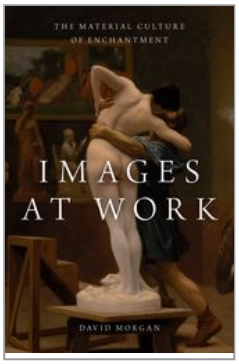

Images at Work: The Material Culture of Enchantment
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Enchantment and Disenchantment

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter moves to formalize the definition of enchantment, considering it in relation to magic, religion, art, and play. The idea of the material network as the matrix in which enchantment happens is presented as the basis for understanding the materiality of enchantment. An extended set of related examples involving the history of the automobile and its material network of roads, gas stations, and so on provide a way of thinking about the utility of network as the site for enchantment. The power of disenchantment is its ability to disrupt the network and disable enchantment—destroying images breaks their idolatrous hold on viewers.

Keywords: disenchantment, animation, iconoclasm, idolatry, Actor-Network Theory

ARE A RITUAL libation (figure 20), the act of pronouncing “I do” in a wedding ceremony, and using a remote control to change television channels all forms of enchantment? It is helpful to compare the three acts. The first two are ritual behavior and the last one is not. The first two are actions that invite auspicious circumstances or the sanction of a higher power, whereas pressing a remote’s button sends a pulse of energy that activates a corresponding mechanism. Yet, different as they are, in every case a system or pattern of linkages is formed to accomplish work. Words, actions, objects, occasion, forces, gods, and people combine to produce a result. In the first instance, the action of acknowledging a deity or ancestor is inserted into an extended chain of events designed to connect a desire to the forces that can fulfill it, not simply by material causation but also by forms of invocation, pledge, influence, and action. With the utterance of “I do,” the marriage ceremony produces a legal bond, recognized by the state,

such that one's social and legal status and identity change. In the case of the remote control, my partner may ask me to change the channel, which I do by activating a signal that consists of infrared radio waves emitted from a chain of transmitters, receivers or sensors, modulators, amplifiers, and code generators. The code includes what is called a "header" in order to privatize the signal lest my neighbor's remote control operate my television set.

Figure 20 Macron vase painter, Young man pouring a libation on an altar. Center medallion of a red-figured cup, ca. 480 BCE, Louvre, Paris.

Credit: Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.

In each instance, a small gesture results in a metamorphosis. A token action produces change. Is that enchantment? If so, how does it work? This chapter proposes to explore enchantment as an operation of networks. And it will argue that **(p.70)** disenchantment consists of the disabling of such networks. In each of these operations, human actors join with one another, with objects, with a series of mechanical acts, and with sets of symbolic codes that enable the transmission of information. But message-making is not all that produces the desired end. The meaning of each act is not simply the delivery of a message. We do better to speak of the salience of an action in terms of the circuit or network of relations that it achieves.

We note in each instance an assemblage of factors that enable an outcome. The networks all involve conventions of one sort or another, but what really sets them apart are their respective components and how they work together to achieve particular ends. The ritual gestures of offering a libation signals to the immaterial realm of unseen deities or departed ancestors, and the words of the nuptial rite ascend to the attentive ear of a deity. The machinery for understanding these acts is not immaterial. By the same token, we may imagine that the remote control is a purely material device, but when it fails to operate I am tempted to suspect it obstinately intends to spoil my viewing pleasure. My partner impatiently blames me for the delay, and **(p.71)** I insist that it's not my fault, but the remote's. I desperately shake the device, mutter frustration, threaten to pitch it across the room, and then pelt it with salty language. In that moment, I confirm its enchantment because something I might have considered

inanimate is capable of hearing and provoking me. My scolding is intended to coerce it into operating properly. My response redeploys the remote in a network of forces that cause it to act in entirely different ways—it may now refuse me, obey gremlins, and feel my wrath, or it may submit and act as I hope it will. When the television suddenly responds, the remote control having regained connection, my partner stops complaining about my technical ineptitude and I feel vindicated. The result endorses the efficacy of my coercion.

At least, I am tempted to feel that way. And I'm not alone. In an essay of some years ago, Bruno Latour happily confessed similar behavior: "I constantly talk with my computer, who answers back; I am sure you swear at your old car; we are constantly granting mysterious faculties to gremlins inside every conceivable home appliance, not to mention cracks in the concrete belt of our nuclear plants."[1] Latour refused to allow this sort of practice to be dismissed as anthropomorphic projection, since the effect of things on us is as powerful as our effect on the world around us. Anthropomorphism, he insisted, works both ways: among humans no less than among things. By talking to my computer or television set, they talk back, humanizing me as much as I might want to humanize them.

The Mechanics of Enchantment

The distinction of these three acts only gets less clear the more we consider the nature of enchantment to be an interactive engagement with an object as a way of exerting action on the agencies connected to it. That makes enchantment a technology, an instrument that appears to work by dint of animation. We seem to animate an object by ascribing to it a will or capacity to choose to work, or not. In order to make the remote work, I treat it as if it had a will of its own. But animation fails to account for the broader scope of enchantment. Consider, for example, the description of the power of crystals to heal. One writer explains their power as a natural process of radiating "pure patterns" of energy, which he compares to the action of a tuning fork:

> Anything can heal us if we are open to suggestion by external tuning fork of another's harmony. Receptivity is a necessity. Being open to it is the key …. Healing is often a matter of recovering our bodies' [sic] inherent harmony by letting go of what we are holding onto—our own ideas about how, where, when, what and why—mental frameworks that have us behaving in inorganic ways.[2]

(p.72) It is receptivity, the preparation to accept an explanatory framework by eliminating what resists it, that allows crystals to exert healing. In this and other contexts, receptivity may mean prayer, attitude, meditation, introspection, study, diet, dress, exercise, pious actions such as confession or charity, pilgrimage, consecration, a proper spirit of questing, or cooperation with an adept or a community of belief. It is useful to distinguish the two common forms of

enchantment. One anthropomorphizes or animates a single object, as in the case of the remote control; the other consists of the ritual use of an object, as with the crystal. Animation attributes to something the power to act; ritual enchantment invests something within an enabling matrix of forces. Yet both rely on a concatenation of linkages to connect the user by means of a device with the desired outcome.

