



Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory

Religious Theory

ISSN 1530-5228

TYPE: Interview

Title: Genealogy, Enchantment, and the War for the Mind

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Source: Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory (JCRT)

Published by: Whitestone Publications

Stable URL: <https://doi.org/10.17613/hxex7-s8c52>

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WHITESTONE PUBLICATIONS

Publisher of the Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory (JCRT)

JCRT | jcrt.org | ISSN 1530-5228

INTERVIEW

GENEALOGY, ENCHANTMENT, AND THE WAR FOR THE MIND: AN INTERVIEW WITH JASON ĀNANDA JOSEPHSON STORM

Interview by Carl A. Raschke

Abstract: In this interview ahead of his keynote at the online conference “Religion, Politics, and Cognitive Warfare: Information, Interpretation, Conspiracy, and the Struggle for Reality,” Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm speaks with Carl Raschke about the argument of *The Genealogy of Genealogy*, in which a once-insurgent critical method hardens into academic routine and is turned against itself in favor of a “metamodern historiography” that reunites history with philosophy. Storm defends his account of postmodernism as a taught paradigm rather than a caricature of Derrida or Foucault, revisits the claim of *The Myth of Disenchantment* that reason was never purified of magic, and traces how the mid-century cybernetic picture of mind as information processing made cognition technically legible and therefore militarily tractable. Moving through Jim Channon’s *First Earth Battalion*, Michael Aquino’s *MindWar*, Byung-Chul Han’s psychopolitics, and the ethics of collective attention, the conversation closes on the fate of knowledge production and the university under hyper-scaled digitization and AI.

Keywords: Cognitive Warfare, Genealogy, Metamodernism, Disenchantment, Conspiracy Theory, Epistemology

The following is an interview with Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm, who will deliver the keynote address at the wholly online conference entitled “Religion, Politics, and Cognitive Warfare: Information, Interpretation, Conspiracy, and the Struggle for Reality” on Thursday, October 2, from 13:00 to 14:30 EDT.

Josephson Storm’s talk is entitled “Militarizing the Mind: Cognitive Warfare from the Cold War to the Dark Web”. Participants may register for the conference without fee, including for Prof. Storm’s address, [here](#). The interview is conducted by Carl Raschke, *Senior Editor of the Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory*.

Josephson Storm is Francis Christopher Oakley Third Century Professor of Religion and Chair of Science and Technology Studies at Williams College, where he also holds affiliations in Asian Studies and Comparative Literature. He earned his PhD in Religious Studies at Stanford University and his Master of Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School. His research ranges across the historical construction of “religion” and “science” in Europe and East Asia from 1600 to the present, Japanese religions and Buddhist philosophy, Western esotericism and spiritualism, the history of science and technology, continental philosophy, critical theory, and social ontology.

Storm is the author of four books with the University of Chicago Press. His first, [*The Invention of Religion in Japan*](#) (2012), received the Distinguished Book Award from the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. The three volumes that followed form a trilogy on the past, present, and future of the human sciences. [*The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences*](#) (2017) dismantles the long-standing thesis that modernity banished magic, showing how the founders of the human sciences were themselves entangled with occultism, spiritualism, and psychical research. [*Metamodernism: The Future of Theory*](#) (2021), winner of the American Academy of Religion's Award for Excellence in the Study of Religion, works through the skeptical impasses of postmodern theory toward a renewed program for the humanities grounded in process social ontology, hylosemiotics, and a self-critical epistemic stance he calls zeteticism. [*The Genealogy of Genealogy: Nietzsche, Foucault, and the Coils of Critical History*](#) (2026) turns genealogical critique on itself, tracing how a once-insurgent method hardened into academic routine and proposing in its place a "metamodern historiography" that reunites history with philosophy.

Storm is also founding co-editor of the journal *Metamodern Theory & Praxis* and co-editor of the volume *Theosophy and the Study of Religion* (2024). He serves on the editorial boards of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* and *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, and he chaired the Department of Religion at Williams from 2013 to 2021.

Raschke is Professor of Philosophy of Religion at the University of Denver and the author of [*Neoliberalism and Political Theory: From Kant to Identity Politics*](#) and [*Sovereignty in the 21st Century: Political Theology in an Age of Neoliberalism and Populism*](#).

Carl Raschke: Your three books, all published by University of Chicago Press, comprise a groundbreaking and provocative trilogy. Let's start with *The Genealogy of Genealogy*. The book blurb, not to mention the sort of pushback you incur from the irrepressible and irascible Adam Kotsko, seems to flag the all-too-commonplace and tiresomely *zeitgeistisch* preoccupation with the presumed racism and eugenics lurking behind the practice of genealogy in the humanities. I cite from p. 232 about how "genealogy's pretensions to an emancipatory politics to enable other futures . . . have largely been defeated or at least absorbed into the very structures of power it railed against." You note also, rather sardonically, that "its chief legacy has been career advancement."

Correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't think we have here with your book simply another version of Ricoeur's "hermeneutics of suspicion" cosplaying in Nietzschean and Foucauldian garb as something we call "genealogy." You say toward your conclusion that you are really aiming at a "metamodern historiography" that hybridizes philosophy with history, and history with philosophy. Can you elaborate, and please let me know upfront if I'm misreading you.

Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm: Thanks for your thoughtful questions.

