“The primacy of meaning: consumption, divinity and the machine”

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Abstract

This research explores the notion that from the time of the Machine Age, humanity has formed a reliance on the machine and on machine–produced consumable items. Writing in 1970, Ivan Illich stated that “The myth of unending consumption has taken the place of a belief in life everlasting”. In this research I explore how this idea is still relevant in contemporary society. The machine continues to have paramount importance, not only in preserving, sustaining, and advancing humanity but also in the deepening process of how we construct meaning and spirituality in a mass–production and mass–consumption society.

The studio outcomes are influenced by Industrial Revolution and Machine Age mechanisms but have no productive outcomes. Formally, they are a suite of sculptures that acknowledge an existential dilemma and suggest that perhaps the machines producing our items of consumption have taken on a divine importance within adapting cultural systems and continued technological advancement.

Some of the key thinkers who have influenced this work include Jean Baudrillard, Ernest Becker, Emile Durkheim, Sigmund Freud, Clifford Geertz, Yuval Noah Harari, Martin Heidegger, Carl Jung, Immanuel Kant, Soren Kierkegaard, Abraham Maslow, Friedrich Nietzsche, Otto Rank, Arthur Schopenhauer and Thorstein Veblen. Works from influential artists include Self Erasing Drawing by Mona Hatoum, Daughter Born Without Mother by Francis Picabia, and Jean Tinguely’s Homage to New York.

In response to these ideas, this research has been based around the following question:

Have the processes of mechanisation and industrialisation allowed the individual to fashion new spiritual, religious and cultural ideologies centred on the ego of consumption?
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Signed

Dated
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Preface

This research consists of two distinct but closely related parts. The ideas are explored through both an in-depth theoretical analysis and through my own studio practice.

In the written component, chapters 1 to 4 are thesis driven and are constructed as an independent body of work. These chapters discuss the theoretical and historical positions of Western collective religious systems, to individualisation and the construction of meaning through consumption and human–object relationships as agency to giving meaning to existence. These chapters discuss the pervasive need in people to find value in existence as a defence from the existential dilemma, from the development of collective religious belief and the eternal afterlife, to the notion of a personal symbolic immortality. Importantly, it demonstrates an investment in looking outside of ourselves and the importance given to ideas and objects in an attempt to give meaning to life. Chapter 5 discusses the influence of the machine as represented in art practice and acts as a bridge to chapter 6 which is an exegetical account of the explorations regarding my studio work and the suite of sculptural outcomes that are part of this research.

My earlier studio practice dealt with the geometry of object and space. I have been drawn to create static objects that lurk at the edges of recognition, that allude to things or states of being without in fully representing them. While following a similar approach, the studio outcomes created during this candidature are kinetic in nature and represent the reliance we have in a contemporary mechanised existence and that the consumption and use of the self–defining object can be considered as being akin to belief in a religious ideology. These outcomes have been exhibited during this candidacy and a completion exhibition will occur in September of 2018.

The thesis–based approach adopted for this theoretical component has helped build on a long–time topic of interest, and has offered an intense critique of the inspirations behind my own practice. By broadening and gaining a greater understanding of those inspirations, a stronger connection is built between the theory and the practice.
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I would like to thank Queensland College of Arts and Griffith University for the opportunity to undertake this research and for the financial assistance that has made this possible. I would also like to acknowledge the academic guidance and support of Dr Donna Marcus and Dr Sebastian Di Mauro through much of this work, and Professor Derrick Cherrie and Associate Professor Elisabeth Findlay for their assistance at the final stages of completion. I also wish to thank Evie Franzidis for her editing. It has all been invaluable.