Every animation involves a broader range of connections, which it conceals in the interest of locating life and will in a single artifact. In blaming the remote, I make it eclipse an entire chain of connected agents—batteries, transmitters, sensors, electrical power, and so on—because I do not see those or understand how to manipulate them. Animation is a condensation of components into a single object of focus. The remote is what I hold in my hand as the materialization or reification of my will. It is the immediate interface with the world around me, a wand that does my bidding. When I fail to get my way by means of it, I consider it the culprit that has thwarted my desire.

The libation and the couch potato's remote control both rely on an assemblage of elements in order to work. Both of these networks consist of broadly heterogeneous elements. Actor-Network Theory (ANT), according to sociologist John Law, treats "everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located," and therefore takes as its task the description of "the enactment of materially and discursively heterogeneous relations that produce and reshuffle all kinds of actors including objects, subjects, human beings, machines, animals, 'nature,' ideas, organizations, inequalities, scale and sizes, and geographical arrangements."[3]

The heterogeneity that Law foregrounds in this definition is important to note because it stresses the range of actors that are configured in networks—human and animal, as well as inanimate things and forces such as machines, tools, objects, ocean currents, geography, and the weather. To this list we might also add intangible phenomena such as dreams, visions, apparitions, and events of collective effervescence, as well as the many forms of discourse that structure human relations. And we need to add amulets, talismans, ghosts, demons, ancestors, saints, spirits, and gods, for it is these actors that often distinguish sacred networks from others.

It is helpful to recall the point I made in the introduction: enchantment is not inherently religious, though all religions exhibit enchantment. Thus, people are not engaging in a religious practice when they are impelled to curse the remote control. **(p.73)** I animate the device in order to make it to work for me. But invoking the help of a saint or an ancestor by prayer before a cult image or by

pouring a libation are instances of religious enchantment. This defines the religious enchantment as a network that includes immaterial beings.

It would be convenient if we could assert fixed differences among religion, art, magic, and play, but as noted in the introduction, that does not seem possible in view of their deep entanglement. One might like to say with confidence that religion petitions, magic conjures, enchantment transforms, art evokes, and play pretends. But surely they all do these things, and often in tandem with one another. It seems more compelling to argue that enchantment performs in all of these. In religion, for example, metamorphosis is accomplished by petitioning a saint or making libation to a god or an offering to Fortuna. In magic, it happens with a spell or ritual action, the possession of a talisman that will do the work for me, or in the recognition of an omen or the interpretation of a dream. In art, metamorphosis occurs in the material creation of an image; and in playful fictions of a game. Thus, there is no good reason to segregate these from one another. Talismans are in religions and libations in magic; games make for religious practice and the experience of beauty is as religious as it is artistic.

We might be inclined to think of enchantment as a singularly irrational act of animation, but that misses the calculated nature of its purpose and actual operation. The libation, for example, offers an insight. The figure pouring out a mixture of wine and water in the Greek libation cup pictured in figure 20 is conducting what the Greeks called *spendo* (σπένδω), or to pour a libation. The verb, which also signifies sealing or concluding an agreement, is related to the Latin, *expendo*, the origin of the modern English verb *to spend*. The Latin *libatio* referred to a “sacrificial offering of a drink” in the ancient world.[4] The Indo-European root of *spendo* is likewise the source of the Latin verb *spondeo*, “to promise or pledge.” In other words, the act of libation inserted the pourer into an economy of relations that turned on promise or offering, with the expectation of return for the solemn act. Gratitude or respect for the gods was part of an *economy* or system of exchange that solicited their favor. To make an offering that betokened respect was to enter into a relationship. As a gift offering, the act of libation was part of something more. It is not surprising, therefore, that libation cups were costly items, beautifully adorned and valued for the special work of ritual use. Libation accompanied invocation and petition, and was the necessary act for civic ceremonies, meals, and daily acts of piety, but also for auspicious occasions such as battles and journeys. Thucydides describes the ritual offering of the Athenian army before it departed for the Sicilian expedition:

> The whole army had wine poured out into bowls, and officers and men made their libations from cups of gold and of silver. The crowds on the shore also, the citizens **(p.74)** and others who wished well to the

> expedition, joined together in the prayers. Then, when the hymn had been sung and the libations finished, they put out to sea.[5]

Offering wine to the gods invited them to share in good relations, forming a network whose nodal point was ritual use of the cup, which survives in examples such as figure 20, and in scenes decorating countless ceramic vessels, stone reliefs, and bronze figures from ancient Greece and Rome.

But as I noted in the introduction, enchantment consists of the small things we do to make the world go our way in situations in which we have no power or other means to achieve our end. When we do have, say, the wealth to get what we want, enchantment may play little or no role. If I buy a palatial home to realize my fantasy of being aristocratic, it is not a status achieved by enchantment but by expending wealth. Enchantment turns not on the payment of a purchase price but on transforming something by the economy of gestures.

Enchantment is a metaphysical work of interface with a network that transforms one thing into another. The economy in question is symbolic, not grounded in exchange value. By contrast, sacrifice in various religious traditions is often not an act of enchantment but of significant expenditure. To sacrifice a bull, to offer one-tenth of one’s income, to donate land, to consign a child to a monastery, to endow a temple or build a shrine—these are acts of significant financial loss that purchase religious merit, perform penance, garner influence, or enhance social prestige. Their value does not depend on the metamorphosis of one thing into another but, rather, on the tangible exchange of something inherently valuable for something less tangible but worth the price. Such sacrificial acts depend on a secular or profane economy to register their value because the loss of wealth is measured both by its secular value and by the metaphysical benefit that it acquires for the donor.

In contrast to sacrificial expenditures, acts of enchantment, conducted in the coin of tokens or small gestures, do not require real value for the work of metamorphosis. That is because the end that enchantment achieves is economically beyond the means of the supplicant. It consists of a set of symbolic forms of exchange. Enchantment is a procedure that produces results by engaging an alternative economy, one that consists of an assemblage of agents. The gesture is part of a larger set.

