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Witchcraft for Sale!

Commodity vs. Community in the Neopagan Movement

David Waldron

ABSTRACT: The growth of the Pagan and Witchcraft revivalist movements (Neopaganism) is well documented in the Anglophone world. However, Witchcraft movements are also closely linked to a vibrant set of subcultures and a multitude of representations in popular culture. In this context investigating the relationship between Witchcraft as a religious community and its representation in consumer culture and mass media is extremely significant. This article examines the ambiguous relationship between witch and Wiccan communities and the vast array of merchandising, popular culture and media representations that surround them.

In creating the WIKID WITCH KIT I hope to take you on a magickal and exciting journey! Through ritual, music, song and spoken word I will help you unleash your inner magick and discover the wonderful and positively empowering world of Witchcraft.

As part of this journey you will discover your WIKID magickal name, giving you access to our exclusive website and online coven. There you can meet up with other WIKID Witches to swap spells, stories, and ideas. And every full moon I will personally join you for an online gathering—which will be truly WIKID.

WIKID Witch Kit features WIKID Magick Fizz/WIKID Magick Potions/WIKID Magick Fire/WIKID Magick Star/WIKID Magick Cord/WIKID Magick Audio CD.¹

The contemporary Witchcraft revival, also known as Wicca, a branch of the broader Neopagan revivalist movement, is one of the fastest growing social and religious movements of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.² It is also a movement that is

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often idealized as a model of postmodern protest in the wake of disenchantment with empirical claims to historical legitimacy. Conversely, Witchcraft is also a religious movement with a significant spiritual component, which links, in a typically romanticist style, images of the divine with nature and the feminine in opposition to patriarchy, industrialism and science. One area where the cultural development and influence of the Witchcraft movement is particularly apparent is in the development of a proliferation of witch-inspired media, products, and artifacts of popular culture. However, the development of a Witchcraft-related industry and its increased representation in mainstream popular culture have had a profound impact on the social cohesion of the Wicca movement. The commodification of the movement's sacred elements and the commensurate development of Witchcraft-related industries, has deeply affected the content of its identity, source of values, and sense of community.

Because it is a diverse and fragmented movement that overlaps a wide array of cultural phenomenon, it is difficult to ascertain the size of the Witchcraft-related industry or the extent to which the process of commodification impacts the process of identity formation and ritual within this revivalist movement. While there are figures that indicate a growing industry, such as the claim by the American Booksellers Association that annual sales of Witchcraft-related books has increased to from 4.5 million in 1990 to 10 million in 2000,³ it is difficult to determine how these statistics directly affect commodification of the movement. Even at the most pragmatic level, differentiating between where the New Age movement ends and the Witchcraft and Neopagan movements begin is a problematic exercise, as is defining what differentiates specifically Witchcraft-related artifacts from those of the New Age movement. Is the purchase of a packet of scented candles or a Goddess statue an acquisition of Witchcraft or New Age paraphernalia? Or, is it simply evidence of an aesthetic not necessarily linked to either? Similarly, even with figures indicating the sales of *Witchcraft Magazine* in Australia,⁴ there is little relevant information as to the symbolic significance of these figures or in what context the magazines are purchased and consumed.

In attempting to ascertain the extent to which the process of commodification has impacted the Witchcraft revivalist movement, therefore, it may be more helpful, first, to focus on the social significance of the consumption of materials by witches and second, to examine the mechanisms by which producers of Neopagan materials market themselves to their consumer base. This would be more illuminating than simply referring to market statistics on the number of items sold. The more enlightening questions are: How are witches defining their cultural identity with regard to the increasingly diverse array of consumable products available to them? To what extent is Witch/Wiccan identity rooted in representations of Witchcraft in popular culture?

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This article investigates the development of commodified representations of Witchcraft and examines the effect that this commodification has had upon witch communities and sub-cultures. First, the role of post-modern approaches to constructing Wiccan identity is examined, with particular reference to the appropriation of postmodern rhetoric by some sectors of the Witchcraft revivalist movement. Second, the impact of eclecticism and the intrusion of commodification on religious belief are examined in relation to their specific manifestation in Witchcraft in the light of Fredrik Jameson's interpretation of the postmodern and nostalgia.⁵ Finally, the research of anthropologists Marcel Mauss and C. A. Gregory, investigating the social and cultural significance of gifts and commodities in community structure, is evaluated in relation to Doug Ezzy's claim that the embracing of an individualist and consumption-oriented ethos regarding cultural identity and Pagan practice has led to the transformation of the nature of social relationships and community structure in Australian Neopagan and New Age communities.