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By all outward appearances our life is a spark of light between one eternal darkness and another.
—Alan Watts

Introduction

This research is focused on the long-term effects of the Machine Age, or Second Industrial Revolution, an era marked by a phase of rapid industrialisation and generally dated between 1870 and 1914. With advancements in manufacturing and production technologies, it also marked the beginnings of mass production and increased consumption. This research contends that ... as humans we are driven by the fundamental need to find meaning outside of ourselves, and that in a post Machine Age era this may no longer be found as a collective through religion, but rather through an individual process of consumption and engagement in human–object relationships. If mass–produced items are used to create a sense of meaning in existence, has the machine become part of a new divinity?

The Machine Age, like the Industrial Revolution before it, had a profound impact on European cultural identity. A traditional description of the Industrial Revolution suggests that a broad change occurred in the British economy and society as a result of the dramatic innovations it brought about in many quarters, including manufacture, agriculture, and transport. The economic and social benefits of the Industrial Revolution are continually debated, particularly in terms of workers’ conditions, but Clarke Nardinelli asserts that the technological transformations as part of this era “caused a sustained rise in real income per person in England.” Nardinelli continues that real wages grew rapidly for all workers after 1819, with the wages of the blue–collar workers doubling within thirty–two years. Arnold Toynbee, in his 1884 lectures about the effects of the Industrial Revolution, also described increases in wages and standards of living, suggesting that “The distribution of wealth was, indeed, in all respects more equal” and that “The relation between the workmen and their employers was much closer, so that in many industries they were not two classes but one.” The Machine Age that followed brought further advancements in production technologies and standards of living, as well as a rise in disposable income and consumerism.

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4 Arnold Toynbee, The Industrial Revolution (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), 44.
During the earlier Enlightenment period, also known as the Age of Reason, advances in the sciences were challenging perceptions of the origins of human existence and the universe as contained within the dominant religious teachings of the day. Louis Dupre proposed that “For over a millennium Western culture had been the culture of Christianity,” and that the beginnings of the modern age were marked by a separation between culture and religion. This was an opposition that had developed during the Enlightenment. Dupre suggests that these challenges to the religious teachings and belief in an all-knowing and supernatural being not only allowed continued advances in technology and manufacture but also an increased sense of the individual and how the self might otherwise be defined as “modern culture increasingly came to regard the human subject as the sole source of meaning and value.” Improvements in technology and industrialisation generated better standards of living and improved education during the Industrial era with higher levels of income enabling a consumerist ideology. A shared belief in a supernatural being might have weakened, but, as Carl Jung proposed, the purpose or need for meaning to life and existence remained. Consumption and presentation perhaps offer accessible means for the ego to feel acknowledged and therefore real. The Industrial Revolution brought us into a consumer society. Is religious belief and all that that meant now made manifest via an outward expression of the self? Is the burden of existence, and of meaning in life, now projected onto the self-defining object?

The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) is important to this research. Nietzsche is perhaps most famous for the declaration that “God is dead” and this statement and its use in the parable *The Madman* is very much of interest here. He is

5 The terms *mankind, human and hero*, when used in this exegesis, refer to all human–beings collectively, and are not intended as a reference toward a specific gender. If *man* is used, it is in the context of quotes or direct references, such as Immanuel Kant’s *immature man*, or similarly in Kant’s critique of the Old Testament and the expression that god creates the world and appoints man as his deputation. Douglas Harper tells us that the term man was traditionally used as a gender-inclusive expression. Its use to describe a sense of adult male alone developed in the late tenth century, but it was not until the twentieth century that it was used with an almost exclusive reference to males. It is accepted that any references where man, mankind or hero is used, these authors are referring to both genders.


7 Ibid., 2.


considered as one of the first philosophers to openly examine the decline of religious belief in Western Europe and to question religious morals. Earlier philosophers had certainly debated the existence, purpose, and need for religion and god/s, but Nietzsche was perhaps more confrontational with his message that society no longer had a need for a god, and that god, or the notion of a god, had outlived its usefulness. The crutch of faith and dogma was, in Nietzsche's view, a burden to humanity, and it was time that humanity faced the realities of life. It is a decline of a collective religious value system, and the rise of the divinity of the individual.