A Network Approach to Material Culture

Rather than explain enchantment as a psychological projection, which tends to install a dualism pitting an enclosed ego against an external world, a ghost afloat in a very large machine, we get a richer account of causation or agency when we **(p.75)** integrate the viewer into an extended network of human and nonhuman actors. Human beings are part of much larger habitats, economies, or ecologies, and they require assistance to thrive in them—the aid of knowledge, science, lore, communities, partners, rituals, kinships, gods, or good luck. The

world does not always go our way. A little help is indispensable, and it may only be a few small gestures away. Recall that we defined enchantment as the application of such gestures to affect matters that exceed one's sphere of power. And technologies and networks are what extend the body to spheres of power beyond its own. I would like to understand the way that human beings collectively construct material webs of relatedness that include themselves within all manner of agencies around them, and how enchantment ensues from the networks to which all such things belong. My claim is that enchantment is not simply the projection of one actor or the unilateral agency of one thing but, instead, a collaboration of people and the things that constitute their worlds. As it were, we might speak of "Enchantment Network Theory" as a certain version of Actor-Network Theory. Enchantment is what happens when the world accommodates one's desires. A fit takes place between humans and the worlds they inhabit.

Disenchantment, by contrast, is a process by which the world as a whole or part of it is shorn of such proactive cooperation. A very familiar way of describing the broader notion of disenchantment is Weber's account of life without spirit or heart, enslavement to "the technical and economic conditions of machine production."[6] Whereas Puritans wore the cloak of "care for external goods" lightly, preferring instead to cultivate their sense of calling to spiritual tasks, Weber contended that moderns labor within a cloak that has become an "iron cage." But disenchantment need not entail a loss of spirit. It can also be a search for better magic. Thus, it is not a universe bereft of divine power that motivates Protestant missionaries when they disenchant a wonder-working image. They actually consider that a real deity is in control of nature, but not the one worshiped in the idol. Disenchantment can be a useful means of opposing other people's enchantments and securing one's own. As we shall see, this makes disenchantment part of a political process of iconoclasm.

Latour has urged social analysts to recognize that human morality is more than human will. It is shared with the things in the world that induce our moral conduct, like seat-belt alarms, subway gates, traffic signs, construction site walkways, and fences—anything to which is delegated the responsibility to ensure that human beings do what they ought to do. This urges us to recognize that material culture is more than objects alone. It is the fit between objects and the body, which serves as the means of engagement between body and network. The feel of the libation cup, the remote control, the fit and weight of the marriage gown or tuxedo materially integrate the body into an enabling matrix of forces. The ensuing interactions put **(p.76)** objects to work, weaving them into configurations that produce a compelling sense of the world as enchanted. This means that the materiality of things pertains not only to their singularity as objects but also to their connectedness to other things and forces. People

experience the result of a web of relations in the objects they engage in religious or non-religious ritual practice.

In a pioneering study of magic published in 1902, Marcel Mauss anticipated something of my argument when he asserted that “the whole of magic is more real than its parts.”[7] Mauss observed that magic works on the basis of

> continuity between the agents, the patients, the materials, the spirits and the end-object of a magical rite …. Magic involves a terrific confusion of images, without which, to our way of thinking, the rite itself would be inconceivable …. [T]he magician, the magical rite and its general effects give rise to a motely of indissociable images.[8]

Because he tied magic to the magician as a private entrepreneur, Mauss stressed that “the important role played by pure fancy” in magic strongly distinguishes it from religion,[9] which he insisted remains a “collective phenomenon.”[10] The distinction is dubious for any number of reasons, not least of which is that magic moves through religions, whether their authorities care to admit it or not. But I focus attention on Mauss’s insight into the ensemble of actors that collectively create magic. As I will argue at length in the next chapter, in my view, by distributing agency, the ensemble or assemblage acts concertedly to make things happen. And it does so under the guise of a mask that offers interface with the network of actors Mauss described. Recognizing this helps us understand the work that images perform in enchantment.

The intermingling of agents in any act of magic is not merely the product of individual fantasy but also comparable to how Aristotle described causation. Magic has long been regarded as the historical antecedent of science. Frazer and Tylor, for example, defined magic as primitive science. The kinship in explaining events is one thing, but the two are similar in an important structural sense. Aristotle observed that “there are several causes of the same thing,”[11] and identified four forms of causation: matter, form, mover or agent, and purpose (material cause, formal cause, efficient cause, and final cause).[12] Anything can be known by virtue of its causes, and these four variously combine to specify causation. Aristotle indicated that form, mover, and purpose often coincide in causing something to occur.[13] Thus, for example, “both the art of the sculptor and the bronze are causes of the statue.”[14] The four bring to mind Gell’s more integrated account of four elements in the art nexus: artist, index, prototype, and recipient. The artist (Aristotle’s mover) works on the index (matter) using a prototype (form) to fashion it for the *purpose* of affecting a recipient. **(p.77)** We cannot speak of the resulting work of art without regarding the configuration of each causal agency. In the highly intentional domain of representational art, it is not surprising that Gell integrated the four causes into a single set of interrelations in any given work of art and its reception. And it is perhaps no accident that Aristotle chose works of art and

their makers when he wanted to illustrate the configuration of multiple modes of causation. Gell does not mention him, nor do any of Gell's commentators, that I can tell, but the connection with Aristotle is striking for their mutual framing of agency as an ensemble.