One small correction up front: *The Genealogy of Genealogy* is actually my fourth book with Chicago, though I can see why you said three, as *The Myth of Disenchantment*, *The Genealogy of Genealogy*, and *Metamodernism* form a trilogy on the past, present, and future of the human sciences. They can be read in any order or as stand-alones, though.

Otherwise, I think you are basically reading me right, but with one important qualification: I do take the history of genealogy's entanglement with scientific racism and eugenics very seriously. I'm not saying that genealogy is inherently racist, however, and I definitely don't think that discovering ugly origins is necessarily enough on its own to discredit a contemporary practice. That would reproduce one of the errors the book is attacking: the genetic fallacy. Origins can give us clues, but they don't necessarily determine what something is now.

So I'm not merely performing a hermeneutics of suspicion on genealogy. Ricoeur is actually part of the history I reconstruct. He helped consolidate this image of Nietzsche and Freud as practitioners of a suspicious, reductive hermeneutics that exposes what is lurking underneath our ideals. What interests me is what happened when that gesture, that hermeneutics of suspicion, hardened into a scholarly genre, especially one capable of being suspicious of everything but itself.

That's where the somewhat sardonic remarks you quote come in. Genealogy was once supposed to be a hammer or a scalpel directed at hegemonic institutions and concepts. Now it's a master's tool. It circulates through elite universities, presses, journals, hiring networks. Something that presents itself as intellectual insurrection has become remarkably good academic currency. At its most hollow, it's a mere ritual disobedience performed inside institutions that know perfectly well how to reward it.

And it has become incredibly formulaic. As I say in the book: "a thousand genealogies, one plot." Show that something we thought was natural or universal is historically contingent. Find the power relations behind it. Dig up a compromised past. Identify victims or beneficiaries. Unmask. Problematize. Repeat. What once had the capacity to shock has become critique on autopilot.

But, to be totally clear, I'm not against critique. If anything, I'm hypercritical. I want to push critique harder. Critique has to be able to criticize itself. Sometimes it has to bite itself in the ass. Rote criticism isn't liberating just because it calls itself radical. The experiment of the book is to turn genealogy against genealogy and see what survives. Most versions of genealogy don't. They break. Good. Let them break.

That's also why I like Foucault's language of autodestruction more than the idea that we should simply patch genealogy up and put it back to work. In a line I quote in the book, Foucault himself said he wanted his books to be like a "Molotov cocktail, or minefield; autodestructing (*carbonisent*) after use like fireworks." So I think it is high time to let genealogy explode. Carbonize. See what's left afterward.

For me, what's left points toward what I'm calling "metamodern historiography." I don't mean that as a new doctrine or a ten-step method. I mean both some modest concrete proposals for scholars and a call for a much larger conceptual repertoire for thinking historically.

The simplest version is: philosophy needs history and history needs philosophy. Philosophers like to imagine that they can ask timeless questions, but even the philosopher who says history doesn't matter is citing predecessors, entering inherited debates, and using concepts whose meanings have changed over time. History is already present, even when unnamed.

And historians are doing philosophy whether they admit it or not. Every historian makes epistemological judgments about evidence, ethical judgments about stakes, assumptions about what words mean, assumptions about what sorts of social things exist, and so on. You don't escape philosophy by refusing to talk about it. You just end up doing philosophy without questioning your presuppositions.

Once you put history and philosophy back together, some different questions become possible.

Genealogy has been very good at showing that things are contingent. But honestly, by now contingency should be the starting point, not the big reveal. Of course concepts change. Of course institutions mutate. Of course social categories have histories. Power has been everywhere. The deeper problem is why anything holds together at all. Why do some meanings stabilize? Why do some institutions persist? Why do similar social forms sometimes appear in very different places? What are the processes that keep things temporarily coherent amid all that historical turbulence? Stability, too, has a history.

And there's another side of this that also matters to me, which is more affirmative and, ironically, comes partly from Foucault himself. He sometimes imagined genealogy as the recovery of "desubjugated" or "insurrectionary" knowledges. I want to take that much more seriously than most genealogists have. The archive doesn't just contain crimes to expose and errors to debunk. It also contains abandoned possibilities, marginalized knowledges, forgotten virtues, failed experiments, suppressed utopias. Not every ruin is barren. Some are seedbeds.

So metamodern historiography isn't an attempt to produce a new hegemony. I don't want another master-method that will repeat the same story over and over in new settings. The whole point is to stop pretending there should be one. I want histories that can explain rupture but also continuity, contingency but also convergence, domination but also resistance, destruction but also construction.

A history of history doesn't have to be an endless sequence of intellectual assassinations. It can be recursive without being nihilistic. It can correct itself, learn from what it destroys, recover things worth keeping, and sometimes even help us build something new.

Carl Raschke: Thank you. That helps me a lot, because it underscores, in my reading of your work, how the scholarly approach you term "metamodernism" backgrounds your treatment of genealogy. What both books share pointedly in common is a critique of "skeptical" (or what we would way too promiscuously term these days "critical") discourses that pretend to be anti-hegemonic while functioning uncritically as hegemonic discourses themselves. That is why what the Frankfurt School a century ago named "critical theory" ended up, in my estimate, a throwaway term for these sorts of aforementioned "hypocritical" hegemony-methodologies that now dominate the humanities.

