deployment of the Judaic, and in this sense it seems to me wiser to think of Derrida's thought as John Caputo does, as an expression and repetition of his broken covenant with Judaism.<sup>47</sup>

### **Part Three: Of Agency and Complicity**

*In which Susan, performing her own deconstruction of the Deconstructor of Himself, situates his thought within a modern tradition closely aligned with Protestant tradition, consequentially also revealing the degree to which the roots of (post)modern interpretation lie with the Radical Reformation. Having thus established a model of mutual complicity between Unitarian Universalism and postmodernism, Susan then suggests the Ways in which such Complicity might actually be transformed into a positive agency for reclaiming those aspects of (post)modernity best associated with our faith tradition. For all the messiness, there is a Happy Ending.*

For all of its genuine promise and brilliance, a deconstruction of Derrida's own work is easily performed. Of course this is not quite the embarrassment that it might seem: Derrida is always very clear that there is nothing, including deconstruction, "outside the text," i.e., invulnerable to deconstruction. Yet in his opposition of the Hellenic and the Hebraic, the Hebraic clearly emerges as the redemptive, and in doing so Derrida himself does freeze the play of binary opposites that is deconstruction's ideal in order to privilege the one term over the other.

Nor is it coincidence that it should be this particular binary opposition between the Hebraic and the Hellenic that should prove the easiest means of deconstruction Derrida's own work. Modernity has always assessed its oppositions and invented itself through this highly constructed opposition of Hebraic and Hellenic. "As the Enlightenment saw it, the world was, and has always been divided between ascetic, superstitious enemies of the flesh, and men who affirmed life, the body, knowledge, and generosity; between mythmakers and realists, priests and philosophers. (The inheritors of the) Enlightenment, would later call these parties, most suggestively, Hebrews and Hellenes."<sup>48</sup> Even as the Enlightenment was in part marked by the revival of a certain interest in classical learning, eventually, almost as if to justify the appropriation--the Hellenic was identified as that which must be left behind in order for progress--modernity itself, inspired by the Hebraic, to march on.<sup>49</sup> In so far as Derrida remains caught between the poles of the Hellenic and Hebraic and recommends the Hebraic for advancement, he would seem to remain modern even as his (post)modern inclination remains the attempted dismantling of that which defines even his discourse. And in Derrida's incomplete

attempt to escape from modernity's constitutive dualism, we can read in the traces of both Derrida and the modern the evidence of Protestant influence.

In his very careful description of this Hellenic and Hebraic dynamic, Vassilis Lambropoulos identifies the specifically Protestant motivations behind the Enlightenment identification of Hellenic and Hebraic poles of cultural influence.<sup>50</sup> The Reformation did more than establish an interest in the Hellenic and Hebraic through its close reading of the (Greek) New Testament and Hebrew Scriptures, although certainly that interest in the original languages of the Bible was important. Protestantism, as a counter-ecclesiastical and anti-dogmatic faith needed to "anchor itself in an event other than the (recurring) ritual, and it discovers such an event in form, the spiritual happening of matter."<sup>51</sup> By removing authority from the church and placing it instead *sola Scriptura*, reading itself became the regulatory system of faith. Protestantism both required and to a certain extent was the development of an interpretative technology capable of extracting from form, especially text, divine law. The political consequences of such were most clear in the earliest Reformation, when such reading was explicitly understood as a form of civil right for the bourgeois individual, whose very autonomy was formed in and through such reading.

What is new in postmodernism is that while interpretation still reigns as the primary technology of (modern) liberation, the scope of the texts from which the divine law might be teased have expanded well beyond literal scripture. In fact, Reformation thinking, founded on the dual principles of scriptural coherence and natural reason, in its most radical and ever-reforming traditions, began to use interpretive reason as a means of undermining the very scriptural authority to which it once gave testimony.<sup>52</sup> Interpretation itself became the highest principle, where "what is read is irrelevant, as long as everything is read, treated like a text, interpreted, Biblicized." Hence interpretive faith becomes the governing principle not of only explicit Reform traditions, but of a thoroughly secularized society, and it becomes possible to define postmodernism as "interpretation at its last historical phase, ...the scripturalization of the world."<sup>53</sup>

