

“Message From Thee Temple”: Magick, Occultism, Mysticism, and Psychic TV.

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A reality that cannot face itself becomes an illusion. Cannot be real. We must reject totally the concept and use of faith, that sham. We must emasculate religion. The “universe of magick” is within the mind of mankind. The setting is but illusion even to the thinker. The Temple is committed to building a modern network where people are given back pride in themselves, where destruction becomes a laughable absurdity to a brain aware of its infinite and immeasurable potential.¹

Thee Temple strives to end personal laziness and engender discipline. To focus the Will on one’s true desires, in the belief, gathered from experience, that this maximizes and makes happen all those things that one wants in every area of Life.²

Writing in *The Psychick Bible* (2006) Genesis P-Orridge notes how ‘Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth has been convened in order to act as a catalyst and focus for the Individual (sic) development of all those who wish to reach inwards and strike out. Maybe you are one of these,’ he continues, ‘already feeling different, dissatisfied, separate from the mass around you, instinctive and alert? You are already one of us.’³ Founded after the disbanding of Throbbing Gristle (seen by many as the founding fathers of the industrial music genre⁴), Psychic TV was formed in 1981 by the performance artist Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, musician and video director Peter “Sleazy” Christopherson, and musician/producer Alex Fergusson. Over a period of more than thirty years, Psychic TV have produced a vast oeuvre of mixed media work including recordings, moving image, art installations and literature. As a band and performing arts group, they have embodied various incarnations, working collaboratively with over thirty musicians, writers, artists and philosophers, with P-Orridge remaining the one constant core member of the band.

P-Orridge’s awareness in the occult and pagan ritual was integral to forming Psychic TV, and was also central to the simultaneous formation of the Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth (TOPY), an organisation that was to become the magickal and philosophical wing of Psychic TV, and which

¹ Genesis P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible* (Port Townsend, Washington: Feral House, 2006), 58-59.

² P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, 39.

³ P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, 33.

⁴ See John Encarnacao, ‘Throbbing Gristle’s Early Records: Post-Hippie/Pre-Punk/Post-Punk,’ in *Mute Records: Artists, Business, History*, eds. Zuleika Beaven, Marcus O’Dair and Richard Osbourne (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p. 75; Paul Hegarty, *Noise/Music: A History*. (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 105; and Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-84*. (London: Faber, 2005), pp. 30-31).

subsequently led to the incorporation of magick, occultism and ritual into their music and multi-media productions. Using the Psychic TV's debut album, *Force the Hand of Chance* (1982) as an investigative framework, this chapter seeks to investigate, scrutinise and illuminate Psychic TV's past and on-going relationship with magick, occultism, mysticism and paganism. Through a semiotic and discursive analysis of Psychic TV and TOPY's multi-media texts, performances, rituals and interviews, this chapter unpacks the significance of magick, occultism and ritual in asserting Psychic TV's occupying of an interesting 'cult' ural and philosophical space between music, performance art and the practice and exposition of 'chaos magick.'

Thee Infinite Beat: The Magickal Mileu of TOPY

It is commonly thought that Genesis P-Orridge coined the term 'Occulture.'⁵ 'Probably no word does better justice to the TOPY phenomenon than "Occulture," notes Carl Abrahamson 'meshing "Occult" with "Culture," there's a prefixed trace of "Occident" if you will. The defined concept as such was integrated in the inter-TOPY-"lingo" in the late 1980s, and then grew to become a readily accepted term for anything cultural yet decidedly occult/spiritual.'⁶ As Abrahamson explains, 'occulture' was never really about occultism as such, but instead 'consisted of interchangeability where the clear cut borders were gently erased.' In other words, he notes how,

Books, pamphlets, newsletters, film and video screenings, record and cassette releases and other manifestations could certainly contain more or less blatant esoteric form or content, but it in no way a prerequisite. The literal meaning of "occult" (as in "hidden") was given a wider perspective than the merely "magical" one.'⁷

Further to Abrahamson, Christopher Partridge emphasises the *confidential* nature of occulture, noting how 'occulture includes those often *hidden, rejected* and *oppositional* beliefs and practices associated with esotericism, theosophy, mysticism, New Age, Paganism, and a range of other subcultural beliefs and practices...'⁸ For Partridge, occulture 'refers to the environment within which, and the social process by which, particular meanings are disseminated and become influential in the lives of individuals and in societies in which they live.'⁹ For Partridge, these meanings

⁵ See Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West Volume 1: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 68.

⁶ P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, p. 11.

⁷ P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, p. 11.

⁸ Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, 68. (original emphasis).

⁹ Christopher Partridge, 'Esoterrorism and the Wrecking of Civilization: Genesis P-Orridge and the Rise of Industrial Paganism,' in *Pop Pagans: Paganism and Popular Music*, eds. Donna Weston and Andy Bennett (London: Routledge, 2014), p. 191.