As you imply, they always valorize Foucault, while for the most part grossly misrepresenting him. I applaud you for having the courage to direct attention to this phenomenon. Faux "critical" anti-hegemonism, again in my take, has a lot to do with the proliferation among academics nowadays of once-disreputable conspiracy theorizing (note the proliferation of fashionable types of antisemitism, which Sartre considered the paradigmatic type of conspiracy theory exemplifying *mauvaise foi*, or "bad faith," and which are far more than simply anti-Zionism). Since your keynote talk at our cognitive warfare and conspiracy conference at the beginning of October broaches this subject, your work as a whole proves to be a remarkable exercise in background briefing.

But let me be straightforward here, and please be aware that this is just friendly disagreement. Here is where I take issue, not with your “genealogy of genealogies,” nor with your account of “metamodernism” (with which I first became familiar through its usage in literary theory and its applications in the visual arts), but with your characterization of “postmodernism” as largely, if not wholly, skepticism. In some ways you seem to use the vernacular, and often the polemical, meaning of the word “postmodernism” as a kind of caricature to offset your notion of “emancipatory zeteticism,” which is compelling in its own right without any sort of conceptual foil in juxtaposition with it.

I’ve spent my whole career, as it turns out, fighting against the vernacular or caricatured reading of “postmodernism.” I note that you do point out that figures such as Derrida or Foucault, or even Deleuze for what it’s worth, were not “skeptics” in the traditional or ordinary-language connotations of those terms. I also grant that superficial readings of Lyotard’s *The Postmodern Condition* (whence the transition in public discourse from “poststructuralist” to “postmodernist” began to effloresce) have a lot to do with the garden-variety meme of postmodernism as “skepticism.”

But my argument (actually, it’s more a long-researched analysis of philosophy and culture in tandem) is that the “poststructural” moment (I’m deliberately using that term instead of “postmodern”), which has now come and gone, actually opened the gates wide to what you are calling “metamodernism.” For instance, your discussion in *Metamodernism* of what you term “social kinds,” “ergonic convergence,” “hylosemiotics,” and “process social ontology” reminds me in many ways of what Deleuze and Guattari were doing in the 1960s and 1970s. The “semiotic” dimension of what their collaboration aimed at has been largely misunderstood and misappropriated in the Anglophone world, especially with the fad of the so-called “new materialism.”

I would also argue, even though I won’t go there in this conversation, that it is the key to unlocking the black box of AI. Guattari’s relatively unknown account of an “a-signifying” semiotics strikes me as very much in line with what you are doing in your book *Metamodernism*, which I think is brilliant, by the way.

Anyway, I know that is long, but I want to throw you some red meat. Perhaps you can chew on it, and maybe let out a roar?

Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm: Okay, red meat accepted, metaphorically, since I’m a vegetarian. But I think we disagree less than you think we do, although there is at least one place where I want to push back.

I absolutely agree that Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, and most of the people stuffed into the box marked “postmodernism” were not universal skeptics, straightforward antirealists, or ethical nihilists. I say that explicitly in *Metamodernism*. I also note that there weren’t even any self-described “poststructuralists” in France and that the figures later canonized as postmodernists disagreed with each other about all sorts of fundamental things.

But here’s where I think we differ. I’d reject the charge that I’m using a vernacular or polemical caricature of postmodernism as merely a foil. To be clear, what I call postmodernism doesn’t map precisely onto the work of Derrida, or the work of Foucault, or the work of any single French philosopher in isolation. Rather, it is an academic paradigm, or more precisely a family of overlapping paradigms. Crucially, these were produced through the reception and recombination of these thinkers in different disciplines.

Let me explain. Thomas Kuhn argued that textbooks often tell us more about a community’s paradigms than the original works do. Simplifications, exaggerations, and secondhand criticisms get taught to graduate students, reproduced in introductory works, and eventually begin functioning as established disciplinary truths.

Newtonianism as taught to burgeoning physicists was a very different beast than the actual Isaac Newton. The textbooks cleaned him up, systematized the mechanics, dropped most of the theology and alchemy, and folded in the work of later physicists and mathematicians.

All this means that if you want to know a scholarly community’s paradigms, don’t just read its founding figures. Look at its textbooks. Look at what graduate students are taught. Look at the concepts that become so obvious within a discipline that nobody bothers defending them anymore.

That is what happened with postmodernism. It was a bricolage, a pastiche assembled out of fragments of Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, and a lot of other folks, reconstructed through textbooks, edited collections, graduate seminars, and secondary scholarship. And, crucially, it was this mash-up that got taught as a research paradigm, with each discipline getting a slightly different variant.

So I'm not especially interested in proving that the "real Derrida" was a skeptic. In fact, I don't think he was. But demonstrating that Derrida himself was more complicated only gets us so far, because the object I'm trying to describe is what scholars actually learned to do. If thousands of scholars learned a portable set of skeptical moves that they associated with Derrida, then challenging Derrida's actual epistemology doesn't get us anywhere in addressing those moves. At some point the cover version becomes more culturally consequential than the original song.