**POSTMODERNISM, ECLECTICISM,
AND COMMODIFICATION**

Underlining the development of a commodified and eclectic model of Witchcraft belief, symbolism and practice is the rise of postmodern rhetoric in Neopagan approaches to culture and identity. Largely originating in the aftermath of the 1960s re-popularization of the New Age, an increasing crisis of confidence in empirical claims to legitimacy within the Wiccan movement gave rise to alternative models of witch identity rooted in the analytical psychology of Carl Jung and, later on, in the appropriation of postmodern rhetoric and feminist discourse. One of the most significant ramifications of this shift was the increasing rejection of empirically-based historicity and interpretive structures, excluding those defined in terms of individual experience and aesthetics, in defining the legitimacy of rituals, symbols and foundation myths.⁶ Some of the most prominent examples of this eschewing of enlightenment ideals as a means of legitimating Neopagan beliefs include Margot Adler's comment that: "everything in the Craft, even the Great Metaphor of the Goddess, is still only a metaphor," and Starhawk's (Miriam Simos) remark that "I have spoken of the Goddess as psychological symbol and manifest reality. She is both. She exists and we create her."⁷ One may even encounter statements like Mary Ellen-Brown's observation that, "It does not matter if the first religion of most societies was Goddess worship or even if the Goddess had the characteristics that Neopaganism now ascribes to her . . ."⁸

Jim Wafer describes this abandonment of both empirical history and Jungian analytical psychology by large sectors of the Witchcraft/Wiccan and Neopagan movements as a shift from foundationalism to

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postmodernism, utilizing Jean Lyotard's description of postmodernism as "A recognition of the futility of seeking an absolute foundation for knowledge."⁹ In other words, this definition of Neopagan identity implies a denial of the existence of any transcendent or empirical teleological structure upon which to base a sense of self, historicity and identity.¹⁰ Consequently, the increasing permeation of the postmodern mood into conceptions of Witch/Wiccan identity, authenticity and historicity offers a model by which the new postmodern era can be navigated by a social movement without recourse to empirically-based claims to authority. As Dianne Purkiss notes:

The entirety of modern Witchcraft offers a unique opportunity to see a religion being made from readings and re-readings of texts and histories. No one person is in charge of the process, so modern Witchcraft is not a unified set of beliefs. Every interpretation is subject to reinvention by others.¹¹

According to this ideology, even the interpretive framework of Jung may be abandoned and the ultimate value in rituals, symbols and history for witches is defined by the experience of its practitioners and the meanings they ascribe to arbitrarily devised or adopted signs. Consequently the critical issue is the experiential influence of symbols and rituals on the practitioner, as opposed to any sense of historicity or cultural context.¹²

As postmodern approaches to cultural and ideological identity have come to prominence within the Neopagan movement, the extent to which witches have become willing to draw on the material culture of consumer capitalism has evolved accordingly. Increasingly, images and identities drawn from popular culture have come to dominate Wiccan identity formation and this trend has been paralleled by the development of forms of highly commodified Neopaganism; that is, items which are heavily linked to the New Age industry and the process of commodity exchange. The number of commercial books on Neopaganism, Witchcraft and Wicca, fee-charging courses on Witchcraft, magazines promoting Witchcraft and Neopaganism, movies and television programs featuring Neopagans, commodities spawned by and abetting the New Age industry, have increased exponentially since the 1980s, and the Witchcraft-related branch of the New Age industry and its influence in popular culture continues to grow. While books, conferences, and ritual tools have always been available for purchase, these forms of participation have been largely peripheral to the practice of Witchcraft as a religious system.

The commercial trajectory of modern Witchcraft has led to a situation, however, well illustrated by the research of Doug Ezzy, in which the opportunities for participation are increasingly dominated by the processes of commodity exchange.¹³ Consequently, the public profile of

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Witchcraft as a religious movement is becoming defined in terms of its manifestation in purchasable products and its representations in popular culture and the mass media. This shift in the structure by which Witchcraft can be accessed has significant ramifications for Witchcraft as a movement. First, the increased significance placed on purchasable items and symbols in defining Neopagan identity is indicative of broader changes in the socio-cultural basis of Witch/Wiccan identity formation and allows significant insight into the social structure of the Witchcraft revival. Second, it can be argued that implicit in the adoption of an aesthetically-based cultural eclecticism, as manifested in the purchase of items, is the embracing of an individualist, consumerist ideology rooted in actually buying cultural capital. This consumerist approach has significant ramifications for the future of Witchcraft as a whole.