‘typically relate to spiritual, esoteric, paranormal and conspiratorial ideas,’ and whose core vessels are popular culture (he pulls upon television series such as *The Twilight Zone* and films such as *The Wicker Man* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976)), noting how ‘popular (oc)culture provides a space within which there is an openness to the possibility of metaphysical interpretation.’¹⁰ Importantly for Partridge – and this chapter – P-Orridge’s concern was not following one particular tradition, that being either occult traditions or paganism, but instead to ‘challenge tradition, question received ways of thinking, unravel established moralities, and subvert political and religious hegemonies.’¹¹ In other words, P-Orridge’s occultism ‘focused on change and the future: it is confrontational, subversive, experimental and, to a large extent, dystopian.’¹²

P-Orridge’s reclamation of magical elements therefore, not only reached back to the 1960s where he notes how, ‘some people were prepared to live on the edge and explore what happens,’¹³ but more importantly were influenced by an occult lineage, and primarily by the work of the English occultist Aleister Crowley. Crowley’s influences were eclectic, drawing upon ideas from, amongst others, the Thelemite, Gnostic, Occultist and eastern traditions (he had travelled through India in his late twenties). Born in 1875, and from parents who were members of the repressive Christian sect known as the Plymouth Brethren, Crowley was living at a time when both America and Europe ‘had become fascinated by mediums, séances and hypnotism,’ and where the Theosophical Society ‘had stimulated an interest in magical and esoteric doctrines from both the East and West.’¹⁴ It was a time of time, therefore, since,

Until the twentieth century, magic had been a practice that moved between the worlds of science, medicine, philosophy and religion. The great magicians of the past had been sages, had pioneered the experimental method, particularly with alchemy, and had been concerned with healing as a well as finding ways of communicating with other worlds and the Divine.¹⁵

Crowley’s influence, therefore cannot be underestimated, not least in his writings informing modern paganism, the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO), Gardnerian witchcraft and the development of modern Satanic thought and philosophy (espoused by Anton La Vey who established the Church of

¹⁰ Partridge, ‘Esoterrorism and the Wrecking of Civilization,’ 191.

¹¹ Partridge, ‘Esoterrorism and the Wrecking of Civilization,’ 194.

¹² Partridge, ‘Esoterrorism and the Wrecking of Civilization,’ 192.

¹³ (*Seconds* interview 1995),

¹⁴ Philip Carr-Gomm and Richard Heygate (eds.) *The Book of English Magic*, London: John Murray, 431.

¹⁵ Philip Carr-Gomm and Richard Heygate (eds.) *The Book of English Magic*, 432.

Satan in 1966 and who later worked with P-Orridge). Crowley also became a figure that fed into popular culture, including works by the novelists John Buchan, Dennis Wheatley and Dion Fortune; as well as an inclusion on the front of the Beatles' album *Sgt Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band* (1967), an inclusion of Crowley's motto 'Do What Thou Will' on Led Zeppelin's album *Led Zeppelin III* (1970) and the song 'Mr Crowley' (1980) written by Ozzy Osbourne.

Furthermore, P-Orridge also acknowledged the power of sexual magic as purveyed by Crowley. 'There's no question in my mind,' he notes, 'that one of the most important traditions in human history that's worked in terms of that power in sexual magick in various forms.'¹⁶ Further elaborated below, P-Orridge believed that the power of sexual magic embodied 'a sacred forbidden place, quite literally where the spirit flowed like sexual fluid for our beings...a chantry ov our minds chanting thee same human desire to breaks the bounds of temporality'¹⁷: thoughts reflected in P-Orridge's fascination with the artistic/magickal presentation of body modification.

Calling this practice 'a response to a deeper sense of alienation,'¹⁸ P-Orridge describes the skin and the surface of the body as a boundary between certain means of communication, and thus, working with the skin draws in notions of the primitive nature and shamanistic quality of body modification, embodying a sense of power and control of one's body. For P-Orridge, therefore, body modification allows us to connect 'with older traditions and an older lineage that's been hidden in our society'¹⁹ and thus allowing us to challenge an illusion of experience and feeling. In conclusion, P-Orridge, as provocateur, performance artist, exhibitor of outrage and demonstrator mystical depths somehow mirrored the lifestyle and predilection for the obscene and forbidden as Crowley did at the turn of the twentieth-century.

Just Drifting: An Investigation into *Force the Hand of Chance*

Released in 1982, *Force the Hand of Chance* was Psychic TV's debut album,²⁰ filling the immediate creative space after P-Orridge's earlier musical endeavour, Throbbing Gristle. Interestingly, John Encarnacao notes how Throbbing Gristle were symptomatic of the 'freethinking and political struggles of the late 1960s.'²¹ Comparing the band to the likes of US artists Patti Smith, Devo and Suicide, Encarnacao explores the aesthetics, political standpoint and cultural expression

¹⁶ (Seconds Magazine 1995).