Problems of reception are also one of the things connecting *Metamodernism* to *The Genealogy of Genealogy*. In the new book I have the space to present the argument at greater historical resolution. There I'm tracing another sequence of productive misreadings. A particular French intellectual milieu reconstructs Nietzsche as the great genealogist. Foucault then constructs his own Nietzsche based on that already constructed, refurbished French Nietzsche. After that, the Anglophone academy constructs its own Foucault. A relatively short essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," gets promoted into a master key for Foucault's thought. His accounts of archaeology and genealogy are mashed together. Eventually you get something that has wandered very far from Nietzsche, far from the French Nietzsche, and even far from Foucault.

That "Foucault" then becomes one of the components of the taught postmodernism.

So part of what I'm trying to do in that book is break the chain. As I put it there, I want "to free Nietzsche from Foucault's reading, and Foucault from the flattening grip of his scholarly afterlives."

That doesn't mean we burn Foucault and go home. Quite the opposite. Some of the best things in Foucault got lost in the flattening. His joyful, insurgent genealogy, his interest in desubjugated knowledges, his more complicated accounts of power, his willingness to let knowledge disrupt the scholar as well as the object of scholarship: I want some of that back.

The same thing is true of poststructuralism more generally. So I agree with you that the poststructural moment opened gates that metamodernism walks through. That is built into the argument. I say in the book that postmodern skepticisms cannot be evaded. They have to be worked through. Metamodernism is not restoration. I'm not trying to rewind the tape to 1955 and pretend Derrida never happened.

The move is more aggressive than that. More dialectical. I'm aiming for a negation of the negation. Grant the postmodern critique. Steel-man it when needed. Then turn it inside out.

Grant the critique of essences. Grant the instability of disciplinary master categories. Grant that language mediates our access to the world. Grant that knowledge is historically and socially situated. Then ask what follows if those critiques themselves become our starting assumptions rather than our final conclusions.

That is basically the engine of *Metamodernism*. I take a series of problems associated with postmodernism and push through them rather than backing away. Anti-essentialism turns into process social ontology and social kinds. The linguistic turn gets pushed into hylosemiotics. Skepticism, when made skeptical of itself, becomes zeteticism. And so on.

So yes, Deleuze and Guattari are influences. I'm not bothered by that at all. Deleuze is explicitly one of the process thinkers I acknowledge. A world of becoming rather than static substances, hostility toward crude essentialism, attention to relationality and material processes: I'm happy to claim those points of contact and affinity.

But I wouldn't collapse the projects.

One of my central questions is almost the reverse of the usual celebration of becoming. If everything changes, change isn't the puzzle. Stability is. Why does anything hold together?

That's why I care about anchoring processes. Social kinds, as I describe them, are dynamic clusters of powers temporarily stabilized by causal processes. And it's why I introduce ergonic convergence: sometimes historically unrelated social forms start looking alike because they encounter similar material constraints, institutional environments, ideological pressures, or practical problems.

So I'm less interested in shouting "Everything flows! Look at the unpredictable flux!" than in asking why the river sometimes freezes.

Hylosemiotics is an even clearer case. It's even more different. I can certainly see the resonance with Deleuze and Guattari, and Guattari's a-signifying semiotics is something I'd be happy to think harder about. But hylosemiotics comes through a different route: Peirce, Uexküll, Grice, Millikan, philosophy of biology, ethology, and especially research into animal communication.

And its central claim is that meaning is inference. Sentient beings, not just humans, interpret both voluntary and involuntary signs. So we need to separate sign production from sign consumption, that is, meaning-making from interpretation.

That makes me hesitate over the comparison with an a-signifying semiotics. Hylosemiotics is trying to naturalize and radically expand signification, not bypass it. A raven's cry, a scent of smoke, a line of footprints in the snow, or a human sentence can become a sign for an interpreter. But the world doesn't come preloaded with meanings. The same footprints can mean different things to different interpreters. Something functions as a sign because an organism can draw an inference from it. Meaning emerges in that relationship.

That might actually become interesting for the AI question you raise. I'd want to distinguish very carefully between machinic operations that manipulate signs and an inferential account of meaning. I'm not convinced those are the same thing, and I suspect the difference matters enormously for whatever we end up saying so-called AI is doing.

So I'd put our disagreement this way. I think you are right to defend Derrida, Foucault, Deleuze, and company against the flattened version of "postmodernism." I'm trying to do some of that myself. Where I differ is that I think the flattened version became historically actualized. It became teachable, reproducible, professionally useful. It became a paradigm.

And once a paradigm exists, saying "but Foucault didn't really say that" isn't enough to break its hold.

In a way, that's a thread connecting the two books. I'm interested in what happens when complicated philosophy gets turned into method, method gets turned into disciplinary common sense, and disciplinary common sense forgets where it came from.

So perhaps the formulation I would use is this: poststructuralism is not simply what metamodernism negates. It is one of the things metamodernism metabolizes. I want to preserve what worked: anti-essentialism, historicization, attention to power, the critique of naïve representation, the recognition that our categories are constructed and unstable, and so on. But I don't think fidelity to those insights requires fidelity to the academic orthodoxies that formed around them.

The answer isn't to return obediently to the master thinkers. It's to recover what they got right, wreck what no longer works, and build something out of what survives.

Carl Raschke: Your answer here, which I truly appreciate, strikes me as having certain assonances and resonances with the early Foucault, whom nobody seems to read anymore. I'm not saying in any sense you're making a "retro" move with metamodernism, only that we've come back to the underlying problematic of modernism itself, which you address in *Metamodernism* and appear to suggest postmodernism forced us to confront but didn't succeed in overcoming. Graciously, I'm more than willing to set aside the intractable issue of whether postmodernist "skepticism" was the real deal or not.