Those who have embraced and promoted these approaches to Witchcraft—such as Dianne Purkiss, Mary Ellen-Brown, Jim Wafer, Starhawk, Zsuzsanna Budapest and Roberta James, among others¹⁴—have tended to hail the increasing adoption of eclecticism as liberation from the tyranny of the Enlightenment, and from the patriarchal and traditionalist approaches to religion, culture and identity that are perceived to be part of the Enlightenment episteme. Apart from the argument that a postmodern approach to Wiccan identity offers a means for marginalized sectors of society to construct their own identities and mentally break free of the presuppositions and ideologies that support forms of social control, there is also an argument that an individualist, eclectic approach to cultural consumption can bring a whole new variety of aesthetic experiences to religion. In other words, Witchcraft can represent a religion designed to suit the needs of the religious consumer, instead of coercing the individual to conform to an established ideological and cultural prescription. It could also be implied that a flexible approach to culture is necessary for any religious movement to accommodate new forms of social relationships, as traditional workplace and community identities disintegrate under the strain of a post-Fordist economy in which traditional forms of community structure are undermined by rapid transformation of the role of class, locality and workplace identity.¹⁵ Finally, it can be argued that a postmodern individualist and consumerist approach to religion can liberate religious expression from the constraints of traditionalism.¹⁶

According to many postmodern academic studies of Witchcraft and Neopaganism, this reification of cultural signifiers, supposedly bereft of universalist interpretative or ideological structures, is perceived to be an immensely liberating component of the Neopagan movement.¹⁷ By dissolving the link between fact and fiction, postmodern history and culture are believed to become the property of those who create them and thus challenge the epistemological dominance of technocratic, patriarchal, Enlightenment rationality. If culture can be divested of its essential

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meaning in relation to universalist ideologies of empirical history, tradition or national identity, then the consumption and reconstruction of these images can be perceived as a means of escaping these ideologies and the corresponding social formations and power relations on which they are based. This is ultimately a model of knowledge linked to the power of societal discourse that closely echoes Michel Foucault's postulate that power is intrinsically based and interrelated with corresponding epistemological structures that give it meaning and significance. Purkiss, in particular, perceives the adoption of postmodern approaches to culture by many witches, especially within the ecofeminist tradition, to represent a complete break with previously assumed relationships between experience, culture and history altogether.¹⁸ Furthermore, the close links between legitimacy in knowledge and power structures implies an inherent push towards social activism. She writes:

The valorization of historical creativity rather than historical authority no doubt explains why women have been able to be so prominent in modern Witchcraft; individual histories obviate the need to battle with institutional and social understandings of whose word goes, understandings that are invariably gendered.¹⁹

From this perspective, the postmodern pastiche allows history, culture and social identity to avoid the homogenizing effect of meta-narratives that define reality in accordance with dominant power structures and cultural formations in society; structures and formations that are inherently exclusive and restrictive of people's freedoms. The challenge to the domination of Enlightenment thought over the legitimacy of knowledge is thus a struggle for freedom.²⁰

In this context, the adoption of postmodern approaches to culture and historicity becomes not only a means of rationalizing a particular conception of history, but is also a statement of ideological identity and social values. The very fact that history is defined in accordance with alternative perspectives of historical legitimacy is a means of illustrating fundamental differences in the nature of Witchcraft epistemology and cultural structure in opposition to the linear, empirical perspectives of Enlightenment and traditional historiographical discourses of Witchcraft history. This perspective is illustrated by Dianne Purkiss' comment that:

Modern Witches' histories of Witchcraft present a much cleaner break with academic values than anything feminist historians have ever produced or wished to produce. Far more than Derrida or Foucault, popular history disregards the assumptions that make Enlightenment history possible.²¹

From this perspective, the Witchcraft revivals, particularly those branches that embrace cultural eclecticism, offer a means by which the

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totalizing project of patriarchal modernity can be overcome by new forms of socio-political activism that embrace the decentered nature of the postmodern condition and whose socio-political identity is rooted in the fragmented organic construction of self-created images, rather than in the quantifiable struggles of traditional politics.

This sense of a counter-modernity embedded in discourses of a Wiccan identity in conflict with an encroaching process of commodification is reflected in Heelas' argument that the New Age movement is marked by a division between a configuration of the New Age as a counter-modernity, and an interpretation of the New Age as harmonious with the processes of liberal capitalism. While a discussion of the boundaries between the New Age, Neopagan and Witchcraft movements is beyond the scope of this article, Heelas' model of the New Age has significant relevance in this discussion of commodification and the Witchcraft revival. Even more than the New Age movement, contemporary witches (and all Neopagans, for that matter) draw deeply on constructions of premodern religiosity for symbolic and cultural resonance, impact and legitimacy. Concurrent with this appropriation of the premodern, however, is a process of detraditionalization in which sources with established authority external to the community are eschewed in favor of a utilitarian approach to defining the self, spirituality and cultural identity. Consequently, in the era of late capitalism (to borrow Jameson's term), in which the past has become constructed as a nostalgia defined by a matrix of fragmented and commodified images and products, it is scarcely surprising that approaches to the self, historicity, spirituality and symbolism have followed suit. In this light, the intrusion of the realm of the commodity into the Witchcraft revival can be interpreted as an inevitable response to the condition of post-modernity and the collapse of traditional sources of ascribed identity and cultural forms.²²