¹⁷ (Revealed Manifestation, GPO 1987)

¹⁸ (Seconds Magazine 1995),

¹⁹ (Seconds Interview 1995)

²⁰ The first 5000 pressings of *Force the Hand of Chance* were accompanied by the album *Themes* (1982).

²¹ John Encarnacao, 'Throbbing Gristle's Early Records,' 71.

of that time between post-hippie and punk: an aesthetics of ‘confrontation, amateurism and disruption.’²² For many, Psychic TV continued the countercultural path seen in the Throbbing Gristle’s punk-like attitude. Musical styles are juxtaposed within a debut album that, again like Throbbing Gristle, struggles with a balance between content and style. As Encarnacao quite rightly suggests,²³ there is a complex relationship between the conceptual background of P-Orridge’s work (what that work is *trying to say*), and the form of that expression. In other words, musical style becomes the antithesis of a disinterested aesthetic, and is instead bound up by external meaning and motive.

Examples of this can be seen in the uneasy juxtaposition of ‘Just Drifting (For Caresse),’ whose diatonicism and conventional instrumentation underpins the subject matter (it was written for the birth of P-Orridge’s daughter, Caresse); ‘Ov Power,’ a track reminiscent of 1980s pop, with its mantra-like lyrical content, brass interludes and bass line; and the meandering and often discordant ‘Guiltless,’ a track conjuring up influences from Throbbing Gristle. Arguably, the album is pulled together by the manifesto-style declaration of the track ‘Message of Thee Temple,’ especially through its ethereal aesthetic and meditative-style vocal delivery. Indeed, Psychic TV’s renown for their use of intertextuality in the production of their work gave credence to the track, in this case producing a video to accompany the narration of the audio.²⁴ The narrator is filmmaker Derek Jarman, who had previously referenced paganism in his 1972 film *Journey to Avebury*, and collaborated with P-Orridge on the film-maker’s quasi-psychedelic *In the Shadow Of The Sun* (1981), with Throbbing Gristle providing the soundtrack. The mise-en-scène and delivery of the narration is visually and aurally/sonically confrontational and challenging; the viewer is presented with a male, business-like figure in dark suit and tie positioned behind a lectern. The setting is one of a plain white background with the TOPY ‘cross’ symbol to the right of the narrator.

A beam of white light rises from behind the narrator, resting on the right hand side of his face, illuminating cheek, nose and eye. The rest of his face is mostly in the dark including his mouth. The visual impact remains rather unnerving, especially in the context of receiving an authoritative, ‘forceful’ and persuasive delivery reminiscent of an evangelical minister or religious cult-like spokesperson. The vocals are prominent throughout, a friendly, almost trustworthy tone, but monotone and instructional. ‘Thee Temple strives to end personal laziness and to engender discipline,’ begins the narrator, ‘to focus thee Will on one’s true desires.’ During the video the

²² John Encarnacao, ‘Throbbing Gristle’s Early Records,’ 76.

²³ John Encarnacao, ‘Throbbing Gristle’s Early Records,’ 74.

²⁴ ‘Psychic TV First Transmission 1982 1-4.’ Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zbYzAxOhIKo&t=196s>. Accessed 31 October 2019.

camera moves between close ups of the side of the face or back of the head (3:45), and close up of the face (3:40) focussing on the eye area that is lit by a side light. Not once do we see the narrator's face in full light, giving an air of mystery and distance.

At 4:03 the camera scene shifts to the narrator sitting behind an altar-like desk, with the TOPY cross placed beside him. With the white light beam behind him, the narrator remains shrouded in dim half-light, thus adding to the religiosity and enigmatic setting. At 6:16 he picks up the cross and thrusts it towards the viewer whilst continuing with his narration. "It is up to everyone to accept the power that their bodies are endowed with," he notes, with the next camera shot showing the cross back on the table next to the narrator as if it returned there without assistance. At the end of the address the narrator promptly stands from behind the 'altar' and exits stage left with the music still playing in the background.

Written in the form of a manifesto, 'Message from Thee Temple' creates an esoteric foundation from which Psychic TV and TOPY go on to further develop in their later productions.²⁵ Interestingly, the track was allegedly written by P-Orridge 'after consideration of sexual magic and L-OV-E under Will,'²⁶ perhaps highlighting P-Orridge's familiarity of the techniques of the Ordo Templi Orientis as regenerated by the occultist Aleister Crowley, and evident within the latter's *The Book of the Law* (no date). For Crowley, each individual has a 'True Will,' as distinct to the desires of the ego. 'True Will,' therefore, has an almost divine character, a 'purpose' of one's life that an individual can only truly uncover through deconditioning, a process by which one can free the subconscious mind from the conscious mind.