But what I find most thought-provoking in your previous response is a tacit way of thinking, if not being, that you frame and seek to configure so interestingly in the initial book of your "trilogy": the putatively negative dialectic of "enchantment" and "disenchantment" (for Weber, *Entzauberung*, or literally "de-magification").

Which brings us to the conference on cognitive warfare and conspiracy theories. I'm fascinated with your extremely insightful excursion into the conflicted project of the Frankfurt School, especially its fraught analytic of fascism as in Horkheimer's and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. I'm of course referencing your 2017 book *The Myth of Disenchantment*. I sense that your critique of the overdetermined, and "overheated," *lumpen*-Foucauldianism that saturates our overly politicized humanities nowadays can be traced back to the missteps of the Frankfurt School on this score (at least, that's my reading of you). So my next piece of "red meat" I will throw at you, despite your vegetarianism, is as follows: does the techno-militarization of the mind you are going to talk about at the conference have its own profound "genealogical" provenance in this proto-Enlightenment hybridization of the rational and occult that undercuts the so-called "myth of disenchantment"?

Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm: I think there is something to that. But I want to hedge the answer because I'm literally in the middle of writing the cognitive warfare piece now. I'm still reading, still doing research, and some of this is intuition rather than an argument I'm prepared to nail to the wall.

My first hesitation is with "genealogical provenance," particularly after everything I've just said about genealogy. I don't think there is a single origin point from which we can draw a straight line through Renaissance magic, the Enlightenment, the Frankfurt School, cybernetics, and finally cognitive warfare. History is messier than that. Things break, mutate, recombine, and sometimes arrive at similar places by completely different routes.

But I do think you're putting your finger on a problem that has followed me through a lot of my work.

One of the central arguments of *The Myth of Disenchantment* was that modernity never accomplished the purification imagined for it. Magic did not simply disappear as science advanced. The occult wasn't some primitive residue stubbornly surviving outside modern rationality. Again and again, the people supposedly disenchanting the world were themselves entangled with magic, mysticism, spiritualism, psychical research, or esotericism. And even today the majority of Americans, something like 73 percent, hold some kind of paranormal belief. We get similar numbers in Europe. There was never a point when most people, even in the supposed heartland of modernity, were disenchanted.

That's one reason I'm both attracted to and dissatisfied with the Frankfurt School. Horkheimer and Adorno's line that "Enlightenment reverts to mythology" is incredibly powerful. But I argued in *The Myth of Disenchantment* that their dialectic still grants too much to the original disenchantment story. Reason supposedly conquers myth, instrumental rationality runs amok, and enlightenment collapses back into its opposite.

I argue instead that the clear victory of reason over myth never happened. Reason was never purified of myth. Science was never purified of magic. The oppositions were unstable from the beginning.

And the Frankfurt School itself is a good example. Critical theory's "proximate other," as I put it in the book, was the occult. Ludwig Klages helped formulate some of the language about the domination of nature that later became central to critical theory. Benjamin's aura, correspondences, constellations, angels, and Ur-images emerged in a milieu saturated with esotericism. Adorno attacks magic while simultaneously mourning the loss of what he thought disenchantment had destroyed.

So I wouldn't make the Frankfurt School the culprit here exactly. They're more interesting than that. They are another knot in the problem. They saw something profound about instrumental reason while remaining caught in the very binaries they were trying to explode.

More recent work I've been doing has made me increasingly skeptical of treating "rationality" and "irrationality" as the relevant opposition. In particular, there is a common model of rationality itself that can be historicized.

In a recent piece in the journal *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* (MTSR), "Sex, Magic & Rockets," an essay focused on the ritual magic practices of the rocket engineer Jack Parsons, I argue that one particularly influential twentieth-century model of rationality came out of cybernetics, rational choice economics, and related movements.

Whereas earlier philosophers like Descartes argued that machines were the opposite of thinking beings, during the mid-twentieth century, and against a Cold War backdrop, the machine was increasingly taken as the model for the mind. Human beings were seen as something like individual calculators, processing information and making algorithmic or probabilistic decisions about means and ends.

Again, I'm still working this out for the talk. Still, I want to emphasize that this way of looking at the mind brought some insights but also blind spots. I don't actually think the cybernetic model tells us what the mind is. At best it is a partial picture. What interests me is that it produced an extraordinarily powerful way of making the mind technically legible.

Once you treat cognition as information processing, all sorts of things become possible. Mental activity can be quantified, modeled, transmitted, intercepted, simulated, optimized, disrupted. The abstraction does real work.

But abstractions have a nasty habit of forgetting that they are abstractions.

This is where N. Katherine Hayles's account of information "losing its body" becomes important for me. Once information is imagined as fundamentally separable from its material instantiation, you can start moving in some very strange directions.

AI is one obvious direction. If cognition is basically information processing, then why should intelligence have to live in a biological human body?

But weirdly, remote viewing points in almost the opposite direction from the same conceptual neighborhood. The military researchers studying it explicitly described what they were looking for as a human "information-accessing capability," eventually calling it "anomalous cognition": information transfer without the ordinary sensory channels. The body drops out there too. Perception starts looking like access to information that might occur independently of eyes, ears, distance, perhaps even ordinary physical locality.