Mircea Eliade identified the secular tendency to ascribe religious function to increasingly secular objects as the logical extension of the breakdown between the sacred and profane that occurs with the advent (which he locates in Judaism) of an understanding of human history as a revelation and manifestation of divine meaning.<sup>54</sup> Yet it is hard not to recognize our own historical complicity in this particular chain of events, and even in its motivation, above and beyond our obvious association with a radicalized Reformation. The scripturalization of an ever increasing variety of texts was after all a part of the explicit agenda of American Unitarian moral philosophy, which sought in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to promote the careful reading and appreciation of secular literature as a literature as likely if not more likely to meet the moral and spiritual needs of the time than the Bible. The Bible may no longer have been the exclusive source of elevating literature, but the Reformation understanding of the benefits of interpretive reading was perfectly intact in the recommendation of the Unitarian moral philosophers. Nineteenth century Unitarians clearly understood reading as a means of self-regulation, one which tempered the autonomy of the individual with the social control of self-discipline, or in the language of the day, self-culture. That such reading also helped to define proper taste and determine the manners of the gentry only

betrayed the extent to which the radical edge of interpretative reading was rapidly being blunted by a growing class-based aestheticism.<sup>55</sup>

Such is well known. It is less common to examine the Unitarian Universalist involvement in the scripturalization of the world where it is no longer just literature which is understood as appropriate objects of attention, but where increasingly nature and culture become transformed into texts and "social texts" from which the truth might be mined by interpretive technologies. Nonetheless, it has been my argument elsewhere that the development of certain branches of the social sciences, including culture studies, folklore and comparative religious studies, all owe their existence to liberal Protestantism's textualization of an ever expanding range of objects of interpretation.<sup>56</sup> In this sense I argue that it is improper to see secularization as the diminishment of religious influence in social and cultural life; rather, it seems to me to be the clear triumph a particularly liberal (post)Protestantism interest in the sacralization of culture. Hence the circularity of some liberal Protestant thinking which proclaims one of the hallmarks of liberal religion to be a friendliness to secular culture. We are not merely friends to secular culture. We brought it into being precisely as a reflection of our religious convictions.

My final argument, then, is that postmodernism is nothing more or nothing less than the historical consequence of the theological process that was set in motion by the theological technologies of our own inheritance, as it sought to construct and enter into a covenant of emancipation which it administered, and by which paradoxically, it hoped to guarantee human autonomy. Some of the negative aspects of postmodernism—its overly aestheticized and restrictive formalisms, for example—then, are not cultural stumbling blocks placed in the way of what would be our otherwise unhampered advance towards the universal realization of freedom, reason, and tolerance; rather they are obstacles that have resulted from the inherent contradictions of our own project.

This is not to say that we are hopelessly caught in a web of our own making. Rather, it is simply to point out that if we are to advance at all—in self understanding and in creating a world more in keeping with our ideals—it will only come from a comprehensive embrace of our responsibility, and a return to re-examine and redirect those very forces of history that we might well have set in place and yet which might need direction towards new ends, ironically, in order to better reflect our intention. As William Morris said in a moment of high modernism: people "fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and then it turns not to be what they meant, and others have to fight for what they meant under another name."<sup>57</sup>

Some have found the postmodern insistence on the omnipresence of controlling ideologies and the constructed character of human subjectivity too politically fatalistic and defeatist to warrant such fighting words. But if postmodernism has offered us anything, it is the promise that this complicity with ideology does not mean that we cannot change the processes of history. In Postmodernism, complicity serves as the very foundation of our positive agency. Gone is the simple notion of agency of our own modern optimistic inheritance where the power to act on the world is associated with naive over-insistence on the absolute nature of human goodness and human power. In postmodernism, resistance is impossible, but reconfiguration is everything.<sup>58</sup>

How, then, to reconfigure our own relationship to postmodernity as a theological movement, and thus reconstitute our own mission? First, we need to remember the degree to which modernity was not any one single project, but a series of projects, some more admirable than others, some more successful than others. Increasingly scholars are identifying two Enlightenments, or two initiating modern movements.<sup>59</sup> The first was that of Montaigne, Duns Scotus and Spinoza—that movement which greeted all truth with healthy skepticism and which celebrated the virtues of singularity and different. The second Enlightenment was that repressive force which sought to control the failures of the first with through the construction and mediation of dualisms. The second modernist project was always an impossible and paradoxical one that involved placing the highest confidence in empiricism, a move that itself turned out to be more an expression of faith than a rational decision.<sup>60</sup> This does not mean that empiricism has proved itself to be just another form of subjective religious belief; rather, that it was a matter of the specifically second-wave modernist faith to exaggerate and evangelize the salvific powers of the scientific method.