This type of eclecticism, linked to a deeply ambivalent relationship to a consumer-driven identity, is suggestive of Jameson's model of history-turned-nostalgia in postmodern discourse. Using Jameson's theory of postmodern eclecticism and the prioritizing of aesthetics in defining historicity, the eclecticism and embracing of the realm of the commodity within Witchcraft revivalist histories ultimately creates a pastiche of symbols designed to evoke a feeling of pastness and ideological identity via the appropriation of symbols from mainstream consumer culture.²³ History is manifested as nostalgia for a feeling of permanence through the eclectic appropriation of images associated with a particular sense of ideological correlation, or opposition, to mainstream bourgeois social values. Nostalgia refers to the past as idealized and imagined through a combination of memory, metaphor, symbolism and desire, and as such is dependent on the irrecoverable nature of the actual past for its emotional impact and appeal. Nostalgia does not simply replicate memory,

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but rather by denying and degrading the present as it is symbolically constructed, brings an idealized past, as imagined from the present, into the site of immediacy, presence and authenticity. It is essentially a Romantic ideal; the past is replicated and reconstructed according to psycho-symbolic and metaphorical impact and thus serves as the means to reconstruct and redefine the relationship to the present with an eye to the future. History is thus redefined as an expression of consumable cultural identity or ideological fashion, manifested through a feeling of pastness rather than a sense of historicity or identification with an actual past.²⁴

Consequently, for Jameson, the abandonment of traditional historiography, empirically-based claims to links with the past, or even the illusion of antiquity created through ritual and mythologizing the past, becomes largely irrelevant. History is ultimately supplanted by a cyclical struggle of cannibalization and consumption that mines the past as a source of seemingly novel aesthetic experience. This process makes attempts at identifying genuine historicity problematic and thus requires new approaches to historico-cultural identity formation. As Jameson writes:

Faced with these immediate objects—our social, historical and existential present and the past as a referent—the incompatibility of a post-modern nostalgia with genuine historicity becomes dramatically apparent. This contradiction propels this mode into complex and new formal inventiveness, it being understood that the nostalgia was never a matter of some representation of historical content but instead approached the past via a stylistic connotation implying a sense of pastness.²⁵

Consequently, the most significant ramification of historicity becoming configured as a sense of aesthetics and nostalgia—as illustrated by the eclectic and commodified branches of the Witchcraft revivalist movements—is the subsuming of identity, politics and history to the all-pervading influence of culture as manifested in the production of consumable and purchasable symbols embedded in popular culture. In effect, this redefines and categorizes the witch identity in terms of appropriation of images defined through purchasable symbols. If history is defined through its aesthetic experience according to the psycho-cultural impact of its symbolism, then the reconstruction of historicity into an aesthetically-defined nostalgia for the past is intrinsically linked to the intrusion of commodification in the realm of the spiritual. The idealization of the aesthetic and its subsequent appropriation and reconstruction of symbols cannot occur in isolation from the economic, political and cultural formations from which they are appropriated and given meaning. Thus, the social and cultural structures within which the Witchcraft revival defines social and cultural significance becomes

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characterized by the dominant economic and socio-political structures from which these symbols are appropriated and reconstructed.

From this perspective, the idealization of a postmodernism defined as an unfettered cultural supermarket of aesthetic experience ignores the many problems raised by a wholesale adoption of cultural consumerism and the significant changes wrought by an adoption of commodification as the primary basis of cultural exchange. The Neopagan response to the increasing influence of popular culture has been extremely ambiguous. On the one hand, popularization and marketization have led to increased acceptance and proliferation of Neopagan ideals and cultural identity. On the other hand, the social, cultural and political character of the movement is also becoming transformed as previous forms of history, identity formation, cultural representations and spiritual expression are changed by the processes of detraditionalization, nostalgia, and the process of commodity exchange. This conflict between a Witchcraft configured as a form of Romanticist counter-modernity, and a Witchcraft configured as harmonious with the processes of commodification and the representations of the witch in consumer culture and the realm of commodity exchange, has increasingly come to dominate discourses of witchcraft identity and legitimacy.

THE NEOPAGAN RESPONSE TO COMMODIFICATION AND POSTMODERNISM

There are certainly Neopagans who openly embrace the popularization and marketization of Neopaganism and Witchcraft. Neopagan scholar and Fantasy writer, Dana Kramer-Rolls, argues that the consumerist approach normally attributed to the New Age movement has been enormously beneficial for the Neopagan movement in terms of public acceptance, ease of access to Neopagan materials and the resultant growth of the movement.