I'm not claiming AI and remote viewing are basically the same or are equally legitimate or anything like that. That would be nuts. But I do think there is a family resemblance in the abstraction that makes both imaginable: mind becomes detachable from embodied perception, and "information" starts doing an enormous amount of metaphysical work.

Push that far enough and something that began as an engineering concept starts looking suspiciously like an ontology. The mind is information. Organisms are information. Society is information. Eventually the world itself starts becoming something called "information."

And that matters politically and militarily, because once the mind is rendered as an information system, it also becomes something you can imagine controlling as an information system.

You can see one version of this in the Cold War history of propaganda and communication research. Modern communication research was entangled with psychological warfare. There is a fairly straightforward model lurking there: sender, message, channel, target. Find the right message, transmit it effectively enough, and alter what the target thinks.

Soviet reflexive control is already subtler than that. Instead of simply putting an idea into somebody's head, you manipulate the informational environment from which they make decisions, ideally getting the opponent to choose the action you wanted while experiencing it as their own decision.

Those techniques work. I don't want to dismiss them because their model of cognition is incomplete.

But as I say, they have blind spots.

Byung-Chul Han's idea of psychopolitics gets at one of them. Power does not always arrive from outside as propaganda or command. Increasingly it works through freedom itself: through participation, preference, self-disclosure, prediction, desire. We feed the system voluntarily. We train it on ourselves.

That seems much closer to what contemporary platforms actually do than the old picture of propaganda broadcasting messages into passive brains.

And that gets me to conspiracy theory. In "Sex, Magic & Rockets," I suggest that what we often describe as radically different "rationalities" may be better understood in terms of different epistemic communities, different ontological commitments, and especially different structures of epistemic trust.

Most of us don't believe the Earth moves around the Sun because we personally did the astronomy. We trust a huge network of institutions, experts, instruments, textbooks, teachers, and practices. That's just how most knowledge works.

So minds are not autonomous calculators floating in informational space. Cognition is embodied. It is enacted. It takes place inside epistemic communities and depends on networks of trust, habits, institutions, technologies, and other people.

So I'm starting to think that one of the deeper problems in the history of cognitive warfare is that military and technological systems repeatedly make cognition tractable by reducing it to something manipulable: messages, probabilities, information flows, neural vulnerabilities, behavioral data.

Those are reductions, but sometimes they are frighteningly effective.

Still, to restate the old cliché, the map is not the territory.

And maybe that is where the contemporary language of "cognitive warfare" gets especially interesting. It doesn't merely describe the mind as a new battlefield. It helps produce an image of mind as territory: something that can be mapped, penetrated, occupied, defended, and dominated by whoever has the superior instruments.

That fantasy of mastery may itself be part of the problem.

Because cognition is never simply sitting inside the skull waiting to be hacked. It spills outward into bodies, media, institutions, relationships, and infrastructures. You aren't merely fighting over what information enters a mind. You are fighting over the environments in which people learn what deserves attention, which authorities deserve trust, what counts as evidence, and ultimately what kind of world seems to be there.

So perhaps the thread running through the talk is that, by seeing the mind as an information machine, we became extraordinarily good at building machines, institutions, and military doctrines around that picture of the mind. And the picture works just well enough to become dangerous.

Again, even this model doesn't necessarily disenchant anything. Technologies do not merely change what people can do. They change what people can plausibly say exists. So technologies don't simply disenchant the world. They can generate new conditions for enchantment.

That seems especially important with digital technologies. The machines most associated with rationalization, computation, surveillance, prediction, and control are also remarkably productive of hidden agencies, invisible networks, algorithmic forces, paranoid pattern-recognition, and conspiratorial accounts of causation.

All that is to say, the same systems that promise unprecedented powers of calculation, prediction, and control may also be extraordinarily good at generating ghosts in the machine.

Carl Raschke: I don't know if you are familiar with the story of Jim Channon, who died in 2017 at the age of 77. He was a former U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, futurist, and business consultant whose ideas helped inspire the 2009 movie *The Men Who Stare at Goats*. He was heavily influenced by the New Age and Human Potential Movements, which in themselves derived in many respects from the left wing of the Theosophical Society as instantiated in the writings of Annie Besant and Alice Bailey. The term "New Age" itself is Bailey's. In the film, Channon was played by George Clooney. Channon came up with the notion of the First Earth Battalion (a play on the radical environmental movement at the time known as "Earth First!"). Channon's *First Earth Battalion Operations Manual* envisioned a radically different sort of elite soldier: a theosophically minded, half-human, half-cyborg combatant he called a "warrior monk," after the occultified legend of the Knights Templar. Channon's "warrior monk" was supposed to meld discipline, physical fitness, conflict de-escalation, psychological acumen, and unconventional methods of learning and perception, including those of the paranormal.

Channon, then and even more so now, has been generally regarded as a New Age eccentric who wasn't taken seriously by the military at the time, but that is not really the case. He may not have been taken seriously by the military brass at the Pentagon, but he had his own strong following. Marilyn Ferguson, author of the extremely influential book *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, constantly touted him and fundraised for him. I sat in on an interview with Channon by a local journalist in the early 1980s, and it was obvious he was not only zealous but highly intent on making a historical impact. In the interview he bragged about his close (he called them "friendly" and "cosmopolitan") ties to Soviet intelligence and made the following statement to the journalist, which got published in a now-defunct local alternative weekly known as *Up the Creek*: "If the military took over today, you'd be damned pleased with the results."