In this exegesis, religious belief, the Machine Age, and the effects of mass consumption are observed from a Western perspective. Christianity is singled out here as it was the predominant religion within the countries affected by Western philosophy, science, and technology during the era under scrutiny, and the early stages of mass industrialisation and production/consumption. With the exception of my discussion of the origins of religious thought, any mention of religion, religious practice, and the concept of god in this exegesis is in relation to a general Christian perspective. In Chapter 1: Religion in Human Evolution, I will consider a number of questions that are pertinent to this research. Where did the belief in a religious entity come from, how did it develop? What part did religion have in human evolution? Is there, as Daniel Dennett argues, a propensity or genetic need for religious belief, and, if so, why? What role does belief play in being human, particularly from a psychological perspective, and especially when considering that religion is a cultural system that affects the individual, community, and cultural identities as ideologies are applied and reinforced?

Chapter 2: Questioning God and Religion considers Nietzsche's and Schopenhauer's existential arguments. Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860) offers an amusing but pointed metaphor in regard to the questioning of, or challenges to, religious belief. In an essay on religion, Schopenhauer declared that “Mankind is growing out of religion as out of its
childhood cloths.”¹³ But does religion become a hand–me–down, or is it properly worn out and discarded? In this same essay, Schopenhauer concludes that religious belief and knowledge are akin to a “wolf and a sheep in the same cage,” with the wolf threatening to consume its companion. These rather apt words demonstrate the challenges of one existing alongside the other, but which is the wolf? With advances in science and technology, god becomes progressively more vulnerable, and Schopenhauer states that “Christianity is dead”¹⁴ but in its futility, the religious institution clings onto being the proprietor and defender of the moral high ground. Schopenhauer argues that genuine morality “is dependent upon no religion, although religion sanctions and thereby sustains it.”¹⁵

Nietzsche was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer and was similarly absorbed in questioning god and religion throughout his life, challenging religious truth and morality. Schopenhauer was more of a pessimist, however. His view of the world was that human desires were the cause of suffering and pain, and that moral reform was not possible. For Schopenhauer, human action was driven by a dissatisfied will and it was ultimately directionless. As a result of his pessimism, Schopenhauer rejected god and believed that the world was an evil place. Nietzsche also challenged Christian influence and moral standing and argued that Christian moral doctrine is not absolute. Nietzsche considered the advances in science and technologies as well as the greater considerations of logic and rationalism as integral in his assertions.

Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche was bold enough to suggest that god is an enemy to life and that religious teachings are morally anti–nature and against the instincts of life... “For those that believe in the kingdom of god, life is at an end.”¹⁶ For Nietzsche, “... the practice of the church is hostile to life.”¹⁷ While both thinkers challenged the notion of a god and questioned traditional morality, Nietzsche, unlike Schopenhauer, considered the driving forces in humanity as being ambition and achievement. For Nietzsche, it is better to face

¹⁴ Ibid., 88.
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁷ Ibid., 52.
the reality of life and to embrace the temporary nature of existence and its apparent
meaninglessness than to despair it:

For the human intellect has no further task beyond human life. Instead, it is merely
human and its owner and producer regards it so pathetically as to suppose that it
contains in itself the hinge on which this world turns.\(^\text{18}\)

Christian morality existed with an emphasis on subservience to a greater good, on being
kind and meek, and with a focus on the afterlife rather than on one’s present condition.
Nietzsche challenged Christian mores, arguing that they did not reflect the reality of how
the world actually works. Instead, Nietzsche saw value in human existence; he argued for
the choosing of one’s own values and for living in the present, rather than justifying the
issues of existence in the here and now by the hereafter.