What remains within *Force the Hand of Chance* therefore, is the delicate balance between concept and style, the ever-present otherness that accompanies the musical object. With P-Orridge's reputation as a performance artist already established, one is immediately aware of the intertextuality of imagery, performance art and music. Although referred to as 'Message from Thee Temple' on the track listing, it is, however, referred to 'Message from Thee Temple of Psychic Youth,' on the lyric sheet. Despite TOPY/PTV claiming an almost anti-cult status, it soon became apparent amongst adherents that the structure and aesthetic of the organisation had become increasingly cult-like, not least in the individual/single acts of sigils feeding into a group/collective/cult-like dynamic.

²⁵ Given that P-Orridge's previous band grounded their music in electronics and industrial noise, there is a notable shift in the use of instrumentation for *Force the Hand* and *Themes*, almost denoting a metaphor for rebirth and a new musical direction. Throughout *Themes*, for in particular, PTV deploy the use of various folk/ethnic instruments such as drones, African initiation drums, joujouka, bells, and twenty-three Tibetan human thigh bone flutes/trumpets and gongs; instruments used in Indian and Tibetan tantric Buddhism temple rituals. Included as (perhaps) a nod to the emerging and developing 'cultism' of TOPY was a recording made at cult figure Jimmy Jones' Jonestown settlement at the time of the mass suicides in 1978.

²⁶ Julian Cope, 'Unsung reviews: Psychic TV *Force the Hand of Change*.' Available online at <https://www.headheritage.co.uk/unsung/review/2121/>. Accessed 4 November 2019.

For the German theologian Ernst Troeltsch, mystical cultism ‘had no desire for organized fellowship; all it cared for was freedom for interchange of ideas, a pure fellowship of thought,’ and where interestingly through the ‘invention of printing...[t]he isolated individual, and psychological abstraction and analysis become everything.’²⁷ For Troeltsch, therefore, cultic spirituality is essentially ‘self-oriented, eclectic and epistemologically individualistic,’²⁸ traits that resonate in the lack of complex hierarchy in cultic organisations (they are often led by a charismatic leader) and their membership of marginalised groups (where the group demands almost total commitment). The sociologist Roy Wallis developed Troeltsch’s ideas surrounding mystical religion, noting in *The Road to Total Freedom* (1976) and *The Elementary Forms of the New Religious Life* (1984) that cults were ‘oriented towards the problems of individuals, loosely structured, tolerant, non exclusive [with] a rapid turnover of membership and are transient collectives.’²⁹ Of key interest to this discussion, however, is Wallis’ unpacking of membership, in that cults do not adhere to a rigid overarching authority, being ‘epistemologically individualistic,’ instead of being ‘epistemologically authoritarian.’³⁰ Moreover, Wallis believes that,

In constructing the typology, several key questions are asked. On the one hand, what is the self-understanding of the insiders? In particular, do they understand their organisation to be *uniquely legitimate*? In other words, is the organization to be the sole repository of truth and the only path to salvation? Or is it *pluralistically legitimate*?... On the other hand, what conception do *outsiders* have? Specifically, is it generally understood to be a *respectable* or a *deviant* organization?’³¹

As an aside, Wallis’ typology of cult – whether the organization can be regarded as ‘respectable’ or ‘deviant’ – allows for a socio-cultural reading of the cult in question. Moreover, Wallis’ work allows for an analysis of cults and their schismatic (where a smaller group may break away from a larger group) or evolutionary beginnings,³² a framework useful in the examination of TOPY and its belonging within a further subcultural space.

Wallis’ critique of the historical/social contextualisation of the cult is further explored through the work of the sociologist Colin Campbell. Turning to the structure of the cult, Campbell believes that there is a unifying set of belief values that Troeltsch and Wallis overlook. Indeed, for Campbell, cultic writing and definition has often been centred around what it is ‘*not* a sect, church

²⁷ Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, 62.

²⁸ Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, 62.

²⁹ Roy Wallis, *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology*. Available online: <https://is.muni.cz/el/1421/jaro2010/RLB12/um/Wallis1.pdf> (accessed 16 November 2019).

³⁰ Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, 25.

³¹ Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, 24-25.