If it wasn't for the New Agers and White Lighters we wouldn't be finding Tarot decks at Barnes and Noble and aromatherapy candles at Target. And a lot of the people buying these things on the mass market are also becoming a whole lot more open to any sort of non-Judeo-Christian (and now we should add Islamic) theological paradigm (one big god who demands submission).²⁶

Similarly, some Neopagan writers argue that attitudes to Witchcraft that deny material gain are in fact a corruption caused by the influence of Judeo-Christian belief upon Pagan ideals.²⁷ From this perspective, the pursuit of self-aggrandizement as a significant component of one's spiritual life—though not at the expense of others or through dishonest practices—is perceived to be an entirely legitimate objective in the practice

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of Neopaganism. Consequently, the adoption of a consumerist ideology is perceived in some Neopagan circles to be entirely compatible with Neopagan belief. An example of this is Neopagan writer D. J. Conway's claim that:

[s]ome schools of Witchcraft will tell you that doing magic for financial benefit is selfish and wrong. This is an erroneous idea held over from Judeo-Christian beliefs and has nothing whatsoever to do with ritual magic and spellworking. The truth is, if you cannot manifest for yourself, you have little chance of manifesting for others.²⁸

It is worth noting that this approach to wealth is far from universally accepted within the Neopagan movement. Scott Cunningham for example in *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*, gives this stern warning against using the practice or teaching of Witchcraft for financial benefit: "It is unwise to accept money for the use of the power, for it quickly controls its taker. Be not as those from other religions."²⁹

The idealization inherent in a vision of postmodernism defined as an unfettered cultural supermarket of aesthetic experience, ignores the many problems raised by a wholesale adoption of cultural consumerism and the significant changes wrought by an adoption of commodification as the primary basis of cultural exchange. The Neopagan response to the increasing influence of popular culture has been extremely ambiguous. While popularization and marketization have led to increased acceptance and proliferation of their ideals and cultural identity, they have also transformed the social, cultural and political character of the movement. As Neopagan author Lucie duFresne comments:

Witchcraft is marketed through *Buffy*, *Charmed*, *Sabrina*, *Blair Witch*, *Llewellyn* and even cheesy little books at the supermarket on love spells. Some of these ideas are interesting, even realistic, while others at best rival the story lines and plots of pornographic cinema with their shallow treatment of the subject and two-dimensional characters. When does this cease to be a journey for knowledge and degenerate into pure entertainment and narcissistic hedonism? Does our embracing of popular culture really strengthen our movement and public acceptance of Witchcraft or does it eat away at the edges of our credibility and draw others to the community for the wrong reason?³⁰

While the intrusion of the realm of the commodity into the Witchcraft revival, and models of witch identity can be interpreted as a natural response to the condition of postmodernity and the prioritizing of personal aesthetics over traditional and empirical forms of identity formation and historical legitimacy, it has had significant consequences for the community structure and social cohesion of the movement. According to research conducted by Doug Ezzy, one of the most significant

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aspects of the increased influence of commodification in the Neopagan movement is the changing structure of social relationships and sense of community that are concomitant with the embracing of an individualist and consumption-based approach to cultural property. Contrary to the postmodern argument that the consumption of symbols, rituals and cultural artifacts is arbitrary beyond the meaning given to them by the consumer, the process by which culture is appropriated implies an array of social and political relationships. Drawing heavily on the work of anthropologists C. A. Gregory and Marcel Mauss, Ezzy argues that the perceiving of cultural resources as objects of consumption has very different socio-economic implications from a perception that cultural property is to be shared by a community or exchanged as a gift.³¹

Apart from the influence of the profit motive and fashion in defining the value of cultural artifacts and symbols used to formulate witch identity, there is a fundamentally different set of social relationships embedded in a community relationship defined by commodity exchange than there is in a community relationship based upon gifts or resources communally distributed. In particular, gifts imply a social connection that is reminiscent of family or *Gemeinschaft* (community structure), and is community-oriented in character. By contrast, a commodity transaction is performed between self-interested and independent individuals and there are few or no enduring links or obligations between them.³² C. A. Gregory observes:

Commodity exchange establishes a relationship between the objects exchanged, whereas gift exchange establishes a relationship between the subjects. In other words, commodity exchange is a price forming process, a system of purchase and sale. Gift exchange is not. As Mauss noted, they replace our system of sale and purchase with one of gifts and return gifts. With gift exchange it is wrong to speak of alienation, for these things are loaned rather than sold and ceded. An inalienable thing that is given away must be returned. Thus a gift creates a debt that has to be repaid.³³

The approach to cultural eclecticism practiced by postmodern-styled Wiccan practitioners characterizes culture, rituals and artifacts as commodities. There is little or no relationship between the source of the material consumed, and the recipient who uses and interprets the material. The connection between the source of the material and the consumer is dissolved upon completion of the transaction. When there is no overarching structure to culture, ideology and identity formation, then culture fits within the realm of the commodity. By contrast, objects that are viewed either as gifts or as belonging collectively to the community, are inalienable from the relationship between the source of the material and the recipient. Objects passed on as gifts or shared community resources, imply a moral and ethical obligation to the source material

