

My Specific Form of Disorientation

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“Nonna stared at the figurines silhouetted against the wall: Jesus, with his pink right hand catching the Bronx sunlight in the middle of a blessing; Saint Francis, his chipped brown arms in the air ready to receive the landing of the birds; Saint Joseph, holding his staff and staring at Nonna. Upon the bed they had some new life and their own silent language.”

Joseph Papaleo, *Italian Stories*

“To put it paradoxically, what matters most in a human life may in some sense be one’s specific form of *disorientation*, the idiosyncratic way in which one’s approach to and movement through the world is ‘distorted.’”

Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*

I had gone with some friends from high school to see the preview of an off-Broadway play about a New York City couple struggling with guilt over their son’s recent suicide. It was the second day of spring break 1972 in my first year at college in New England. My parents had fought fiercely against my leaving the Bronx. “What can you do in a dorm that you can’t do at home,” my father asked me when I was pleading with him and my mother to let me go. My father had dropped out of school in the sixth grade to support his mother and younger brother after his father died suddenly. My visit home had begun poorly. A girl from my dorm who I had a crush on dropped me off in the Bronx on the way down from Connecticut to her family’s Park Avenue apartment and leaning next to her against the car while we waited for my mother to return from the beauty parlor the old neighborhood suddenly seemed strange, shabby and abandoned, and my neighbors, whose stories I had been telling this girl for months by way of charming her, shuffled by, much older and frailer now than when I last saw them, not recognizing me. My mother,

when she got back, looked waxen to me, her lipstick too red, her hair like a lacquered wig, and her cheeks overly bright with rouge. The girl who drove me down declined my mother's invitation to come in for lunch and soon after departed for Manhattan, leaving me standing on the sidewalk alone beside my mother. At dinner that first night home one of my relatives, furiously crushing out her cigarette, called me a "big shot" after I had made some comment about a psychology class I was taking. She did not mean it as a compliment.

The play was the next day. The couple comes on stage lugging their suitcases. Their car has broken down on the highway en route to New England, we learn, and they have taken refuge from the snowstorm raging outside in what seems to be an empty house. They put their luggage down, shivering, and brush snow from their heavy coats. Sniping at each other, veering between rage and grief, they begin to explore, and gradually they realize the house is haunted. A family of ghosts, mother, father, and two small children, moves noisily through the rooms and up and down the stairs. I think this is where act one ended. The rest of the play is about the interactions between the ghosts and the living people. But then towards the end there is a surprise: the couple from New York turn out to be the ghosts—they had been killed in a car crash on the highway before the action of the play starts—and the ghosts are actually the people whose house it is.

This plot twist unsettled me at the time, which is why this otherwise forgettable play has lingered in memory all these years. The ontological switch—between the living and the dead, the real and the spectral—resonated with my sense already of the world having been turned inside out that first year of college. For the rest of that visit home I felt as I did at my Sicilian grandmother's wake and funeral earlier in the same year. It

was as if I had been lifted out of ordinary space and time and was seeing my mother and father, aunts and uncles, suddenly from a great distance. But what especially startled me in those days was that I had begun to see myself from a great distance too. Coming when it did, the play has taken on the status of an augury for me, a presaging of the central existential and intellectual dilemma of my life as a scholar of religion.

The world I had taken unquestioningly as real—as really there as the couple in the play assumed themselves to be, as real as my hands and feet—was the Italian American Catholic working-class north Bronx. Here I recognized and was recognized by almost everyone; everyone’s personal qualities were endlessly picked over in rounds of conversation on the streets, in the parish, and at kitchen tables, in Italian or some mix of English and Italian (in its various dialects), and then fixed in nicknames we imposed on ourselves like curses. Things were accomplished relationally, face-to-face, in an ever-expanding web of favors asked for, favors received, and favors owed, all recorded with precision on the running neighborhood balance sheet. What was not done this way was suspect. Talking was essential and a person’s quality was judged on the basis of how well he or she did in conversation on public occasions.