Ernest Becker argued that humans suffer from a fear of death.\(^\text{19}\) If this is true, and if that
fear had been previously relieved by religious belief and the comfort of an immortal
afterlife, what happens to that fear when a belief in god is cast off? Becker asserts that
there is an accompanying psychological effect when someone decides to have the courage
to pursue one’s own understanding of life and the realities it offers.\(^\text{20}\) While this may
present as a release from religious constraints and the opportunity to find meaning in the
self, this psychological effect may also present as an existential fear with life no longer
having any meaning. Does a fear of death, once soothed by the imagined afterlife, shift to
an existentialist ideology by accepting either the unknown condition of death, or by
making one’s own meaning in life and creating a symbolic immortality? Does the
individual become an authentic being by accepting that sense of understanding or does
the individual become illustrative of Immanuel Kant’s \textit{immature man}—one who is driven
by anxieties?\(^\text{21}\) These questions are the focus of Chapter 3: The Bind, so named because it
appears that humanity is in a bind, faced with the choice of surrendering to a belief in the
possibilities of a religious eternal afterlife or risking it all on the here and now. The
conscious elements of belief need to be placed somewhere. If god is dead, so too, it would
imply, is the meaning in life. If god is dead, what is the individual supposed to do, or is

\(^{19}\) Ernest Becker, \textit{The Denial of Death} (New York: Free Press, 1997), 53.
\(^{21}\) Immanuel Kant, \textit{An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?} (Cambridge: Cambridge University
anything possible? “Pascal’s Wager” perhaps becomes a viable option, a wager that suggests that it is better to believe in the existence of a god and be proven wrong than to not believe and then to find that god does exist. Pascal argued that if the existence of god cannot be determined through reason, a rational person should wager as though god does exist, because living life accordingly has everything to gain, and nothing to lose.

Chapter 4: Investing Meaning in Life considers the power of human–object relationships and the rituals that surround specific objects. One of the unique attributes to being human is the ability to create meaning, from a meaning in existence to a cultural identity and the self–defining object.22 What are the things that people choose to surround themselves with, and what makes these things important? Human–beings are active in the processes of material/non–material culture, where objects are invested with meaning beyond their practical use value. The investment in the presentation and use of objects to gain a sense of acceptance and acknowledgement from others becomes significant. The consumer object has meaning, and just as it is/was for the religious icon, so the non–material value of the object potentially becomes more important than the object itself. As Daniel Miller indicates, objects become signs, social constructs that are created and passed on as part of communication, as part of human beings’ relationships and interactions with each other.23 This is not a critique of capitalist modes of production and political economy. It is an acknowledgement of consumerism and that a sense of meaning is gained via the consumption of material objects.

Some reactions to the Machine Age and the rapid industrialisation it brought due to technological advances are also considered in Chapter 5: The Machine. What does ‘the machine’ afford civilisation? Mass production changed the workforce and our reasoning for working. There was an increase in income and it was possible to engage in material consumption. The worker no longer toiled for the good of god; rather, for their own personal benefit. Various artists since that time have explored the developing importance and/or challenges of this new age, many defining it as an integral part of contemporary human culture. Chapter 5 explores aspects of twentieth century art and how this era of the new machine technologies influenced art practice, not only physically but also

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mentally and emotionally. Several artists who consider the machine in their work are critiqued and thoughts around their work are also presented in this chapter. Here, I consider the machine as human, the machine as god, and the machine as art.

Alongside this theoretical research, I have conceived, developed and built sculptural responses. These are examined in Chapter 6: Form and Scope of Studio Outcomes. Sculptural practice and motivations immediately prior to this research are discussed along with artists who have been of influence, the creative process and the conceptual development of ideas that developed as a direct result of this research. This is presented with early drawings and analysis of ideas through to images of the finished works and a critique of those sculptural forms. Links to YouTube clips showing some of the studio outcomes exhibited are also listed.

Industrial Revolution and Machine Age mechanisms have been influential in the development of the studio practice with the resultant outcomes offering a new way to view the issues explored in this research. Machines of this era are of a rudimentary nature yet complex and fundamental for the time, the early machine age coincided with the release of Nietzsche’s parable, and the repetitive qualities of this early mass production machinery offered dynamic sculptural possibilities. Materials of choice for these sculptures have been carefully considered, this is also discussed. The resultant studio outcomes create a suite of sculptures that look to acknowledge an existential dilemma and the eternal quest for meaning. They are simultaneously aesthetic and responsive, yet repetitive and meaningless in regards to productive outcome. They are useless machines yet engage us in *Useful Tasks*.