³² See Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, 26.

or denomination,’ and how the cult ‘comes closest to resembling a *non*-group.’³³ For Campbell, cultic organisations arise out of what he terms as the ‘cultic milieu,’ which ‘can be regarded as the cultural underground of society. Much broader, deeper and historically based than the contemporary movement known as *the* underground, it includes all deviant belief-systems and their associated practices.’³⁴

An overview of writing around cultic formation and organisation is useful in furthering an understanding of the practices of TOPY, not least in uncovering the complex relationship between established forms of religious practice and those formed from Campbell’s ‘underground,’ and echoed by Simon O’Sullivan. The latter uses a framework of ‘performance fictions’ highlighting how TOPY ‘had a mythopoetic character (they produced – or *fictioned* – their own world), perhaps most evident in the emphasis on performance and collective participation.’³⁵ For O’Sullivan, the work of the writer William Burroughs and performance artist Brion Gysin (especially in the use of the ‘cut up’ as method), and Aleister Crowley and Austin Osman Spare (especially in relation to sigil magick) are key to unlocking the complexities of Psychic TV’s music and framework of religiosity. O’Sullivan also turns to the notion of ethics, not in the framework of any particular morality, but instead as instigating a ‘way of life,’

Exploring what, precisely, a body was capable of and in developing a programme, involving certain disciplines and discipline more generally... A central aspect of this ethics was the will to self-determination – ‘to become oneself’ – and, with that, the refusal of any transcendent enunciators, in particular Christianity.’³⁶

Highlighting the complex, interwoven relationship between the individual and the collective, (not least in the sharing of experiences, the sharing of performance space and philosophical/religious ideas), O’Sullivan, therefore notes how collectivism ‘provided both a context and a legitimisation for this other way of life,’³⁷ thus echoing Troeltsch’s and Wallis’ ideas surrounding cultic religiosity. As is further noted in *Thee Psychick Bible*,

Don’t think we are going to tell you what to do, what to be. The world is full of institutions that would be delighted if you thought and did exactly what they told you. Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth is not and NEVER WILL BE one of them. We offer no dogmas, and no promises of comfort or easy answers. You are going to have to find out your Self, we offer only the method of survival

³³ Clarifying the Cult, p. 377

³⁴ Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West*, 66.

³⁵ Simon O’Sullivan, ‘Mythopoesis, Scenes and Performance Fictions: Two Case Studies (Crass and Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth).’ Available online: https://www.simonosullivan.net/articles/Mythopoesis_Scenes_and_Performance_Fiction.pdf (accessed 1 November 2019), p. 1.

³⁶ Simon O’Sullivan, ‘Mythopoesis, Scenes and Performance Fictions,’ p. 5.

³⁷ Simon O’Sullivan, ‘Mythopoesis, Scenes and Performance Fictions,’ p. 5.

as a True Being, we give you back to yourself, we support your Individuality in which the Spirit and Will united burn with passion & pride. Our function is to direct and support. Work that is needlessly repeated is simply wasteful.³⁸

That said, there are still questions that arise over the role of the individual and its relationship with TOPY. ‘No matter how often we stress that the Temple seeks to create a sense of fierce individuality,’ it notes in the document entitled ‘TOPY Is...,’ ‘that it is for each Individual to redefine and redesign TOPY within themselves to meet their own needs, these questions still arise: what is TOPY?’ The piece continues,

As we have said before, and no doubt will say again, TOPY exists to promote a system of functional, demystified magick, utilising both pagan and modern techniques. It is a process of individual and collective experimentation and research with no finite answers, dogmas or unchallengeable truths. It is for each to discover his or her own understanding of these questions that suggest themselves, and through that voyage of discovery to find their personal and true identity, the True Will.³⁹

A perfect example of this can be seen in ‘The Sigil Of Three Liquids,’ a ritual developed by TOPY ‘to strengthen and refine [initiates] inner objectives, both sexual and practical, but also to provide a fertile basis for those objectives to grow and become real.’⁴⁰ The ritual is performed alone on the twenty-third of the month at 23.00 hours. If at all possible, the only source of light should be a candle and the ritual should be performed naked. The initiate must first write down their most ‘intense sexual fantasy,’ and one that would ‘generate... the maximum possible excitement, pleasure and fulfilment, regardless of the identity, sex or age of those who take part with you, alive and guiltless.’⁴¹

From here, the initiate must make the piece of paper ‘special,’ by being touched by ‘the three liquids of the body – that is spit, blood and OV, which is the Temple name for the fluids obtained by masturbation, semen from the male and lubrication from the female.’⁴² During this process, the individual should not only concentrate on their chosen fantasy, but ‘also on the idea of the Temple and the fact that doing this Sigil is inevitably bringing closer what you really want.’⁴³ The individual must then attach a lock of hair from their head as well as pubic hair to the paper. Furthermore, twenty-three monthly rituals qualifies one as a full Initiate of the Temple.

³⁸ P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, p. 33.

³⁹ Anonymous, ‘TOPY Is...’ Available online at http://www.ain23.com/topy.net/topy_is_1.html, accessed 1 November 2019.

⁴⁰ P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, p. 47.

⁴¹ P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, p. 48.