We should not forget that the most powerful hopes for Enlightenment empiricism were expressed during times of the terrible, bloody Wars of Religion. Enlightenment thinkers only turned to empiricism as a means of providing a certitude that would exist above and beyond religious difference only after tolerance and an accepting and mutual skepticism, the first and eventually overwritten gifts of modernity, seemed to only exaggerate, not relieve, the violence associated with religious diversity.<sup>61</sup>

In our current postmodern moment we find ourselves attempting to rehabilitate and resurrect once again the local and minority casualties of yet another one of humanity's homogenizing quests for certitude. If we could only learn, though, to refuse to enforce peace through an insistence upon agreement as to the nature and existence of ontological truth we could use postmodernism to its best and most liberatory theological ends, and in the process we could recapture the skepticism and tolerance of modernity's first inheritance, thus asserting what it was our liberal religious ancestors intended all along.

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<sup>1</sup> For the original uses of the term "postmodern" see Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, *Postmodern Theory: Critical Investigations* (London: Macmillan, 1991). Jean Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, trans. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1984). *La Condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savoir* (Les Editions de Minuit, 1979).

<sup>2</sup> Phillipa Berry, "Introduction," *Shadow of Spirit: Postmodernism and Religion*, Phillipa Berry and Anrew Wernizk, eds. (London: Routledge, 1992): 1-10; 3.

<sup>3</sup> A good summary of the increasing impatience in religious studies with the dead-ends of modern reductionisms is found in Richard King, "Disciplining Religion," *Orientalism and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1999): 35-61.

<sup>4</sup> Try S. Mark Heim, *Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Wm Eerdsman, 2001) and Ted Peters, *God-The World's Future: A Systematic Theology for Postmodern Era* (Fortress Press, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> Daniel J. Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism," *Cross Currents: The Journal for the Association for Religion and the Intellectual Life* (Winter 1997-98): 518-530; 518.

<sup>6</sup> The quote is from Adams, *op.cit.*, but many "religious" rejections of postmodernism operate on such a confusion, see for further example, Edward Farley's *Deep Symbols: Their Postmodern Effacement and Reclamation*

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(Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1996).

<sup>7</sup>Ronald Allen, *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos* (1997).

<sup>8</sup>Charles Carroll Everett, "Kant's Influence in Theology," *Essays Theological and Literary* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1901): 76-98.

<sup>9</sup>Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990): xxiv.

<sup>10</sup>Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris, 1962)/*The Savage Mind* (Chicago, 1966).

<sup>11</sup>Derrida's most complete treatment of Lévi-Strauss is "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *Writing and Difference*, Alan Bass, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978): 278–293; esp. 286.

<sup>12</sup>*Savage Mind*, 16.

<sup>13</sup>The association of postmodernism with pastiche is appropriate when referring to postmodern aesthetic style which does in fact function though pastiche. It is important to remember, though, that such pastiche is employed precisely so that the various elements of the piece deconstruct and reveal each other's constructedness. The idea of passing off pastiche as a coherent and integral if assembled tradition remains bizarre even in the stylistic usage.

<sup>14</sup>*Postmodern Condition*, 81.

<sup>15</sup>Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, and Postmodernism* (London, Macmillan, 1986: esp. 57).

<sup>16</sup>Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Pierre Bourdieu *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Colin MacCabe, ed., *High Theory/Low Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986); and my favorite case study of the relationship between the definition of "low" art forms as such and actual oppression, Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* (NY: Grove Press, 1996).

<sup>17</sup>For example, Morris Berman, *The Twilight of American Culture* (NY: Norton, 2000), Lewis Lapham *Waiting for the Barbarians* (NY, Verso, 1997), and the grand-daddy of them all, Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1987).

<sup>18</sup>For examples of how modern attempts to make the classics of high culture available to the working class and colonial subjects directly served regressive political ends even while operating under the alibi of democratization, see Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) and Guari Viswanathan, *Mask of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (NY: Columbia, 1989).