Considering the nature of agency in the technical discourses of ancient philosophy and modern anthropology of art may strike some readers as recondite. To make it more concrete, let us take an example from modern life: the automobile, which has received attention from sociologists and anthropologists for its power as an object of enchantment and webbed connections.[15] Rather than being experienced as the confluence of the sprawling socio-technical, industrial, and commercial network that produces and sustains it, the automobile acts as what I call a *focal object* (see chapter 4)—that is, an interfacial node or material form of interface with an entire network that it appears to replace in order to make negotiation with it possible and corporeal. Ian Hodder has summarized a good deal of discussion about the automobile as part of a network, in effect, as a focal object arrayed within a vast and enabling network of very different kinds of agencies:

> A car appears to us as a car. We are taken in by the fact that the car has a perceptual boundary we can see or feel. It appears isolated, an object that is stable. But in fact the car is connected to the tarmac—indeed to a whole network of roads and road management systems that make the car possible.[16]

But when owners or would-be owners look at a car, they do not see this network but, rather, a focal object—that is, any one of several embodied experiences: the solution to a mid-life crisis, "my dream car," the enviable expression of the owner's coolness, individuality, machismo, or social status. As focal objects, automobiles allow their owners to feel themselves into the worlds they inhabit, materialized in the fit and feel of the automobile about their bodies. The focal object acts as an extension of the human body, which we are inclined to substitute for the network, since doing so confers agency upon us rather than upon the network of interacting features. And the car, in part a fantasy, tips us off to the fact that we live in ecologies that are partly envisioned. It represents the life-world that hovers within physical reality. The car occupies the world as we want it to be as much as the world that pushes back against us. It is the image of its owner's self-esteem and the object that the bank will quickly repossess when the payment schedule flags.

(p.78) Yet as Michel Callon has pointed out in a fine description of ANT, a car is more than an extension of human will. In order to function, an automobile "needs a road infrastructure with maintenance services, motorway operating companies, the automobile manufacturing industry, a network of garages and fuel distributors, specific taxes, driving schools, traffic rules, traffic police,

roadworthiness testing centers, laws, etc. An automobile is thus at the center of a web of relations linking heterogeneous entities."[17] We wish to take all that for granted and ignore it behind what becomes the gleaming, iconic heart of the web, which is the place where our eyes dwell and where we assume everyone else is looking. The study of material culture, therefore, must look through or around the focal object in order to understand what things do and how they work with it.

For the scholar of religious material culture, however, the focal object must remain in view as one agency among others, for it acts as a principal articulation of sacrality. We might define enchantment as the subordination of a network to a focal object. Callon points out that when the driver takes the wheel of the car, "in a sense the driver then merges with the network that defines what he or she is (a driver-choosing-a-destination-and-an-itinerary)."[18] But it only looks that way to those of us who watch from the outside. We see a host of moving parts come together in a vast social assembly. The same holds for religion. Only to the outsider does the icon or focal object take its place within an interactive reticulation of actors. To insiders, who themselves intermingle with the network, who are themselves part of what they experience, there is no rival to the centrality of the object of devotion. Callon argues that the entire socio-technical network that moves with the automobile as a collective action is "black-boxed" in the car.[19] Black-boxing of the network of production is at work in the visual experience of enchantment when a network is subsumed under a focal object such as an image or object, a place or a person. A black box is any cloaking of how something actually works, preferring instead to regard a device such as an image or an object such as a remote control device as autonomously able to do something and to operate beyond rational comprehension.

Disenchantment and the Power of Images

In the lithograph reproduced in figure 21, we encounter what must have been a common experience among car drivers at the outset of the nation's automotive experience. The new technology was set loose in a landscape designed for horses, steamboats, and foot traffic, whose affordances favored movement paced to the day-long rate of the sun and the loping routines of everyday life, not a quick jaunt for leisure packed into the minute-by-minute schedule measured by a pocket watch. And most materially, **(p.79)** early drivers were constrained to operate along narrow pathways designed for foot traffic, horseback, or horse-drawn carriages and wagons. These trails and routes were in many cases ultimately patterned on primordial nomadic animal migration and waterways. The automobile must have faced considerable limitations, time and again. In the print, we see that the pioneer drivers are stymied by the absence of a bridge. Whereas a horse might wander up or down a bank to find a suitable place to ford a river or stream, an automobile had far less latitude in this regard. It relied on roads, and preferred those that were paved or hard-packed. The operators in figure 21 have reached the end of the road at a broken-down mill. In this early

moment of the social world of a new technology, its operators discover that their machine belongs to a life-world with edges beyond which it cannot go. The advantages that new technology affords expire at the same time that its infrastructure comes to an end. One of the men consults his pocket watch to see time evaporate. The commoditization of time that the car had purchased for him is put to waste by the missing roadway. If the other car in the distance is the reason for their rush, the group in the foreground is losing its lead. And the print's final touch of pain is delivered by the airplane overhead, which appears as if to announce that no technology is new for long. Flying machines don't need roads, the pilot might be heard to say. **(p.80)**

Figure 21 H. C. Ireland, *Automobile at Road's End*; Walker Litho Co., 1910.

Credit: Library of Congress LC-DIG-pga-08502. Public domain.

But they do require landing strips, hangars, support crews, mechanics, fuel, and good weather. And in that realization, it is possible to recognize in this print something critical about any technology: its agency as convenient, powerful, efficient, time-saving, and profitable depends on an enabling infrastructure. Cars require a network to operate successfully. Even before the world of automobiles had fully appeared, as Michel Callon has described it, we can see in figure 21 that cars in 1910 already needed roads, gas stations, mechanics, and special dress—long coats to protect expensive suits and dresses from being soiled in the open air, hats to keep one's hair in place, scarves to keep the hats in place, and goggles to prevent the dust of unpaved roads from compromising vision. To drive a car meant to enroll all of these and a thousand other components into a single process. Figure 21 shows how the human body is specially equipped and fitted into the apparatus in order to harmonize with its operation, taking its place within an encompassing web of relationships and interactive components, all of which seem to fade away behind the red form of the car—until, of course, the road ends, or the engine stalls, or one's hat flies off. Suddenly the flow of a finely purring assemblage of parts comes to a halt.