⁴² P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, p. 48.

⁴³ P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, p. 48.

In accompanied commentary, P-Orridge provides a brief historical overview of religious practice, noting how, ‘most religious and political groups of the last two centuries have stressed, among other things, the superiority of their leaders and the inferiority of the individual.’⁴⁴ As such, and through the recognition of a growing disinterestedness in religion, P-Orridge concludes how, ‘if we are to be able to suggest even guidelines in this area, it must be done without dogma and in ways that people will understand.’⁴⁵

To further unpack P-Orridge’s work, one must look in the most incomprehensible of places, and in this case it could be Coldplay and Lori Burns’ article on the transmedial story world of band’s concept album *MyloXyloto* (2011). Burns looks at Gérard Genette’s model of intertextuality, noting how the ‘paratext’ are materials that ‘surround [the text] and extend it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb but also in the strongest sense: to *make present*, to ensure the text’s presence in the world.’⁴⁶ Burns then draws upon the work of Serge Lacasse,⁴⁷ looking at the transferring of Genette’s model of intertextuality towards the concept of ‘paraphonography,’ to illuminate those materials whose purpose is to both accompany and inform the music object. For Burns, these may be the artwork (album covers, liner notes and digital media), film footage, including music videos, documentaries and concert footage, as well as stage persona and performance practices. As the author notes, ‘adopting the perspective that...meaning...emerges through a potentially complex network of materials’ we can receive a multitude of meanings via the ‘multimedial, intermedial and transmedial contexts.’⁴⁸

Drawing upon the work of Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen⁴⁹ (especially in their use of multimodality) and Irina O. Rajewsky,⁵⁰ Burns notes how multimodality can ‘comprise the artistic integration of multiple semiotic modes within one media,’⁵¹ while intermediality is a relationship that exists between different media texts. In other words, multimodality consists of video footage, live performance, musical genre and lyrical content, whilst intermediality consists of the live performance (and its links towards occulture and religious practices),

⁴⁴ P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, p. 49.

⁴⁵ P-Orridge, *The Psychick Bible*, p. 49.

⁴⁶ Lori Burns, ‘The Concept Album as Visual-Sonic-Textual Spectacle: The Transmedial Storyworld of Coldplay’s *Mylo Xyloto*,’ *IASPM@Journal* 6, no. 2, 2016, 96.

⁴⁷ Serge Lacasse, ‘Intertextuality and Hypertextuality in Recorded Popular Music,’ in Michael Talbot (ed.) *The Musical Work: Reality or Invention?* Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 35-58.

⁴⁸ Burns, ‘The Concept Album as Visual-Sonic-Textual Spectacle,’ 96.

⁴⁹ Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*. London: Arnold Publishing (London: Arnold Publishing).

⁵⁰ Irina O. Rajewsky, ‘Border Talks: The Problematic Status of Media Borders in the Current Debate about Intermediality,’ In Lars Elleström (ed.) *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 51-68.

⁵¹ Burns, ‘The Concept Album as Visual-Sonic-Textual Spectacle,’ 96.

It is not difficult to see how Burns' work can inform the study of Psychic TV's *Force the Hand of Chance*, not least in the intersectionality of the popular music aesthetic and notions of spirituality and religiosity. Not only in the complex interplay of albums, books, newsletters and film-screenings, but more so in the function and liminal musical experience. As such, Burns' conception of intertextuality extends towards a spiritual, transcendent phenomenography of musical experience, of blurring the lines between 'audience' and 'congregation.' As June Boyce-Tillman notes, how 'the totality of music experience,' is one of,

encounter with the natural world through the body and Materials of the musical instruments, with the Expressive domain of another self or selves, with the mind in the ways in which musical ideas are debated through musical Construction and another culture in the domain of Values (whether that is geographical or historical).⁵²

For Boyce-Tillman, the musical experience becomes a negotiation of experience, of Expression (anOther self), Values (anOther culture), Construction (the world of abstract ideas) and Materials (the environment), whereby the listener enters into 'another way of knowing.'⁵³ In other words, through notions of liminality and ritual, music experience makes contact with the transpersonal, and thus 'tak[ing] the form of a change of consciousness.'⁵⁴ Drawing upon the work of Isabel Clarke, Boyce-Tillman notes how 'the transliminal way of way of knowing' is primarily related with a 'porous' relationship with others, and where the crossing of 'an internal "limen" or threshold...opens up the possibility of transformation – both social and personal.'⁵⁵

Notions around intertextuality and the phenomenography of musical experience echo P-Orridge's own thoughts that the music accompanies a wider agenda for listeners to 'get interested in the ideas and the theories and the philosophies or the attitudes or just the engagement to try to wake up.' He notes the frustrations around the traditional relationship between a fanbase (particularly in exchanging of letters, etc) and an artist, noting how 'people feel the need to probe us more and there always has been a ritual need – A (sic) need for ritual and celebration and so on.' For P-Orridge therefore, Psychic TV are not there be 'rock 'n' roll,' but instead to 'get the effect, through the instrumentation, of a ceremony or an initiation or a ritual or a celebration or an ecstatic state – It (sic) can vary, we're not sure always what state it is – or a sexual arousal state.' Key for P-

⁵² June Boyce-Tillman, 'The Western Audience,' in June Boyce-Tillman, Stephen Roberts and Jane Erricker (eds.) *Enlivening Faith: Music, Spirituality and Christian Theology*, Oxford: Peter Lang, 51-52.