<sup>19</sup>W.C. Roof, *Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journey of the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993).

<sup>20</sup>Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998).

<sup>21</sup>"The hallmark of modernism is the insistence that theology must adapt a sympathetic attitude toward secular culture and must consciously strive to come to terms with it." William R. Hutchison, *American Protestant Thought: The Liberal Era* (NY: Harper, 1968): 4.

<sup>22</sup>My understanding of the significance of Schelling comes from the work of Slavoj Žižek in *The Fragile Absolute, or: Why Is Christianity Worth Fighting For* (NY: Verso, 2000) and *The Abyss of Freedom* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997)

<sup>23</sup>Robert Bellah, "Unitarian Universalism in Societal Perspective," *Fulfilling the Promise: a Recovenanting Process for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Boston: UUA, 1999) 9-21; Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

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<sup>24</sup>Vassilis Lambropoulos, "Nomoscopic Analysis," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 95: 4 (Fall 1996): 855-880; esp.867.

<sup>25</sup>The best description of this violence as well as the clearest description of how Derrida both adapts and surpasses Nietzsche and Heidegger is still Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's outstanding preface to her translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>26</sup>"But what does it mean to kill God if he does not exist, to kill God who has never existed...The death of God does not restore us to a limited positivistic world, but to a world exposed by the experience of its limits, made and unmade by the excess which transgresses it." Michel Foucault, "A Preface to Transgression," *Language Counter-Memory, Practice*, Trans. Donald Couchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977): 32.

<sup>27</sup>"Being and God are not identical and I would never attempt to think the essence of God by means of Being....If I were yet to write a theology—to which I sometimes feel inclined—the word Being would not occur in it. Faith does not need the thought of Being....I believe that Being can never be thought of as the ground and essence of God and of his manifestedness, to the extent that the latter can indeed meet man, flashes in the dimension of Being, which in no way signifies that Being might be regarded as a possible predicate for God." Heidegger, "Seminarie de Zurich," *Po&sie* 13 (Paris, 1980): 60-61. Translation by Jean Luc Marion.

<sup>28</sup>For a more complete contrast/comparison, see Howard Coward and Toby Foshay, eds., *Derrida and Negative Theology* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup>Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Invention de l'autre*. Paris: Gaililee, 1987: 545.

<sup>30</sup>John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997): 3.

<sup>31</sup>As does Huston Smith in *Beyond The Post Modern Mind* (Quest Books, 1989).

<sup>32</sup>Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, Thomas Carlson, trans. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>33</sup>Merold Westphal, "Overcoming Onto-Theology," *God, the Gift and Postmodernism* John Caputo and Michael Scanlon, eds (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

<sup>34</sup>"...those aspects of differance which are thereby delineated are not theological, not even in the order of the most negative of negative theologies, which are always concerned with disengaging a superessentiality beyond the finite categories of essence and existence, that is, of presence, and always hastening to recall that God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge his superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being." Jacques Derrida, "On an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy." Trans. John P. Leavy, Jr., *Semina* 23 [Derrida and Biblical Studies Issue] (1982) : 6. For "negative atheology" see Jacques Derrida, "Force and Signification" in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1964]1978): 297.

<sup>35</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Differance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>36</sup>Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, Paul Foss, Paul Patton and Philip Beitchman, translators (NY: Semiotext(e), 1983): 9-10.

<sup>37</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being: or Beyond Essences*, Alphanoso Lingis, translator (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991).

<sup>38</sup>Prescott B. Wintersteen, *Christology in American Unitarianism: An Anthology of Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Unitarian Theologians* (Boston: The Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship, 1977). See especially the forward by George H. Williams.

<sup>39</sup>Graham Ward has made a most careful analysis of when and where it is in Marion's argument that "Marion forecloses the postmodern question with an uncritical dogmatism." See Graham Ward, "The Theological Project of Jean-Luc Marion," in *Post-Secular Philosophy: Between Philosophy and Theology*, Phillip Blond, ed. (NY: Routledge, 1998; 229-239).

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<sup>40</sup>Mark C. Taylor, "Text as Victim," *Deconstruction and Theology*, Thomas Altizer, Ed (New York: Crossroads, 1982): 58-78, esp. 73-4.