Since you're digging into much of this stuff from that era, I think he would be a paradigm case of what you describe in *The Myth of Disenchantment*. Techno-mathematical esotericism has been a deep feature of Western culture reaching back millennia. After all, wasn't Pythagoras himself a fanatical vegetarian and what today might popularly be called a "cult leader"?

Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm: I haven't seen the movie. But yes, I know about Jim Channon. His project, and U.S. military psychical research more generally, is another one of those great examples where the neat border between rationality and enchantment just collapses.

And that's definitely the terrain of *The Myth of Disenchantment*. Still, Channon is especially useful because paranormal perception, bodily discipline, and military strategy are all being jammed together to make some new kind of soldier.

But he wasn't the first, or the last. Attempts at military psychical research go back at least to the First World War, if not earlier.

Still, I'd resist drawing a straight line from Pythagoras to Channon. That starts to look a little too clean, and history is rarely that obliging. But as a recurring configuration, absolutely! Technical rationality and esoteric speculation keep showing up in the same room. Sometimes wearing the same uniform.

Carl Raschke: Speaking of military psychical research, are you familiar with the peculiar controversy that goes back to at least the late 1970s and with Paul Vallely's and Michael Aquino's *From PSYOP to MindWar: The Psychology of Victory* (1980)? The paper openly stated that psychological warfare should be aimed at the American public as well as our adversaries. Given Aquino's self-declared "Satanism" and his public "priestly" position as "Magus V of the Aeon of Set" (what he considered the "true name" for the Prince of Darkness), this is an episode even stranger than the story of Channon, and of course it gave rise to numerous conspiracy theories back in that period. There is absolutely no evidence Aquino had any influence on official military policy, but given the expansive sophistication of cognitive warfare worldwide since that period, I'm curious as to how you map and evaluate the ongoing legacy of psycho-tech with its esotericist edge. Have we left all that behind, or has it just slunk into the shadows?

Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm: Good guess! Now we're getting dangerously close to spoilers for the talk. Aquino is actually one of the figures I'm using to open it.

What fascinates me most about *MindWar* is its peculiar account of truth. Aquino insists that his proposal goes beyond propaganda, which he associates with deception and manipulation. But then, as I think I'll quote in the talk, the paper describes a "whole truth that, if it does not now exist, will be forced into existence by the will of the United States."

That's a remarkable statement. Victory begins with securing conviction, and reality is supposed to catch up.

The paper also argues that operatives must have a personal conviction in what they are promoting and that people on the other side of the PSYOP must experience their decisions as uncoerced. So the coercion needs to disappear from view.

That's where I think the esoteric resonance becomes especially interesting. I'm not claiming that Aquino smuggled Satanic magic into official military doctrine. But here is a strategic military proposal in which will, conviction, and the power to bring a desired reality into existence are doing extraordinary work. And the technological means he emphasizes are largely ordinary electronic media, not ESP.

So have we left this behind? I'm interested less in whether Aquino's particular program survived than in the larger ambition to make the future true by engineering what people believe, desire, and choose for themselves.

And then there's the amusing irony that the paper itself became evidence, for conspiracy theorists, of a nearly omnipotent apparatus of governmental mind control.

Aquino proposed a project for mastering perception, beginning with one's own and extending to everyone else's. Its afterlife shows just how appealing the fantasy of that mastery can become.

Carl Raschke: I guess we're both on the exact same wavelength. I happen to know a lot about Aquino and the Temple of Set, but I won't go there for the purpose of this interview. And, of course, he's only one random historical illustration, not the more profoundly imbricated and ongoing issue anyway. One thing we haven't really talked about much is the broader concept of "cognitive warfare" and how advances in digital technology, and now of course AI, shape what "knowledge" has been, and is becoming, in a broad anthropological, if not sociopolitical, sense. It seems that Kant's "first question" of philosophy, how do we know what we know, is swiftly and maddeningly becoming extraordinarily and exhaustingly problematic. Care to make some general comments or observations along these lines? To what degree does your "genealogy of genealogy" problematize the theory of knowledge even further than figures like Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche did in the nineteenth century?

Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm: A small confession: I came to the phrase "cognitive warfare" because of the conference call. It wasn't something I'd been carrying around previously, but the more I've thought about it, the more useful I've found it.

I think you're right that digital technologies and so-called AI are transforming the knowledge landscape. To be clear, knowledge has always depended on technologies and epistemic communities. But the speed and scale of these new systems raise some pretty fascinating and disturbing questions, especially when so much of our social interaction is mediated through bots, advertisers, and bad-faith, or at least questionably motivated, actors, some of whom may be deliberately trying to fragment or reshape that landscape.

On *The Genealogy of Genealogy*, though, I'd tweak your formulation slightly. You are right that I'm taking suspicion a step further. I'm turning it on itself. But the result isn't amplified hyper-suspicion. It's a suspicion that is capable of being suspicious of itself. Self-reflexive suspicion has to become more precise. Perhaps even humbler.

As I argue in that book, critique has become automatic, routinized in many sectors of the academy. Historical criticism is one of its main instruments. But explaining the history of something doesn't, on its own, settle whether it's true or whether there's evidence for it. And of course, genealogy has its own history. Its methods and authority are open to the same critical scrutiny it directs everywhere else.