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and a shared bond symbolized by the exchange. If something is regarded as an object to be consumed, then that implies that the principles of market exchange are appropriate in regulating its production, exchange, access, enjoyment and cultural significance. If moral principles, ethical ideals or social affiliations suggest that a process other than market exchange and consumption should regulate these objects, then it can be argued that their significance implies more than mere commodity exchange.³⁴

The exchange of objects, information, rituals and symbols represents the socio-political structure in which they originate. Material exchanged as a commodity implies the social relationship of commodity exchange and consumer capitalism, whereas that which is exchanged as a gift or joint resource implies a sense of shared community. These differences are important for the socio-political structure of Neopaganism, and the significance of its rituals, artifacts, symbolism and other cultural resources. In the model of traditionalist Witchcraft, skills and knowledge are transferable as part of a personal relationship between a priest/priestess and student. An individual has a role in a broader, close-knit witch community. This is an exchange of knowledge passed on through an established social structure and is deeply based in personal relationships and reciprocal obligations. The exchange of knowledge and culture involves the creation of a personal, and unbreakable, connection between the individual and the coven (or solitary witch) that is part of a deeper structure of social relationships. Knowledge and culture are not arbitrarily exchanged but are directly connected to a particular structure of social relationships.³⁵

The rise of commodified Witchcraft and the adoption of an eclecticism based in the rhetoric of cultural consumerism has led to increasing social disruption between differing sectors of the Witchcraft movement over questions of authenticity, ideology, authority and publicity. This is a particularly important issue when some in the Witchcraft movement, particularly traditionalist and antiquarian Neopagans, feel that their public identity is becoming subverted and dominated by higher profile branches with better access to the media and greater input into mainstream representations through the New Age and Witchcraft industry.³⁶ The problem of who speaks and represents a movement as diverse and ideologically heterogeneous as Neopaganism becomes especially vexing when almost all parts of the movement claim to be pluralist and supportive of religious diversity. Sian Reid notes this problem:

Clearly, the decentralized nature of Neopaganism in general acts as a crucible for conflict. However, the ideology of Neopagan Witchcraft is such that conflict "should" not occur, because a whole range of beliefs and practices are accepted as valid and legitimate. Individuals are supposed to develop their own understanding of the meaning of their

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practice, and come to the conclusions about appropriate morality and ways of "being" in the world.³⁷

The higher profile nature of major Neopagan and Witchcraft groups and authors allied to large publishers and New Age businesses is often perceived to dominate public perceptions of the movement. Apart from increased input into the milieu of popular culture through film, novels, television and marketing, major media outlets frequently use these higher profile organizations as their source of Witchcraft culture and ideology. The result is that their highly marketable version of the Craft is presented as the true or legitimate version of Neopaganism, usually without acknowledging that alternative perspectives exist.³⁸

To a large extent these conflicts revolve around the issue of legitimacy and authenticity of the various traditions of Witchcraft beliefs and practices. While some branches have fully adopted and accepted postmodern-styled ideologies of eclecticism, some link Neopaganism to a particular political project, some argue that belief and ritual should have an empirically verifiable historical heritage, and others assert the importance of initiation and lineage to a recognized tradition, such as Gardnerian or Alexandrian Witchcraft. These differences can disrupt and obfuscate the sense of a witch community. Reid essentially sees this problem as a conflict between the eclectic and traditionalist branches of the movement, particularly since eclectic and commodified approaches to Witchcraft identity are on the rise and increasing exponentially compared with the more static numbers of traditionalists.³⁹

The development of a sense of community requires a loci or sense of focus around which a communal identity is shared. This sense of focus can have a social, economic, political, religious or ritual basis, or a combination of all or any of them. Historically, what has linked the diverse branches of the Witchcraft/Wiccan movement together is a shared embracing of the Romantic antimodernist caricature of Enlightenment modernity and Christianity. However, the intrusion of the realm of the commodity into constructions of Witchcraft identity and community structure, has led to increasing conflicts between popularist consumer-driven models of Witchcraft identity and Witchcraft configured as a symbolic expression of counter-modernity, in which the image of the persecuted but powerfully subversive witch forms an identifiable and empowering symbol in opposition to the dominant cultural matrix of capitalist and patriarchal modernity.

CONCLUSION

While the impact of commodification and cultural consumerism may well have led to the proliferation of choice in identity formation and symbolic interpretation for Wiccans and Neopagans, it most certainly has not

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created a Neopaganism that is a religion of free and unfettered belief. A religion based in the institutions and ideology of market exchange and socio-cultural formations of popular consumer culture is intrinsically shaped and oriented by its relationship to the broader context of cultural commodification. Consequently, the embracing of consumerist eclecticism does not simply free Neopaganism from authoritarian political structures, kinship systems of familial control or hierarchical traditionalism. On the contrary, a religious system based in the process of market exchange is intensely shaped by the values, priorities and ideological configuration of the secular institutions of the broader society within which it is founded.⁴⁰ This is not to claim that Wiccan eclecticism, based in an ideology of aesthetic cultural consumerism, necessarily implies an ideological alliance with free market capitalist ideology. But claims that Neopaganism is inherently linked to a liberation from the alienating and destructive aspects of a modernity characterized by patriarchy, destruction of the natural world and the objectifying gaze of science, are much more ambiguous and circumspect than may at first appear.