This world was formed as well by the supernatural realism of modern devotional Catholicism, a religious imaginary as material and as intersubjective as our everyday lives. Jesus was really present in the Host (the nuns drilled it into me that if I touched it with my teeth the wafer would bleed in my mouth); the Blessed Mother appeared to children (she had appeared in the Bronx on the Grand Concourse in 1948 to a little Italian American boy and I longed for her to appear to me too); the saints crowded around; and I

made space at my kindergarten desk for my guardian angel. Sin was real but its gravity was assessed in relation to family bonds and obligations. That I left for college was much more of a fault in this community than if I had been a criminal.

A dark vein of violence ran through all of this, erupting in families, on the streets against Jews, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans, but among us too, in church and school, between children and priests, nuns and children, and in the minds and souls of my relatives and neighbors. I came out into the schoolyard alongside the church one afternoon when the sky was the color of dirty water and found six of my classmates urinating on a little boy who was often the victim of the fury that circulated mindlessly through our days. This violence was the product of many things: of changing hierarchies at work and in the family (my Sicilian uncles who worked in sales in Manhattan despised the men ahead of them, nearly always Irish Catholics); alcohol abuse; the prevalent practice of disciplining children by beating and shaming them; and the troubled inheritances of the immigrant past. On Good Fridays I kissed the wounds of Jesus crucified; I knelt alongside my Tuscan grandmother as she prayed to the Neapolitan holy man, Padre (now Santo) Pio da Pietrelcina, who bled from wounds in his body like Christ's on the cross; and on every day the saints arrayed around the church in scalloped niches displayed their open wounds for all of us to see.

It is not accurate to call this "pre-modern," because the life courses of my relatives and neighbors had been fundamentally shaped by the social and economic facts of the modern world. "Primitive" will not do either (although it has been proposed: see below). I am attentive to the anti-Catholic origins of almost all the available descriptive terms. But some word is needed to mark the difference between my childhood reality from what

I encountered when I left it and the best I can do here is to call the Catholic working class Italian American Bronx “traditional,” which is the word I will use for the rest of this chapter.

The realness of this world faded the further north I went on I-95 towards New England and by the time I crossed beneath the great stone archway at the entrance to my college it had disappeared. I had never met a Protestant before, never met anyone who did not have a parent or grandparent from another country, or anyone from the American upper class (as opposed to prosperous local lawyers and doctors), and most of them had never met someone from the working-class Italian Catholic Bronx either. It seemed that my identity thinned out too the further north I went. It was troubling and exciting to find myself in an environment where I was a stranger, nearly as troubling and exciting as it was to find myself a stranger back in the Bronx.

There was little talk about social class in the study of religion in those days (there is not much today either for that matter), no mention of the working-class (who were well on their way at this juncture in American social and intellectual history to being mocked and dismissed as “hard-hats”), and little about Catholicism (St. Thomas Aquinas, certainly, but not kissing the purple wounds on the body of Christ). These two absences, of a way of life (working class) and a way of being religious (devotional Catholicism), reinforced each other in modern American society and in the study of religion alike. They were created together and created each other.

The founding theorists of the science of religion, none of whom were Catholic, established normative hierarchies of religious belief and practice that they said had

developed and evolved over time and in different parts of the world. The lower forms of religion were identified by their materialism (the idea that there was power in things like relics and rosaries); ritualism; compulsion (practitioners did not freely choose these religions, but were born into them); pragmatism (or magic, the manipulation of objects to get things done); irrationality and emotionalism; and amorality if not actual immorality.¹ The higher religions (modern liberal Christianity being the highest, on the other hand, were non-materialistic, ethical, a matter of the mind not the body, and addressed to a God who was invisible, absent, and in some theologies, departed once and for all. High and low religions corresponded to certain populations (which is what made this such an effective calculus for social domination): to the lower religions belonged people of color, the poor and working-class, women, children, “primitives,” and Catholics, who had been the prototype of baser forms of religion since the later sixteenth century. The higher religions were the province of prosperous, educated, and civilized adult white Protestants. The ideologies of class, race, gender and age reinforced and were in this way sanctified by religious morphology. Material religion and the sweaty and dark bodies of practitioners were aligned; the gods were present to people whose bodies were figured as overly present in the social world too.²