My fuller answer to the epistemological question, though, is in *Metamodernism*, where I develop a metaepistemic stance I call zeteticism. It is the basis for what I am doing in the *Genealogy* book. In a way, it's skepticism turned on itself: a skepticism of skepticism. There is a lot more there, because I hold myself to thinking not only about our orientation toward knowledge but also about a concrete program for producing better knowledge claims. But in brief, I argue that once we transform skeptical dogmatisms into genuine doubts, we can become more discriminating. Doubt will always be with us. The project of a search for undeniable foundations is misguided. But we can abandon certainty without giving up on knowledge. It's just that the kind of knowledge we end up with is located within the horizon of temporality and finitude. We will never have the last word.

There's a lot to say here, and I realize I've gone on for a bit. But I want to resist the temptation to give a long monologue about epistemology.

Anyway, in the book I also emphasize that we aren't isolated egos peering out at the world like little homunculi. We know things as embodied beings, embedded in communities and institutions. This is a theme I keep returning to.

Relatedly, I'm working right now with the Polish philosopher Piotr Rosół on the ethics of collective attention. One of the questions we're exploring is what happens when the problem is no longer a lack of information, but its superabundance. We're drowning in the stuff. Information overload. And I think that's part of the context in which cognitive warfare becomes useful as a concept.

Under those conditions, who gets to direct our attention? How do we, as communities, choose where to direct it? What gets made salient and what disappears from view? So this is where cognitive warfare starts to have some important philosophical consequences for me. What happens when the very conditions for collective inquiry become targets of strategic intervention by politically motivated actors?

The scale of the problem matters, too. Our actions have ethical consequences in an increasingly interconnected global world, but it can be very hard to figure out what effect we are having precisely because the consequences are often displaced from us in time or space. Hans Jonas had some good stuff to say about this problem more broadly.

All that is to say, we can't solve a collective epistemic crisis by treating it as a series of individual failures to think critically.

The most important questions are problems of institutional and technological design, and of building better epistemic communities. Epistemic trust issues. Sadly, many of the institutions that could help, like the university or scientific and medical research institutions, are actively under threat, in the U.S. at least. Some of their problems are also internal. So we need to defend, repair, and even reinvent the institutions and shared practices that make it possible for us to find things out together. To be clear, my aim isn't an intellectual monoculture. It's a space where inquiry is possible, disagreement is productive, and no authority gets to settle the questions in advance.

So yes, teach people to think critically. But we also have to fight for the institutions, technologies, and communities that give thinking a fighting chance.

Carl Raschke: Thank you. That is quite illuminating. One final follow-up question to your last answer. We live in what Peter Drucker back in the 1980s dubbed the "knowledge society." Other terms abound these days to characterize the phenomenon, such as Yann Moulier-Boutang's "cognitive capitalism," Pierre Bourdieu's "cultural capitalism," and Bernard Stiegler's cum Maurizio Lazzarato's "immaterial labor." Most economists agree that our vast global economy has become a digitized knowledge economy where value is created through the production of knowledge (i.e., Stiegler's long historical process of "grammatization"). But my concluding question comes down to the fate of knowledge production itself and the institutions which conventionally have supported it, specifically the university. Care to comment on where you see the role of colleges and universities amidst the burgeoning planetary storm of "hyper-grammatization" through hyper-scaled digitization, especially AI?

Jason Ānanda Josephson Storm: I think there's a danger in economists taking the "knowledge economy" too literally and measuring value in terms of quantity of production.

We already publish more scholarship than anyone can read. Precarity and the pressure to publish or perish have already flooded the world with lots of low-quality scholarship. LLMs can multiply the output almost indefinitely. But more text isn't necessarily more knowledge. There's a huge difference between producing knowledge-like outputs and cultivating individuals and communities capable of knowing.

Resistance and struggle are key to learning. We find things out by running into a world that doesn't behave the way we expected and by encountering other people who ask questions we never thought to ask. At their best, universities give those encounters somewhere to happen. They function as sites for constructive disagreement. Somewhere you can be wrong, get called on it, and come back with a better argument.

AI also brings us face to face with an old problem in the study of automation and safety. When machines take over routine tasks, the human skills involved tend to atrophy. Then, when something goes wrong, the machine hands control back to a person it has effectively trained into passivity. The results can be disastrous. The implication is that the more we outsource reading, reasoning, and so on, the less prepared we are to recognize when the machine has gone badly wrong.

So I don't want students trained into passivity by technologies that are supposed to make them more capable. And I certainly don't want universities competing to produce the same commodities faster and cheaper. Education should help people decide what's worth wanting, cultivate the epistemic virtues they need to pursue it, and catch the moment when someone, or something, starts deciding for them.

Of course, defending the university doesn't mean defending every feature of the institution we've inherited. Don't get me started on all that is wrong with the corporate university today! And we academics are already very good at critique. We could stand to get better at building.

All that is to say, I don't want a university that trains sophisticated spectators of a world going to hell. I want to help build institutions where people acquire the knowledge, imagination, and solidarity to do something about it.

Anyway, it has been a pleasure chatting with you! I'm looking forward to the conference.

Carl Raschke: Indeed, it's been a pleasure.

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