⁵³ June Boyce-Tillman, 'The Western Audience,' 52

⁵⁴ June Boyce-Tillman, 'The Western Audience,' 53.

⁵⁵ June Boyce-Tillman, 'The Western Audience,' 53.

Orridge then, is the *function* of sound, and not merely its ability to entertain. In terms of Psychic TV, he continues,

That's the big difference with us, and they go, "I wasn't entertained, it wasn't rock 'n' roll." We don't want to do that. We want it to further function and effect people and it does – they go away and talk about their mental state having changed and their physical state having changed and the way and the way it made them feel or whether it was like such a drug! They don't go, "really good songs," they talk about the effect it had. The music is functional. This is the big thing that everyone seems to have forgotten. It's (sic) primary use and it's (sic) origination was function. It was to celebrate or to initiate certain states of mind or physical states and that's what it's for and that's what people have completely forgotten and that's why we use it in such a thrusting and tribal way.⁵⁶

P-Orridge's relationship with performance art has a long lineage dating back to his earliest work with COUM. Similarly Psychic TV's early live performances, such as those that debuted the album, *Force The Hand of Chance* often combined electronic and ethno-acoustic instruments, subdued lighting and banks of TV screens showing visual collages of still and moving images: all of which create a sensory multimedia intertextual experience for the audience. P-Orridge was a close friend of William Burroughs and, as noted above, was influenced by his approach to 'cut up as method.' Burroughs had initially used this approach in written text but later developed a similar process for film and video, contributing to a series of films directed by Antony Balch, including *Towers Open Fire* (1963) and *The Cut-Ups* (1966), which used occult and esoteric imagery and explored the overlap between aesthetics and the experiential through the deployment of the cut up as method or technique. As a useful referent, William Fowler discusses in detail how 'Scratch Video,' a British video art movement from the 1980s inspired pop videos where 'the phenomena centred on the recycling of found materials, exploring non narrative, associational and sometimes musical connections, between disparate images.'⁵⁷ Writing in *City Limits* magazine in 1984 Andy Lipman suggested that Scratch Video as a form positions the TV screen as 'a crystal ball, triggering the subconscious. TV as the Dream Machine.'⁵⁸

P-Orridge who was familiar with these styles and methods of video mash-up/cut up, predated Scratch Video by actively deploying these approaches in the video and multimedia productions of Psychic TV; where images of sexual transgression, occult-like symbols and rituals, live performances of Psychic TV, ethereal landscapes, time-lapse films of flowers blossoming and decaying and cultural icons were looped, overlaid and juxtaposed against contradictory, conflicting and disparate images; creating unusual connections and a fragmented narrative held together by a

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⁵⁷ William Fowler, 'The Occult Roots of MTV: British Music Video and Underground Film-Making in the 1980s,' in *Music Sound and The Moving Image* 11 (1) (2017), 71.

⁵⁸ Fowler, 'The Occult Roots of MTV,' 71.

musical soundtrack that was equally sonically challenging. Psychic TV's earliest foray into this approach to visual texts was the aforementioned *First Transmission* a collection of experimental short films that include magick rituals, sexual transgression, pornography, body cutting, footage of cult leader Jim Jones and the Jonestown massacre, and members of Psychic TV discussing the importance of its philosophies and aims, amongst other dreamlike and surreal scenes.

In the live performance environment these visual productions would be either shown on banks of television screens arranged in the shape of the Psychic TV tri-cross at each side of the stage or projected on to a large screen behind the band. This multimedia experience created a sense of what one may term as 'hypnotic otherworldliness,' where multimedia experiences become representative of the 'DreamMachine' that Lipman earlier referred to, where visually there is a sense of hyperreality at work. It is no surprise that the DreamMachine was a creation of Ian Sommerville (William Burroughs' "systems advisor") and visual artist Brion Gysin, long-term collaborator and friend of William Burroughs and devotee and friend of P-Orridge. The DreamMachine is a stroboscopic flicker device that is set at the frequency range that corresponds with the human brain's alpha waves, related to REM sleep/wake period. P-Orridge was aware of the potential relationship between alpha waves, dreams, hypnosis and trance like states.