Figure 21 actually promotes the *disenchantment* of automobiles by showing the incomplete network they require in order to operate. The viewer is not encouraged to regard the automobile as a delightful, wondrous invention, but as something faulty and prone to disappoint its owners. Looking back from the long romance with the automobile, it is perhaps difficult at first to imagine what *Puck*

might have found so menacing about the device. But the answer is not hard to find. Earlier in the same year, *Puck* published illustrator Albert Levering's rendition of a familiar Protestant motif: the giant car of Juggernaut (figure 22), the cart used to celebrate a festival sacred to Krishna at the temple city of Jagganath Puri on the eastern coast of India, and an inexhaustible subject of Protestant moral discourse against the senseless idolatry of heathenism, since the gigantic car was said to crush devotees beneath its slow, inexorable progress during the ritual. Levering shows the massive car slowly crushing churches and towns beneath its giant wheels as mobs of people rush to offer their worldly means—cash, savings, bonds, jewelry, furniture, factories, and most pointedly, a horse—all in exchange for the pagan idol that will shortly chew them up and destroy their wealth, families, society, and all they hold dear. It is perhaps a subtler critique than it may at first seem. The "gasoline Chuggernaut" will replace the traditional social arrangements with a new infrastructure and life-world of its own, one suited to—indeed, required—for its operation. This means deeply rooted networks of social organization will need to be sacked or transformed. Gasoline was certainly the lifeblood of the automobile, and making the technology applicable to American life meant making far-flung changes: building roads that accommodate two-way traffic and year-round accessibility; creating filling stations **(p.81)** at regular intervals; providing sales, banking, and mechanics to sell, finance, and maintain the expensive commodity. The location of highways would shape the location, size, and contents of towns. And access to regular flows of gasoline had profound global implications far beyond the nation. All of this seems to appear, at least implicitly, in the critique offered by *Puck*.[20]

The use of religion as metaphor served to lambaste the strength of the impulse that drove people to redirect their wealth and lifestyle to the automobile. *Puck* proclaimed that the false god of desire was misleading Americans to abandon their traditional life-world for the new mechanical idol. Figures 21 and 22 seek to break the spell of the new by showing it humbled by the same logic that drew devotees to the cult of technological innovation. Figure 21 reveals the machine's human origin and imperfect infrastructure, while figure 22

Figure 22 Albert Levering, "The God of Their Idolatry—Sacrifice Offerings to the Gasolene [*sic*] Chuggernaut," *Puck*, June 8, 1910.

Credit: Library of Congress LC-DIG-ppmsca-27639. Public domain.

pillories its divine presumption. Both highlight the role that delusion plays in the automobile's false enchantment. Indeed, this appears to be the strategy behind all kinds of iconoclasm: a violent intervention to awaken the bemused from their compulsion or hallucination, to reveal that the image is an idol preying on human fear and ignorance. The argument of iconoclasm is that the real motivating power is the illusory projection of one's own desire. Human blindness and vanity are the origin of idolatry. This is indeed what Protestant reformers such as John Calvin had contended during the Reformation. **(p.82)** An idol is a substitute god, a lie that humans tell themselves by daring to imagine what they want of the real deity and allowing their imagined or desired god to stand in the place of the real one.[21] *Puck's* imagery shows that if images (falsely) enchant, they can also be put to use to (critically) disenchant.

We may set aside the theological claims of Protestantism's view of truth and falsehood and still find something insightful in monotheistic iconoclasm as we consider the cultural logic of enchantment and disenchantment. I like to think of both of these as actions with or upon networks. Both illustrations imply that, on the one hand, the power of the automobile lies in its interface with an enabling infrastructure and that, on the other hand, freedom from the craze of the automobile rests on exposing the commanding power of this gaggle of social behaviors, attitudes, and affordances. By breaking or humiliating the automobile, the focal object par excellence, one might be free of the grip of the network that is its ecology.

There are, of course, other ways to deal with the network than iconoclasm. One is to deploy amulets for the sake of protection. Car owners have long made use of devices to protect them from the hazards and failures of the automobile. The Saint Christopher visor clip reproduced here (figure 23) is an example. Saint Christopher is the ancient giant who carried the infant Jesus on his shoulders across a river. Christopher, or "Christ-bearer," was subsequently invoked as the patron saint of travelers. Devotees wear medals or, in the modern era, have placed images of him in their automobiles. Figure 23 is a clip that was affixed to the windshield visor of an automobile. Rather than rail against the automobile itself, the amulet was intended to render it safe by invoking the saint's favor, or even presence, as the enameled medallion at the center of the device indicates, showing him in the driver's seat. As such, the image locates itself at the active heart of the network—what I have called the focal object. Rather than reject the network or point out its failures, as in figures 21 and 22, the amulet affects the network in order to prevent its malicious **(p.83)** operation. Enchantment ensues by adding an agent to the network of interacting forces, an agent that regulates or intervenes in the matrix in order to render it secure.

The Power of Breaking Images

Figure 23 Saint Christopher automobile visor clip; pressed tin with enamel, 3 1/8 inches long, metal, mid-twentieth century.

Credit: Collection of author; photograph by author.

Jewish and Christian traditions regard “idols” as missing or even hiding the truth and celebrating the false. The idol is preeminently a theological category and has been most vociferously defined by the monotheistic religions, which denounce idols as false gods, humanly crafted substitutes for the true deity. But the concept of the idol can be easily secularized as someone else’s icon, the cult image that exercises no power over me. The images that are smashed may very well be iconic in a negative sense for those who destroy them: they conduct or enable a delusion instead of disclose the truth. Destroying them becomes a way of disabling their distortion of reality. To express this in terms of networks, we can say that breaking or compromising the idols of a particular worldview counts as action against the networks they mediate. Destroying an image thereby constitutes a powerful act that enchants at the same time that it disenchants.[22] So, the Taliban infamously dynamited colossal statues of Buddha in Afghanistan and members of the Islamic State entered museums in Iraq and hammered ancient sculptures to pieces, and filmed it in a video placed online for millions to watch. Their acts of destruction are about much more than breaking single images. The disenchantment wrought by their iconoclasm consists of breaking worldviews in which the images are enmeshed. But the act simultaneously augmented the enchantment gripping the iconoclasts: by destroying other worlds, they sought to bolster their own.