Levels of religion and social class share a relationship with temporality as well in this schema. Modern people are expected to grow out of “primitive” forms of religious practice, indeed, this is one of the key markers of the modern; class, which almost always means “lower class,” is meant to be risen up from, succeeded out of. The enervation of familiar realities that I experienced already as a first year college student was actually the point of it all. My former not-middle-class identity was *supposed* to be fading away,

which is what my relatives feared, that by leaving the Bronx I was jumping from my social class (“big shot”) and abandoning my faith. This is what I could do in a dorm room that I could not do at home.

I went to a secular college, but as it happened, because of social and religious developments in American Catholicism in these years after the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), the same evaluative hierarchy of ways of being and ways of being religious had been adopted in Catholic intellectual contexts. I discovered this in my senior year of college when I arranged to take a reading course on contemporary Catholicism in the United States.

According to the standard narrative of late 20th century American Catholicism, after the Second World War Catholics in the United States became fully American. Catholic veterans took advantage of the G.I. Bill to enroll in record numbers in Catholic colleges and professional schools (my generation made the further move to secular higher education); many more were marrying outside their ethnic communities than before the war; they had moved out of the urban core to the suburbs; and they were becoming more prosperous and securely middle class. Their religious practices kept pace with these changes. The modernizing imperatives of the Second Vatican Council ratified a process already underway in U.S. Catholicism (I am still within the dominant narrative), a slow but steady movement towards a more recognizably modern (see above) religious practice. Protestant America gives way in this era to a tripartite nation of Protestants, Catholics and Jews. Socially, religiously, politically, and economically, Catholics had at last become indistinguishable from other Americans. Catholics had made it (or at least the

men ahead of my uncles on Madison Avenue had made it)! In this way the standard narrative of post-Council Catholicism managed to eliminate the working class and devotional practice from contemporary Catholicism.³

A close friend and colleague at Yale University warned me when I was debating among various dissertation possibilities that if I chose to work on Italian Harlem, rather than on Anthony Benezet and eighteenth century Quaker abolitionism around the North Atlantic, as I was contemplating, my career would be stillborn. Everyone will assume that a dissertation on Italian Catholics is an act of filial piety, he said. They will accuse you of lacking the objectivity and critical distance required by scholarship, he warned. Instead of history and religious studies I would be writing autobiography in an academic environment in which even the use of “I” was discouraged. I will have revealed myself as having never left the Bronx.

But that was then and this is now. We scholars of religion and society have become much more self-critical of such normative assumptions and teleology. The traditional/modern distinction, in all its variations—primitive/civilized; religious/secular, pre-modern/modern, South/North, fundamentalist/modernist, and so on—has lost much of its theoretical force in the study of religion and culture. The notion of the “modern” itself has been destabilized and pluralized. We speak now of “multiple” and “alternative” modernities; of the modern as “braided” with the other-than-modern; we say that the modern is “out of joint with itself”; or even that “we have never been modern.”

Modernity is laced through and through with “traditional” worlds and the boundary between traditional and modern has become porous.⁴

It is intriguing to speculate that if I had had access to this language of the multiple modern back in 1972 I might not have been faced with such stark conceptual and personal choices. Destabilizing perspectives on the modern might have enabled me to see working class devotional Catholicism, in all its material and visual abundance, its practices of the presence of God, the Virgin Mary, and the company of saints, and its disciplining of mind and body, as an alternative modernity. But there are two problems with this suggestion of how the idea of the multiple modern might have helped me with my particular existential and intellectual dilemma.