A suite of later outcomes is also considered in this chapter. This work is related to aspects of this research as it acknowledges practices and rituals surrounding death and the construction of meaning. It is therefore considered as sculpturally significant in regard to an overall creative practice and its relationship with this research. This work, titled *Like the Wind through an Open Wound, I Make Myself* considers funerary practice, remembrance and that death is part of being alive. We are here to die.
Chapter 1: Religion and Belief as Part of Human Evolution

“It's looking for God! I'm looking for God!”
—Friedrich Nietzsche

It would appear that being human suggests being bound by physicality, bound into a corporal world. Being human in this material world would also suggest being bound into mortality, and struggling with our existence, one where there is no meaning other than that which is constructed. In this material world, people are faced with a contradiction as they consider themselves to be individuals, but also part of a society or possessing a cultural identity. Individual goals and aspirations are simultaneously culturally bound, and there is an expectation to commit to a localised set of norms and outlooks that are instilled at birth. Children adapt to who their parents are; the child is trained to be in the presence of their parents. Similarly, people are trained to be part of the culture that surrounds them, to share a cultural identity. There is a mutual confirmation, a consensus, that operates on all levels of culture and “Each culture adheres to a number of mostly implicit ideas that determine its entire course.” But cultures are imagined abstract orders, and an individual can be caught between their own wants and needs and those belonging to the greater societal or cultural identity. A fundamental part of a person’s self-conception and self-perception is a sense of belonging and this is related to nationality, ethnicity, religion, social class, generation, locality or any kind of social group that has its own distinct culture. For Clifford Geertz, “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs.” Just as it is for the cultural identity, so self-expression delivers purpose, passion and individuality, life and reason. This inner struggle with belonging and identity as Emile Durkheim asserts, is eased by ritual, sacred activities, and experiences. This sacred easing, which also acts to bind the individual to the collective agenda, creates a collective consciousness.

A feature of most if not all religions is the notion of the supernatural, that there are things beyond our understanding that are filled with mystery, the unknowable, and the incomprehensible.\(^{28}\) Christian theology, and monotheistic dogma in general, rests on the assumption that the world was created, governed and regulated by fixed absolutes of a supernatural or heavenly origin. If something was beyond human understanding, then god did it, god made it, or god was responsible for it. Religion has seldom been concerned with scientific accuracy and conceptual discursiveness,\(^{29}\) therefore, as Durkheim advocates, “Religion would then be a kind of speculation upon all that escapes science, and clear thinking generally.”\(^{30}\)

But as Europe became more industrialised, the acceptance in god as a shared belief waned. Religion, and an acknowledgement of a god, had represented the shared cultural belief that had once been the defining and uniting characteristic of much of European culture. Hugh McLeod states that “the church was an integral, and in many ways a central part of urban life in eighteenth century Europe” and that “the church had an extensive role in many areas of public welfare.”\(^{31}\) But McLeod argues that, as well as the rising criticisms of belief and Christianity, the church was struggling to keep pace with urban growth and development.\(^{32}\) Science, art, and politics were all moving beyond the religiosity of the past. The identification of the sociological roots of religious belief and its origins in a pre–historical past as a means of placating or controlling nature and in understanding the world are common to many including Karl Marx and Nietzsche. Religion is a cultural construct and, as Christopher Hitchens tells us,

> Religion comes from a period of human prehistory where nobody—not even the mighty Democritus who concluded that all matter was made from atoms —had the smallest idea what was going on.\(^{33}\)

Edward O. Wilson observes religions in the context of their various creation stories and that “humanity, it assumes, exists for a purpose. Individuals have a purpose on being on earth.”\(^{34}\) Religion then implies purpose and meaning in human existence, and with belief,
people exist only for religious purposes because religion gives human existence its reason. Wilson, however, also presents as an existentialist thinker by saying that “we are not predestined to reach any goal, nor are we answerable to any power but our own.”