Further examples are not hard to enumerate, and many involve in addition to blatant destruction the appropriation of artifacts via pillaging. During the years immediately following the Communist Revolution, the new government in the USSR directed armed forces to storm monasteries and churches, and remove icons, crosses, and liturgical objects (figure 24). The Russian Orthodox Church responded to the Revolution and the rise of the communist state by criticizing it and resisting its aggressive move to separate church and state and to remove the many privileges that the church had enjoyed during the history of the tsars. Lenin and his colleagues regarded the Orthodox Church as a great menace to the success of the revolution, so they set about vilifying it and progressively undermining its stature.[23] The materials confiscated in the army’s raids were either warehoused to await display in state-directed museums or they were disassembled to be liquidated for the value of their components. In figure 24, Russian soldiers display icons and church decorations they removed from the Simonov Church and Monastery in Moscow, in 1923. While **(p.84)** some items

were destroyed in such actions, the actual iconoclasm involved consisted of removing silver, gold, and precious stones.[24]

Figure 24 Soldiers removing church property from Simonov Church and Monastery, Moscow, 1923.

Credit: Photo: Wikicommons.

But there was an alternative form of iconoclasm, what may be called “soft iconoclasm,” which did not mean destruction but instead forced relocation to new contexts.[25] Commandeering the objects gave the state a powerful propaganda resource. The communist regime reaped the ideological value of humiliating the church, denigrating its prestige in the eyes of the people, and intimidating its leaders in order to dissuade them from opposing the state.[26] When Patriarch Tikhon publicly criticized the sale of church goods to finance the global exportation of the revolution, he was placed under house arrest.[27] Exhibitions of icons, censors, church plate, and other liturgical items were organized and designed in order to show the hoarding of wealth by the church while peasants starved.

But the ideological campaign was not a simple process because communities objected to the state’s actions against the church. For example, the citizens of Kostroma, an ancient city in western Russia, petitioned the state to reverse its action in 1920 of closing its church dedicated to Our Lady of Smolensk, arguing in effect that it produced the opposite of what the state wanted: “We must say that such forced closing of churches … exerts a very negative effect on the relatively educated people who consider churches and icons only one aspect of their faith, weakens the support for Soviet power of those positively disposed toward it, and decisively drives the simply people into the ranks of its opponents.”[28] The petition continued with a frank avowal of what the Council of the People’s Commissars did not want to hear: “We are religious people. We will not give up our religion, and in the present **(p.85)** difficult days find our sole consolation in the House of the Lord.” Kostroma was the site of an apparition of Our Lady. In light of its history and local objection to the state’s action, the eventual demolition of two cathedrals in the city center shows how the violence of iconoclasm spiraled upward.

This approach to understanding iconoclasm as political behavior and the social construction of value encourages us to integrate imagery and its treatment into a broader ecology of images. If icons could enchant devotees, the hope was that breaking or denigrating them would disenchant them by transforming icons into idols of a false ideology, which might also transform those who saw them in such a new light. Enchantment is a webbed process, which means that changing one aspect of it changes other aspects. Images exert power over viewers, so by modifying the character of an image, the theory goes, one affects (and favorably modifies) those who behold it.

I argue in the next chapter that we should regard cult images or artifacts as *focal objects*—that is, as the material center of awareness in religious practice that acts as an interface with the other—but not just the other. From the perspective of network studies, what faces the devotee in the focal object is the god as one nonhuman actor, but also an extended array of other actors, human and nonhuman. Take, for example, the cross at Ground Zero, which was extracted from the wreckage when a worker "found" it (figure 25). The composition of figure 25 suggests that the twisted wreckage itself is lifting the cross from the carnage. The angle at which the photograph was taken "captures" the moment of revelation, when the cross appears against the background of debris. As a focal object, the cross is no longer merely a random cluster of construction elements amid a vast three-dimensional grid of steel I-beams. It has become a sign, a trace of divine will, a material act of revelation emerging from the very bowels of a horrific event. A focal object operates by eclipsing the enabling network in order to focus attention on itself as the embodied presence of power. We fix our attention on the focal object as the work of an agent within a network that enables it but is also cloaked by it, in the very way the remote control operates. The anthropomorphic nature of human perception and technology nominates the focal object as exercising agency. It is in some sense a projection of human agency, and therefore animated, or as Latour says, operates as a delegate of human intentionality. Recall that Alfred Gell called this "secondary agency." The mechanical device does the work for us, and to us.

Figure 25 Photograph of World Trade Center cross recovered in the debris of 6 World Trade Center, 2001; James Tourtellotte, photographer.

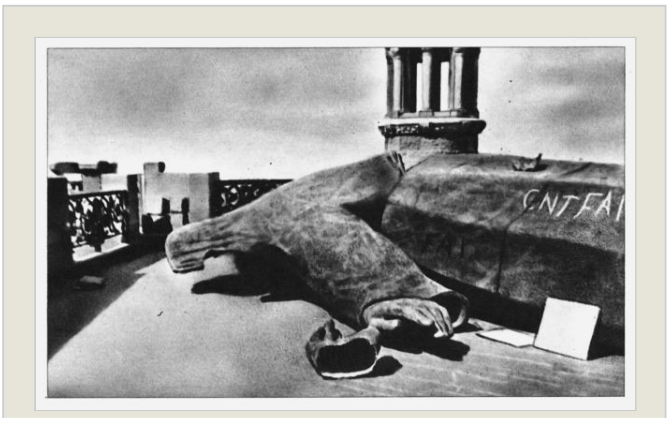
Credit: Wikicommons, public domain.

Consider the example of a subway turnstile. It makes us buy tickets and behave in a safe and orderly way. Not a euphoric, revelatory fit, but a coercive and regulating one. The human body enters into a relation that mechanizes it, making it become a cog in an urban machine. Latour comically complains about the annoyance of the seat-belt alarm in his car and set about trying to sabotage it.[29] Like automatic **(p.86)** **(p.87)** seat-belt mechanisms and the annoying ding and flashing lights that seek to compel our obedience, subway turnstiles exert moral pressure on us and to some extent make us polite and cooperative human beings, even though some choose to subvert that moral suasion by leaping over the turnstile. Nevertheless, for most the turnstile compels us to act in a certain way. The subway turnstile stands in the place of municipal revenue, the transit authority, and patrolling law enforcement. It is the face of numerous forms of civil power, all of which act on the body and person of citizens passing through the turnstile. To this network we can add the engineers who designed the turnstile, the city planners who selected one type over others, the legislature that appropriated funds for it, and the taxation providing the funding. But people probably don’t think of any of that when they insert their MetroCards or leap over the turnstile. They see a device they must negotiate—either by accommodating its requirement or subverting it.