<sup>41</sup>Embarrassing but true: I owe this point to Jim Powell, *Derrida for Beginners* (London: Readers and Writers, 1997). For a more respectable discussion of the same point, try David Loy, "The Cloture of Deconstruction: A Mahayana Critique of Derrida," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 105 (March 1987).

<sup>42</sup>Howard Coward, *Derrida and Indian Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York: 1990). For a treatment of Derrida in relation to other mystical and religious traditions, see Kevin Hart: *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology, Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Robert Magliola explores possible relationships between Derrida and Taoism in *Derrida on the Mend* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1984).

<sup>43</sup>Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam* (London: Routledge, 1992); Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (NY: Knopf, 2000); Nülfür Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996).

<sup>44</sup> Harold Bloom, *Kabbalah and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975); Susan Handelman *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982).

<sup>45</sup>Christopher Norris also notes the same close connection between Derrida's philosophy of language and the consideration of human interrelationship in *Derrida* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>46</sup>Here is Benjamin's famous angel: "A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead and make whole what has been mashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyway. This storm is what we call progress." Walter Benjamin, "Thesis on the Philosophy of History."

<sup>47</sup>John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*, *op. cit.*

<sup>48</sup>Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment—An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1966): 33

<sup>49</sup> In embracing the Hebraic, of course, Europe hardly became less hostile to actual Jews. In fact, as the extreme anti-Semitism of the early reformers, Luther, for example, reveals, the degree to which the Hebraic was embraced as an idea often resulted in the argument that Jews as a people had proved unworthy of their theological inheritance, now, supposedly, best represented in Protestantism. Heiko Augustus Overman, *Roots of Anti-Semitism In the Age of Renaissance and Reformation*.

<sup>50</sup>It would be impossible to overestimate the degree to which my own thinking has been influenced by Vassilis Lambropoulos, in person, and in the form of *The Rise of Eurocentrism: Anatomy of Interpretation* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1993).

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>52</sup>Alister McGrath, "Reformation to Enlightenment," in Paul Avid, ed, *The History of Christian Theology v. 1: The Science of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Em Eerdmans, 1986).

<sup>53</sup>Lambropoulos, 329.

<sup>54</sup>Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Or, Cosmos and History*, trans. Philip Mairet 1952; NY Sheed and Ward, 1969): esp.103-109; and Eliade, *History of Religious Ideas Vol. 1.*, trans. Willard Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978): esp. section 14, 334-356.

<sup>55</sup> For a description of the explicitly Unitarian defined equation of good taste in literature and the



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cultivation of morality, see Daniel Howe, "Genteel Letters," *The Unitarian Conscience: Harvard Moral Philosophy 1805-1861* ([1970] Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition): 174-204, On the increasing aestheticization of reading practices, see Lambropoulos, *op. cit* and Susan Ritchie "Reading the Social Text," *Research and Society* (3): 1990: 85-96.

<sup>56</sup>Susan Ritchie, "Secularization as the Sacralization of Culture: Belief Studies and Liberal Protestant Inheritance," *Journal of American Folklore* (Spring 2002, forthcoming).

<sup>57</sup>As quoted in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 50.

<sup>58</sup>I am speaking here explicitly about the work of the poststructuralist Michel Foucault, who taught us that while power in early modernity was localized in a few centralized, policing locations and subjectivities, the final project of late and post modernity was to teach us to internalize the functions of power so that it power. Before we were externally policed. Now we have learned to police, regulate and discipline ourselves, with the result that power might now properly be thought of as being everywhere. Just as in Derrida there is no "outside the text," in Foucault, there is no aspect of social or even personal life or being that is not already criss-crossed by intersecting lines of power, influence and ideology. Some have decided this means that Foucault believes that resistance to power is impossible. But this is true only if one believes meaningful alternatives to prevailing ideologies can only be offered by persons inhabiting completely politically uncompromised subject-positions. In contrast to this belief, Foucault makes it clear how that compromise itself might be redeployed against the prevailing ideology. For an especially helpful explanation of how this works, see Dennis Halperin *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>59</sup>The most exciting examples are Stephen Toumlin, *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>60</sup>Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>61</sup>Stephen Toumlin, *Cosmopolis*, *op.cit*.