The danger, in terms of the longevity and continued social and political relevance of a countercultural religious movement such as Neopaganism, is that after its initial rise to cultural prominence it can become incorporated within the structure of the market and co-opted back into the dominant socio-cultural order as a niche market based on fashion and consumer-driven identity.⁴¹ This is exacerbated by the fact that the images that defined the countercultural identity were consumed and reconstructed according to an ideology that interprets the role of culture as a consumable aesthetic commodity evaluated according to its popularity and perceived psycho-cultural impact. As the cultural artifacts and symbols associated with Neopaganism increasingly become defined by their role in niche marketing and popular culture, the struggle to maintain a sense of common purpose and socio-political and cultural identity will increasingly come to the forefront of conflicts within the movement.

Neopaganism is a movement which is intrinsically defined by the inter-relationship of Romanticist cultural and political themes within the broader current of an Enlightenment-dominated construction of Western modernity. Consequently, the extent to which images of Witchcraft move into the realm of K-Mart and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* cannot help but challenge the claims to cultural authenticity and historical/ideological legitimacy of a loosely-affiliated movement which is symbolically dependant upon perceived links to the past and a non-hierarchical community structure. In a society where Western modernity is increasingly becoming dominated by the commodifying effects of late capitalism, the issues raised by the changing role of culture and identity will continue to shape the development of Witchcraft communities in the foreseeable future.

ENDNOTES

¹ Taken from the web page of prominent Neopagan writer and musician, Fiona Horne, the lead singer of the band Def FX, who is the author of several Neopagan texts aimed at twelve- to seventeen-year-old women. <<http://www.fionahorne.com/merchandise/kit.htm>>, accessed 15 March 2002; now at <<http://www.fionahorne.com/wikidwitch/info/>>, accessed 3 March 2005.

² Whilst the terms Witchcraft, Neopagan and Wicca are closely related and often used interchangeably, I am utilizing Witchcraft to refer to representations of Paganism associated in the past with the witch hunts of the later Middle Ages and early modern period. My use of Wicca refers to those branches which developed after the formation of Gardnerian and Alexandrian Wiccan movements in the 1950s and 1960s. I am using the term Neopagan to refer more broadly to the contemporary Pagan revival which includes Witchcraft and Wiccan-oriented groups, as well as other variations of Pagan practice and traditions.

³ American Booksellers Association website, <<http://news.bookweb.org/news/>>, accessed 10 February 2001; site has changed since initial date of access.

⁴ The Australian version of *Witchcraft* magazine has a print run of approximately 16,000 per month, according to Christine Froebel, Editor and Advertising Manager, in a personal communication.

⁵ Fredrik Jameson, *Post-Modernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁶ David Waldron, "Post-modernism and Witchcraft History" *The Pomegranate: Journal of Neo-Pagan Thought* 15 (2001): 16–22; D. Waldron and S. Waldron, "Jung and the neo-Pagan Movement" *Quadrant: The Journal of the C. G. Jung Foundation for Analytical Psychology* 34, no. 1 (Summer 2004); David Waldron, "Jung and the Neopagan Movement," *Brownflower* <<http://www.brownflower.com/essays/jung-neopagan.html>>, accessed 3 March 2005.

⁷ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance: Tenth Anniversary Edition* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 95.

⁸ Mary Ellen-Brown, ed., *Neopaganism: A Search for Religious Alternatives* (Bloomington: Indiana University Women's Studies Program, 1988), 106–8.

⁹ Jim Wafer, "Gay and Lesbian Alternative Religious Movements: Do You Have to Have Foundations Before You Can Rock Them," paper given at the Annual Conference of the Australian Anthropological Society, Alternative Culture Panel, University of New South Wales, 10 July 1999, 3. Wafer is referring to Lyotard's famous definition in his ground-breaking work *The Post-Modern Condition*. "I will use the term modern to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a meta-discourse making explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectic of the spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject or the creation of wealth." Post modernity, in contrast, is defined as "an incredulity towards meta-narratives." Jean Lyotard, *The Post-Modern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxii–xxiv.

¹⁰ Alex Callinicos, *Against Post-Modernism* (London: Polity Press, 1989), 3.

¹¹ Dianne Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth Century Interpretations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 52.

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¹² Michael York, "Defining Paganism" *The Pomegranate: Journal of Neo-Pagan Thought* 11 (2000): 7.