When someone subverts the device by jumping over the turnstile, the turnstile’s broader significance—its insinuation in a much larger network of power—comes especially into view, allowing us to grasp the fact that we face in the obdurate presence of the turnstile the legal and institutional authority that may be challenged by subverting the device. The turnstile is not merely a symbol of this

other, but is ontologically connected to it. It is the face of authority that disobedient acts deface and disenchant. This fact is even more evident in the legal codes and punishments that proscribe violence to totems such as the American flag (see figure 33) or the bald eagle. These are especially charged focal objects. Their referents loom within them and suffer injury in acts of desecration.

Action on the other is evident in any act of iconoclasm, which can almost be defined as the practice of destroying focal objects. Doing so is efficacious because it subverts the interface with networks accessed by the focal object. The power of things to connect people to the others they seek is thrown into relief by the *destruction* of cherished things. Iconoclasm means disabling the other to whom believers are connected by things. Iconoclasm is an attempt at canceling agency. But as such, iconoclasm is also an act that animates objects or presumes their animation and seeks to terminate it. Take, for example, a postcard (figure 26) from the Spanish Civil War. During the war (1936–39), especially in the first year, clergy and religious monuments, images, and churches were destroyed in large numbers by Republican forces that opposed the Catholic Church for its loyalty to the Nationalist cause.[30] Cardinal Gomá y Tomás, Archbishop of Toledo and Primate of Spain, drew a stark contrast between "Spain and Anti-Spain, religion and atheism, civilization and barbarism," as he characterized the conflict between Nationalists and Republicans, calling for a national "crusade" to secure true religion.[31] Republican forces apparently targeted the statue in an effort to disable the supporting network of the Nationalists, **(p.88)** the reactionary forces of the military under command of General Francisco Franco. Devotees of the Sacred Heart, it should be remembered, had long been dedicated to Catholic monarchy, going back to Margaret Mary Alacoque herself, who had called on Louis XIV to establish the devotion officially at Versailles. Through the French Revolution and the long spate of revolutions in nineteenth-century France, Royalists consistently counted devotees of the Sacred Heart among their ardent supporters.[32] In each case, action on the object performs work on an unseen other—God in one instance and the fascist state and church in the other.



Rather than the pulsing heart of the world, we see a political event designed to expose the network of church and state as oppressive. Like the communists in the Soviet Union shown in figure 24, the Republican forces (leftist ideologically) wanted to free the popular mind in Spain from the iron-clad enchantment of the church and monarchy. The fallen figure (see figure

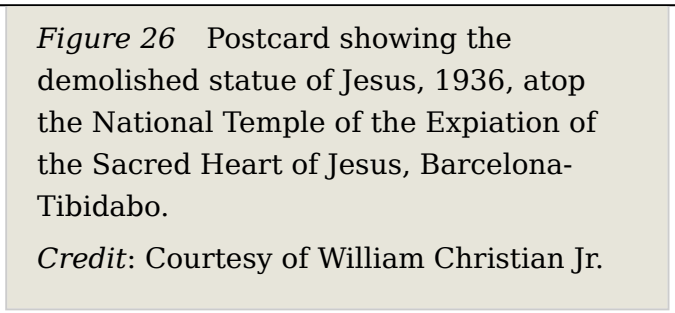


Figure 26 Postcard showing the demolished statue of Jesus, 1936, atop the National Temple of the Expiation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Barcelona-Tibidabo.

Credit: Courtesy of William Christian Jr.

26) bears the initials of two anarchist organizations that opposed the fascists in Spain: CNTFAI, or Confederación Nacionale del Trabajo (CNT) and Federación Anarquista Ibérica (FAI). The fact that the letters were written after the figure of Jesus had fallen (to read horizontally) may suggest that they were not the signature of the anarchists, but were added by those lamenting their actions in order to identify them and to use the scene as propaganda against the Republican cause.[33] Thus, Loyalists made use of the toppled figure, reinfusing the iconoclastic act with a new counteragency. By picturing the rupture **(p.89)** of the network of nationalist culture, the destruction of the Jesus statue brutally visualized the extended network and its ideological function. The power of images to connect viewers to networks is violently inverted in the destruction of images as a way to sever the link. Magic works in enchantment and disenchantment. And most acts of iconoclasm are followed by a new erection of an image to take the place of the old one. Pedestals do not remain empty for long.

Notes:

(1) Bruno Latour, “Where are the Missing Masses? The Sociology of a Few Mundane Artifacts,” in *Shaping Technology/Building Society: Studies in Sociotechnical Change*, ed. Wiebe E. Bijker and John Law (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 235.

(2) Benjamin Dean, “How Do Healing Crystals Work? Healing with Gemstones, How It Works,” at https://crystal-cure.com/article-how-healing-crystals-work.html.

(3) John Law, “Actor Network John Theory and Material Semiotics,” 2007, p. 1, at www.heterogeneities.net/publications/Law2007ANTandMaterialSemiotics.pdf.

(4) Hans-Dieter Betz, “Libation,” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2005), 5433; D. Q. Adams and J. P. Mallory, “Libation,” in *Encyclopedia of Indo-European Culture* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1997), 351.

(5) Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin, 1954), 429 (bk. 6, 32).

(6) Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (London: Routledge, 2001), 123.

(7) Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 1972), 113.

(8) Ibid., 77–78.

(9) Ibid., 107.

(10) Ibid., 110.

(11) Aristotle, *Physics*, book 2, chapter 3, section 195, lines 3–4, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKean (New York: Random House, 1941), 241.