One could argue that one of the later defining moments for Psychic TV was the emergence of the acid house subcultural scene of the late 1980s and early 1990s. At this time P-Orridge was severing his relationship with TOPY and moving towards developing a new project called The Process, an art and philosophy collective that utilised the internet, which was in its early developments, as a platform for artistic and philosophical collaborations unrestricted by geographic location. Whilst in America in the mid 1980s P-Orridge experienced the emergence and development of house music and acid house, including via one party organization, Mr Floppy's, who was affiliated to the TOPY⁵⁹ (Reynolds, 1999). Following a 1992 Channel 4 investigation and programme that claimed that Psychic TV and TOPY were involved in satanic ritual abuse⁶⁰, P-Orridge, who was at the time in America, decided to exile himself after the authorities threatened to take his children into custody if he returned to the UK (Kirby, 2011; Reynolds, 1999). The sound and structure of acid house, where electronic synthesisers and drum machines deployed to create trance-like repetitive beats, combined with mind altering drugs, such as LSD and MDMA that

⁵⁹ Simon Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy: Into the World of Techno and Rave Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁰ The producers of the programme 'Beyond Belief,' an episode of the Channel 4 series *Dispatches*, believed that footage they had acquired of an experimental film titled *First Transmission*, and produced by Psychic TV, was evidence of satanic ritual abuse by Psychic TV and TOPY members. See Danelle Kirby, 'Transgressive Representations: Satanic Ritual Abuse, Thee Temple ov Psychick Youth, and *First Transmission*. *Literature and Aesthetics* 21 (2) (2011): pp. 134-149.

created a euphoric, empathic and connected feeling towards others, presented Psychic TV with another medium and audience in which to explore ideas of ritual and magick, in a form of ‘technopaganism’ and ‘cyberdelics. As Reynolds, notes, during this period P-Orridge disseminated a number of ideas including:

Psychedelia/sampladelia as the creative abuse of technology; house’s 125bpm as the primordial trance inducing, alpha-wave-triggering tempo that connects Arab, Indian and aboriginal music; [and] the manipulation of sonic frequencies to achieve “metabolic engineering”, à la Aleister Crowley’s dictum “our method is science, our aim is religion.”⁶¹

Performances during this period, such as one at the London club Subterrania in 1991, captured the essence of how Psychic TV’s exposition of acid house music tapped into a collective euphoric form of ritual practice through sound, light, visuals and body movement. Again, cut up visuals and collages were projected behind the band, with stroboscopic lights creating a sense of fracture and disorientation. Further, members of the audience are seen on stage dancing, trance-like to the beat. As O’Sullivan⁶² notes, one of the key technologies deployed by Psychic TV was trance; but not only to engender a trance-like state of being but also as a means of creating a space for people to let go of fear, social division and form a collective energy that holds individual and collective power.⁶³ Historically, music and dance that engender trance-like states and which create a euphoric state and space that transcends reality and allows mystical and spiritual connections and experiences, have been well documented, such as the whirling Sufi dancers of Konya and other forms of ancient shamanic trance-inducing dances. Psychic TV’s *Toward Thee Infinite Beat* (1990) and their ‘fake’ 1991 album *Ultrahouse-The LA Connection* capture the essence of this period of their musical output in terms of acid house and related electronic dance/trance music.

Conclusion

Using the Psychic TV’s debut album, *Force the Hand of Chance* as an investigative framework, this chapter has explored the band’s past and on-going relationship with magick, occultism, mysticism and paganism. By drawing upon a semiotic and discursive analysis of Psychic TV and TOPY’s multi-media texts, performances, rituals and interviews, this chapter has examined the significance of magick, occultism and ritual in asserting Psychic TV’s occupying of an interesting ‘cult’ural and philosophical space between music, performance art and the practice and exposition of ‘chaos

⁶¹ Reynolds, *Generation Ecstasy*, 150.

⁶² Simon O’Sullivan, ‘Mythopoesis, Scenes and Performance Fictions,’ p. 7.

⁶³ ‘Psychic TV – Interview + Live Toronto 1990.’ Available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUWyyDUSTXk>, accessed 1 November 2019.

magick.' Without a doubt, P-Orridge's oeuvre remains one of the most complex in popular culture, drawing upon a plethora of philosophical and religious ideas, and often resulting in ground breaking musical styles. 'Clean out the trappings and debris of compromise, of what you've been told is reasonable for a person in your circumstances'⁶⁴ writes P-Orridge in *Thee Psychick Bible*, a quote fitting for the study and investigation of the work of Psychic TV and TOPY.

Special thanks to Stephen Spencer-Fleet for his valuable guidance during the writing of this chapter.

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⁶⁴ P. 39

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