First, the normative scales of being and knowing that constituted the authority and historical inevitability of the modern persist in all domains of contemporary life and retain their full cultural capital. Intellectual work is still more highly esteemed than manual labor, more valued than “flipping burgers,” this era’s analogue to the “hard-hat.” More attention is paid to middle class than to working class religious practice, or perhaps it is more accurate to say that in this neoliberal time the assumption is that all religious practitioners, or at least all those who are socially and intellectually relevant, are middle class, aspire to be middle class, or are potentially middle class. Such assumptions erased the differences and inequalities of social class. Neoliberal ideology reauthorized the familiar hierarchies: the cosmopolitan over the local, the individual over the community, and mind (in the global North) over bodies (of workers in the global South and in various sectors of the American economy). In psychological and religious terms, the criteria for

maturity, personal growth, and mental wellbeing remain those of the normative modern. Who is saner, more mature, or more reasonable: a young white collar worker, whose religion, if any, is soberly mainline, or a young working class Pentecostal who speaks in tongues, jumps up and down during church service, and looks to the Holy Spirit for guidance in how to live?

So while it is true that there is a “plurality of imaginary worlds” in contemporary global culture, of different ways of being and imagining, these disparate realities are not equal, and moving from one to the other provokes anxiety and disorientation. Which world is emergent and which is disappearing or dead? Whose lives are real in the present moment and whose seemingly real lives have been scoured out by time and are still around only because everyone else has forgotten them? Talk of the multiple modern ought not to obscure the social, psychological, religious, and existential challenges confronted by men and women who move back and forth from the traditional to the modern along various highways, oceans, and borders. I have heard stories like mine from Egyptian graduate students in religious studies, from the children of Korean and Iranian immigrants in my classes, and from colleagues from Pakistan, Mexico, and the Philippines, and I have heard them as well from working class and rural American students who are the first in their families to go to college, from the children and grandchildren of migrants and immigrants from South and East Asia and the Caribbean, and from Southern Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Mormons. Nor is it surprising that the dilemma of being and knowing I have been describing often happens at university, which is the gateway to the normative modern for many people from traditional societies. The modern is, as one theorist puts it, “unevenly experienced,” but

this unevenness has consequences. Nomic disorientation is a widely shared predicament of the modern world, especially among those (of us) who must “imagine the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born,” among those of us whom come from the other-than-modern.⁵

The second problem with the idea of a fissured but inclusive modernity of plural ontologies is the obverse of the first. To develop this I have to reverse my position. It has always seemed to me a sleight of nomenclatural hand to gather under the rubric of “modernity,” even with the qualifier “multiple,” the political and religious cultures from which the project of the modern aimed to liberate human beings and societies. Traditional religions were not partners of the modern, not in any way that “modern” retains its specific history. The various goods of modernity—human rights; freedom of thought and expression; gender equality; the rule of law; the public accountability of political and religious leaders; self-determination in matters of one’s body, including reproduction and sexuality; democracy and civic responsibility; critical analytical methods, to name a few—were (and continue to be) hard won against the implacable opposition religious orthodoxies.

The modern arose on “piles of bones,” in Voltaire’s grim phrase, ossuaries heaped up by protracted internecine religious violence and by the harassment of critics of traditional religion and culture.⁶ The earliest advocates of the modern were exquisitely mindful of the dangers traditional religion posed to individual freedoms and social peace, especially in alliance with absolute rulers. These thinkers had a robust awareness of the harm religions had done and of which they were capable. This is not to absolve the modern of hypocrisy or of its own horrors. As my first objection to the idea of the