(12) Ibid., 236–42.

(13) Ibid., 248. And Aristotle added something that Gell did not: the incidental cause of chance (244–47). We will consider this at length in chapter 6.

(14) Ibid., 241.

(15) Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 16–23; Michel Callon, "Actor Network Theory," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, ed. Neil Smelser and Paul Baltes (Oxford: Pergamon, 2001), 62–66.

(16) Ian Hodder, *Entangled: An Archaeology of the Relationships between Humans and Things* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 6.

(17) Callon, "Actor Network Theory," 63.

(18) Ibid., 63.

(19) Ibid., 64.

(20) Once the modern city and countryside were transformed into a supportive infrastructure, the situation of the automobile changed dramatically. For a very different rhetoric of transportation and its industrial infrastructure in 1930s America and Germany, obsessed with progress, a utopian view of technology, and millennial hope in the modern city as the New Jerusalem, see Christian Schwarke, *Technik und Religion: Religiöse Deutungen und theologischen Rezeption der Zweiten Industrialisierung in den USA and in Deutschland* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2014).

(21) John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995 [1559]), 90–107.

(22) The study of iconoclasm has become a major focus in a variety of literatures in recent years: Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997); Alain Besançon, *The Forbidden Image: An Intellectual History of Iconoclasm*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Charles Barber, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in*

Byzantine Iconoclasm (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002); Leslie Brubaker, *Inventing Byzantine Iconoclasm* (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012); James Noyes, *The Politics of Iconoclasm: Religion, Violence and the Culture of Image-Breaking in Christianity and Islam* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2013); Emmanuel Fureix, ed., *Iconclasme et Révolutions de 1789 à nos Jours* (Champ Vallon, 2014); Megan E. O'Neil and Eric Reinders, with Leslie Brubaker Richard Clay, and Stacy Boldrick, "The New Iconoclasm: In Conversation," *Material Religion* 10, no. 3 (September 2014): 376–85.

(23) François-Xavier Nérard, "Détruire les croyances en dévoilant les reliques: Un episode de l'iconoclasme bolchevique après 1917," in Fureix, *Iconclasme et Révolutions*, 222–31. A remarkable series of iconoclasms during Stalin's regime has been studied by David King, *The Commissar Vanishes: The Falsification of Photographs and Art in Stalin's Russia* (New York: Metropolitan Books and Henry Holt, 1997), who demonstrates the successive modification of photographs used by Stalin's regime as propaganda. As members of the Commissariat fell into disfavor, their images would vanish from uses of art and photography in propaganda.

(24) Natalya Semyonova and Nicholas V. Illijine, eds., *Selling Russia's Treasures: The Soviet Trade in Nationalized Art, 1917–1938*, trans. Andrew Bromfield and Howard M. Goldfinger (Paris: M. T. Abram Center for the Visual Arts Foundation, and New York: Abbeville Press, 2013), 66.

(25) David Morgan, *The Forge of Vision: A Visual History of Modern Christianity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015), 131. See also Morgan, "Place and the Instrumentality of Religious Artifacts," *Kunst og Kultur* 99, no. 3 (2016): 122–31.

(26) For a study of the Bolshevik opposition to religion, see Arto Luukkanen, *The Party of Unbelief: The Religious Policy of the Bolshevik Party, 1917–1929*. Studia Historica, vol. 48 (Helsinki: SHS, 1994).

(27) Semyonova and Illijine, *Selling Russia's Treasures*, 61–62; William B. Husband, "Soviet Atheism and Russian Orthodox Strategies of Resistance, 1917–1932," *Journal of Modern History* 69, no. 1 (March 1998): 74–107.

(28) "Citizens in Kostroma Denounce the Closing of Their Church, February 1920," in *Russia in War and Revolution, 1914–1922: A Documentary History*, ed. and trans. Jonathan Daly and Leonid Trofimov (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2009), 165.

(29) Latour, "Where are the Missing Masses?," 225–26.

(30) On violence against religious targets during the Civil War, see Mary Vincent, "'The Keys of the Kingdom': Religious Violence in the Spanish Civil War, July—

August 1936," in *The Splintering of Spain: Cultural History and the Spanish Civil War, 1936–1939*, ed. Chris Ealham and Michael Richards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68–89; Richard Maddox, "Revolutionary Anticlericalism and Hegemonic Processes in an Andalusian Town, August 1936," *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 1 (1995): 125–43; and Bruce Lincoln, "Revolutionary Exhumations in Spain, July 1936," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 2 (April 1985): 241–60.

(31) Quoted in François Godicheau, *Les Mots de la Guerre d'Espagne* (Toulouse: Presses Universitaires du Mirail, 2003), 45.

(32) On the nineteenth-century social and political history of the devotion in France, see Raymond Jonas, *France and the Cult of the Sacred Heart: An Epic Tale for Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

(33) The most well-known instance of violence toward a religious image during the war was the case of a Republican firing squad executing a large statue of the Sacred Heart at the Cerro de los Angeles, a few miles from Madrid. A photograph of the event was taken by a Republican onlooker. It bears a remarkable if unintended resemblance to Goya's famous painting *The Shootings of May 3, 1808* (1814), which portrayed the execution of Spanish nationals by Napoleonic troops. In the center of the executed stands a highlighted figure in a cruciform gesture, a Christ figure who is the target of heartless, foreign aggression. With Goya's painting hanging in the Prado, it is curious that the Republicans did not anticipate the quick appropriation of the scene by the Nationalists, who circulated the image as proof of the Republican attack on religion. The image appeared in a Belgian magazine shortly afterward amid a collage of photographs and brief captions under the title "La furie Espagnole continue," *Le Patriote Illustré; Revue Hebdomadaire* [Bruxelles] 52, no. 36 (September 6, 1936), 1136. The caption clearly conveys opposition to the Republican cause: "Le fanatisme des 'Sans Dieu' de Madrid … C'est là un épisode caractéristique de la guerre d'anéantissement organisée contre tout ce qui a un caractère religieux." My thanks to William Christian Jr. for this reference.