¹³ Doug Ezzy, "The Commodification of Witchcraft," *Australian Religious Studies* 14, no. 1 (1998): 32.

¹⁴ Roberta James, *Spirit Shifts: Erlebnis, Physics and the Persuasive Passionate Minutiae of Women's Spirituality Rituals*, paper given at the Annual Conference of the Australian Anthropological Society, University of New South Wales, 11 July 1999; Zsuzsanna Budapest, *The Holy Women's Book of Mysteries* (Oakland: Wingbow Press, 1989); Wafer, "Gay and Lesbian Alternative Religious Movements"; Purkiss, *The Witch in History*; Ellen-Brown, *Neo-Paganism*; Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*.

¹⁵ Ezzy, "The Commodification of Witchcraft," 33; Paul Heelas, "The New Age in Cultural Context," *Religion*, 23 (1993): 106–7; Paul Heelas *The New Age Movement* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), 75; David Lyon, *Jesus in Disneyland: Religion in Post-Modern Times* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 75. Post-Fordism refers to the changing work environment of the post-1980s era in which an increasingly significant portion of the working population is engaged in transitory temporary positions rather than long-term stable positions linked to a locality and tradition. The impact of a rapidly-changing work and economic structure also has a significant number of economic, social, and cultural correlates, some of which are discussed here. For more on the impact of post-Fordism and contemporary society, see Nick Heffernan, *Capital, Class, and Technology in Contemporary American Culture: Projecting Post-Fordism* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), 1–10.

¹⁶ Ezzy, "The Commodification of Witchcraft," 33; R. Moore, *Selling God: American Religions in the Market Place of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 272.

¹⁷ See, for example, James, Budapest, Wafer, and others noted above.

¹⁸ Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 40.

¹⁹ Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 40.

²⁰ David Harvey, *The Condition of Post-Modernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell Press, 1990).

²¹ Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 52.

²² Heelas, "The New Age in a Cultural Context," 104–5.

²³ It is worth noting that Jameson's model of postmodernism being a product of late capitalism is not uncontested. Linda Hutcheon, for example, argues that Jameson ignores the cultural specificity of postmodernism by equating it with the phenomena of late capitalism and thus equating it with contemporaneity. She also argues that the loss of historicity is a product of the medium used to present the past, rather than postmodernism. However, this critique is as much a problem caused by slippage in the meanings ascribed to the term postmodernism as it is a critique of Jameson's argument. Furthermore, there is little evidence that the Neopagan movement is representative of postmodernism defined as "recognition of the futility of seeking an absolute grounding for knowledge," in Hutcheon's words. Rather, as has been discussed, the growth of eclecticism within the Neopagan movement is better defined as a continuation of the Romantic episteme within the context of a trajectory of Western modernity increasingly dominated by the sphere of commodification. For more information

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- on critiques of Jameson's model of the postmodern see, Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Post-Modernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 1987); Linda Hutcheon, *Irony, Nostalgia and the Post-Modern*, <<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.html>>, accessed 3 March 2005; Anne Friedberg, "Cinema and the Post-modern Condition," *Post Modern Language Association* 106 (1991): 3.
- ²⁴ Jameson, *Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 19.
- ²⁵ Jameson, *Postmodernism and the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, 19.
- ²⁶ Dana Kramer-Rolls, personal communication, Natrel email list, 17 May 2002.
- ²⁷ Starhawk, *The Spiral Dance*, 124.
- ²⁸ D. J. Conway, *Celtic Magic* (New York: Llewellyn Press, 1990), 10.
- ²⁹ Scott Cunningham, *Wicca: A Guide for the Solitary Practitioner* (New York: Llewellyn Press, 1988), 145.
- ³⁰ Lucie duFresne, personal communication, Natrel email list, 23 April, 2002.
- ³¹ Ezzy, "The Commodification of Witchcraft," 34-35.
- ³² C. A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London: Academic Press, 1982), 10-15; Marcel Maus, *The Gift* (London: Routledge, 1974), 9-10, 62.
- ³³ Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities*, 19.
- ³⁴ E. Anderson, "Is Women's Labour a Commodity," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 19 (1990): 72.
- ³⁵ Ezzy, "The Commodification of Witchcraft," 33-35.
- ³⁶ Sian Reid, "Witch Wars: Factors Contributing to Conflict in Canadian Neopagan Communities," *Pomegranate* 11 (February 2000): 10-21.
- ³⁷ Reid, "Witch Wars," 14.
- ³⁸ Kevin Marron, *Witches, Pagans and Magic in the New Age* (Toronto: Seal Books, 1989), 94.
- ³⁹ Reid, "Witch Wars," 18-19.
- ⁴⁰ P. Hanegraff, "New Age Spiritualities as Secular Religion," *Social Compass* 46 (1999): 148.
- ⁴¹ Dick Hebdidge, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Methuen, 1981), 92-100.