“multiple modern” ought to have made clear, it is certainly not to accept the insistence of European and North American modernity on itself as the singular way of life all human history has been aiming towards for centuries. The modern is indeed multiply fissured. Religious figures and institutions sometimes stood in courageous and necessary opposition to the excesses of the modern, moreover, and in some cases contributed to its finer achievements. Hybrid forms of religious practice and imagination developed among some individuals and in particular communities (I am thinking here of Solomon Schechter and Conservative Judaism, for example). But I do mean to question the generally positive valence of modernity framed as a dynamic compound of plural ontologies and religious imaginaries and the implicit endorsement of anti-modern religious idioms that goes with it. I also want to recall that the modern was a positive and revolutionary project that advanced a set of particular ideals that remain valuable and worthy, however often moderns themselves betrayed them. To refer to contemporary conservative Catholicism, for example, as an alternative modernity without careful historical qualification, a precise attention to difference, and a lot of irony is to annul a long and contentious history. What is incommensurable between traditional, religiously authorized ways of being in the world and the modern cannot be erased by the insistence on plurality. To insist on this difference, as I am doing, is to keep in view the challenges of mind and heart confronted by those who move from the traditional to the modern.

By the time I was eighteen, I knew I had to get out of the Bronx. It was my choice to leave. I was finding the place claustrophobic and stultifying. The reliance on face-to-face transactions for social business engendered an indulgent and resigned attitude towards

corruption and contempt for due process and the rules of civil society. There was aggressive suspicion toward people from outside the neighborhood, who were treated badly when they appeared on our streets, especially African Americans and Puerto Ricans. A pervasive anti-Semitism existed alongside the necessary toleration of Jews and Italian Catholics for each other in the neighborhood. There was also an ugly meanness towards men and women and children from the neighborhood who diverged from local norms or who stood out from the rest in some way. The parents of the boy being pissed on in the churchyard were divorced, at a time when very few Catholics were because the church absolutely forbade it. Nothing was ever heard about this boy's father. His mother showed up at school in high heels and fashionable clothing to complain about the violence against her son, leaving behind her in the hallways a delicious fragrance of flowers and vanilla, but the nuns, who did not like it that she was divorced or that she was so well-dressed and smelled so voluptuously, were utterly unsympathetic to her, so the tormenting of her son went on and on within plain sight of the nuns and priests. There was little restraint on what adults did or said to children. There was no language to talk about pain and terror other than the religious one of sacrifice, suffering, and grace. My aunt's comment that ninety cents and my doctorate from Yale (received a decade after that first spring away) would get me a ride on the subway gave voice to the smoldering resentments and anxieties in the neighborhood and between generations. The neighborhood reviled ambition and belittled achievement.

My nickname was "king of the road" because my ambition to leave the Bronx was so well known. But like all nicknames this one was an exaggeration. The ways of the working class and the Catholic imaginary were far more profoundly pressed into my flesh

and blood than that harsh nickname allowed. “King of the road” failed to comprehend that I was both deeply of this community and at the same time deeply desirous of leaving it. It would have been more accurate to say that I was an odd traveler on a long and winding road that always seem to circle back to the Bronx, which I could not stop thinking of as home.

I was in danger of becoming anomic, in short, a word I learned just in time in 1972. I feared that spring that I might never be completely successful at maintaining “a meaningful existence” given my “isolation” “from the nomic constructions” of the worlds I traversed along I-95.⁷ Several choices were available to me. One was to heighten either my working-class ethnic Catholic origins or my identity as a university student and emergent scholar in order to prove to others and to myself that I was really more one than the other. Another was to keep the worlds separate and behave accordingly in each, walking a schizophrenic tightrope, laughing along with the guys in the old neighborhood at anti-gay jokes, desecrating them back in the university, saying the rosary with my grandmother but not thinking about it, critically studying religious practice but not remembering saying the rosary with my grandmother. These options would have made my experience less bearable and would have exacerbated my anomie and homelessness. I wanted to live in a way that was authentic.

Had I been less deeply formed in the devotional imaginary, in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist and of the Virgin Mary and the saints in everyday life, in the traffic between the living and the dead, it might have been possible for me to leave it all behind once and for all. Then again had I been less deeply formed by working class

devotional Catholicism I might not have fastened as fiercely as I did on the theoretical language of the sociology of knowledge and religion. (The quotes in the paragraph above are from Berger and Luckmann, who I was reading in the spring semester of my first year in an introductory course in sociology.) *The Social Construction of Reality* struck me as revelation. The apparently solid, flesh-and-blood world of my childhood became transparent. Ironically, approaching working class ethnic Catholicism with the tools of critical social analysis had the effect of allowing me to return to that world but in a changed relationship to it, giving me a place to stand when I went “home” that was consciously inside and outside simultaneously.

But the coldly remote (as I found it) and totalizing phrase, “social construction of reality,” was not adequate to the real presence of Jesus, Mary and the saints, or to their relationships with my family and with other men and women in the neighborhood. Just as I could not be either fully in or fully out of the Catholic imaginary, so I discovered that because of my experience and my memories I could not be fully in or out of the methods and theories of the sociologies of knowledge and religion either. It is not quite accurate to say that I existed in between these two mentalities. The structural metaphor suggests a terrain that is too clearly bounded and too static. Rather the two—social science and the devotional imaginary—came within view of each other as I went about the work of studying religion. I slowly came to understand that holding the two in tension rendered *each* precarious and unstable and thus unsettled they were more useful for thinking about religion as it is lived in the social world and in history. The theoretical and the devotional contextualized their respective claims to fully account for the real. I knew too much about the struggles of my family’s lives, about the ugliness of the streets, about the miseries

people brought to the figures on the altar, and about the relationships that formed between heaven and earth and on earth among people and the saints, not to approach these figures as really real. But I also needed the social scientific to explore the sources of the world I had lived, whose inner workings remained painfully opaque to me.

Anomic disorientation (in some circumstances becoming anomic terror) in this way became a condition for the possibility of theoretical work in religion and society rather than a subjective state needing to be healed or resolved. It opened unanticipated ways of understanding the social and the religious, but it required those in motion between the traditional to the modern to learn to live in suspension, never collapsing either of their imaginaries into the other or eliding the fundamental ontological, political, and epistemological differences between them. Such integration, whatever its political, religious, or existential motivations, deprives the modern and the traditional of their theoretically productive and socially subversive possibilities in relation to each other. To live consciously in suspension entails learning to embrace this specific form of disorientation, trusting that what appear to be distortions at the intersection of incommensurate realities are pointers towards new questions, new grounds for challenging the sufficiency of both theories and theologies of religious experience and practice, and new epistemologies for seeing both the traditional and the modern. “All social realities are precarious,” write Berger and Luckmann, and so (I will add) are all religious realities. “The constant possibility of anomic terror,” they continue, “is actualized whenever the legitimations that obscure the precariousness are threatened or collapse.” I am suggesting that this precariousness is exactly the moment when productive and innovative theoretical work on religion and society becomes possible.⁸

I went back to my old apartment building in the Bronx recently, more than thirty years after that first spring break. My mother and father had moved away from the old neighborhood in the mid-1980s, after their apartment was broken into a third time. By then they were living behind barred windows. Drug dealers worked out of the first floor windows of the apartment house at the end of my street. Some years before my parents left, during the 1977 World Series, the broadcaster Howard Cosell had called the nation's attention to the greasy funnels of black smoke rising from burning buildings behind the outfield of the old Yankee Stadium. "Ladies and gentlemen," Cosell had intoned, "the Bronx is burning." But there were signs of revival now.⁹

I stepped from the blazing sidewalk into the cool shadows of the building's art deco hallway. Most of the pre-World War II ornamentation had been stripped from the walls to be sold in the burgeoning market created by the furious renovation of Brooklyn's brownstones, but apart from these scars on the walls, the building was in good shape. Three young African American girls, book bags at their feet, sat chatting and laughing on the big radiator in the main entryway. With me was an old friend, also a scholar of his community's past, from the Jewish working class in Melbourne, Australia, whose father sold dry goods at a stall in an outdoor market.

"I grew up in this building," I said to the girls by way of explaining our suddenly arriving in the building. "I want to show my friend where I came from."

"Things were better back then, I bet," one of the girls said.

"Oh, I don't know," I said, "there were good people and bad people back then too."

I wanted to tell her about the Italian American boy in the building, a few years older than

me, who threw a Jewish neighbor's little dog off the roof one summer afternoon. He disappeared right after and then his family went away too. But I did not want to frighten her with this gruesome story.

“Still,” she said, “it was better then, right?”

The boy who was urinated on grew up to become a fortune-teller, reading the stars for clues to other people's fate. Two Jehovah's Witnesses laden with pamphlets about the end of the world were knocking at the door of my old first floor apartment, but no one was home.

Notes

Epigraphs: Joseph Papaleo, *Italian Stories* (Chicago: Dalkey Archive Press, 2002), 45; Eric L. Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 39.

¹ One of the books I had to contend with when I was working on my dissertation was Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward People*, with the assistance of Laura Fassano Banfield (Glencoe, IL.: Free Press, 1963). The backward people in question were Southern Italians; the moral basis of their lives was “amoral familism,” in Banfield’s phrase, by which he meant that their ethics were based on face-to-face exchanges and family loyalties rather than universal principles. This limited and unsubtle theory had a long and influential run unfortunately.

² This paragraph is based on the large literature that has developed in recent years on the history of the modern study of religion broadly conceived (there is still not one comprehensive volume on the subject), including J. Samuel Preus, *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993); Donald S. Lopez, *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Hans G. Kippenberg, *Discovering Religious History in the Modern Age*, trans. Barbara Harshav (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); David Abulafia, *The Discovery of Mankind: Atlantic Encounters in the Age of Columbus* (New Haven: Yale University

Press, 2008); Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, with the German Historical Institute, 2009); Tisa Wenger, *We Have A Religion: The 1920s Pueblo Dance Controversy and American Religious Freedom* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Lynn Hunt, Margaret Jacob, and Wijnand Mijnhardt, *Bernard Picart and the First Global Vision of Religion* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2010); Guy G. Strousma, *A New Science: The Discovery of Religion in the Age of Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010). The classic text is Eric J. Sharpe, *Comparative Religion: A History* (LaSalle, IL: Open Court, 1986, orig. pub. 1975).

³ The most influential expressions of this narrative were, in history, Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1985), and, in sociology, Andrew M. Greeley, *The American Catholic: A Social Portrait* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1977). For the enduring hold of this narrative, see, for example, Jerome P. Baggett, *Sense of the Faithful: How American Catholics Live Their Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). I otherwise admire this book, but Baggett uncritically accepts the standard narrative. “John Kennedy’s election to the presidency in 1960,” he concludes, “left little doubt that Catholics had indeed come of age and taken their place within the American mainstream.” (14) On the new historiography of the tripartite nation, see, for example, Wendy L. Wall, *Inventing the ‘American Way’: The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

⁴ The literature on the splintering of modernity is vast. A short personal reading list for this paragraph includes Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, ed., *Multiple Modernities* (New Brunswick,

NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2002); Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, ed., *Alternative Modernities* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), where the reference to the modern being out-of-joint with itself comes from (16); Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003); Schmidt, *Hearing Things*, where the concept of the braided modern appears; Christian Smith, “On Multiple Modernities: Shifting the Modernity Paradigm,” unpublished paper, 2006, University of Notre Dame, available at <http://www.nd.edu/~csmith22/documents/MultipleModernities.pdf> (accessed June 23, 2011); and James L. Heft, ed., *A Catholic Modernity? Charles Taylor’s Marianist Award Lecture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Public Worlds, Volume 1 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 6; the phrase “unevenly experienced” is on 3.

⁶ Voltaire’s phrase is from Isaac Kramnick, ed., *The Portable Enlightenment Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 119).

⁷ The quoted phrases in this sentence are from the discussion of “anomic terror” in Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1967), 102.

⁸ Berger and Luckmann, *Social Construction of Reality*, 103.

⁹ For a lively account of the Bronx at the end of the 1970s, see Jonathan Mahler, *Ladies and Gentlemen. The Bronx is Burning: 1977, Baseball, Politics, and the Battle for the Soul of a City* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2005).