Wilson tells us that there is no divine being or creator, and that any feelings of subjugation or control by religious belief are for nothing. People are free to make their own way through life; no superstitious entity hangs over anyone and everyone is answerable to no one but themselves and are free to express themselves in any manner they choose. This echoes Nietzsche’s notion of the individual’s absolute freedom and that they are the sole measure of the universe. Nietzsche counselled for the individual to be their own god in this world rather than rely on the false promises of other-worldly existences.

Wilson proposes that human mental growth arose with hunting and the later development of campsites, which perhaps suggests the process of cooking food as also being important. These developing mental abilities placed the human species into a position where it could consider “the ability to invent and inwardly rehearse competing scenarios of future interactions,” or, as Kant contended, “to reflect in anticipation of the future.” Kant describes this as being the “most decisive proof of man’s advantage,” but also “the most inexhaustible source of cares and worries.” An important aspect to these philosophical conjectures is that the ability to anticipate the future and to worry about what may come are innate to human existence. It would appear that these are feelings from which other animals are largely exempt. In being human, there is an ability to imagine. People, as well as living with a focus on the present and the immediate needs for survival, were able to foresee the potentials of difficulty and hardship in existence. With apprehension and uncertainty, the individual could approach that which they knew was coming but which causes other creatures no concern; namely, death. The ability to know of or to predict a future can bring with it a sense of anxiety. Kant proposed that, if nothing else, the individual was then resigned to a sense of comfort and reassurance in “living through their offspring,” that at least a heritable immortality awaits.

35 Ibid., 15.
36 Ibid., 22.
38 Ibid., 94.
Intellectual growth and consciousness, as part of human evolution, started about 2 million years ago. Wilson argued that this was brought about by adapting to changing climatic and environmental conditions, and shifting from primarily a vegetarian diet to an increased consumption of meat, which necessitated hunting. With the development of the campsite, the young could be nurtured in the safety of the site and hunting parties could venture out. A level of social intelligence then evolved that enabled the conceptual and intellectual joining of the past, the present, and the future along with “one of the most rapid episodes of complex tissue evolution in the history of life.” With this developing self-consciousness and social intelligence came a recognition of time and a stronger sense of seasonal changes, and, it could be added, considerations about the process of death. People potentially became preoccupied with knowing, and with memory and expectation, and it’s possible that the humble beginnings of simple belief systems and eventually religions arose from this.

Tony Sunderland argues that the earliest forms of religious worship were directly aligned with the cyclical nature of the world and its seasonal changes, and therefore life itself. The human campsite or settlement brought about pastoral activities, a prehistoric transition from hunting and gathering to settled agriculture. Settlement and agriculture suggest an understanding of the seasonal changes. Agricultural undertakings are dependent upon the weather’s changeable patterns and its effects on potentials for harvest, with some years bringing more favourable conditions and results than others. Those members in the community who had an understanding of seasonal aspects, such as the seasonal equinoxes and the solstices, represented an early and elemental priestly caste in touch with the divine light of the sun. They were the keepers of important knowledge.

For Kant, the acts of permanent settlement and pastoral investment reinforced an aggressive nature in humanity. This was accentuated as the pastoralists had to distance themselves from the nomadic herdsmen because there was now a need to protect the planted areas and harvested crops as well as the occupants of the settlement itself, particularly if the season had been unfavourable and the harvest inadequate. Kant argued

40 Tony Sunderland, *The Obelisk and the Cross* (Freemantle: Vivid, 2016), 200.
that this time and these processes of settlement gave rise to culture and the beginnings of art. It was also a time when the human race was irreversibly deflected from its course as marked out by nature.\textsuperscript{41} Being resigned to the effects of the weather but being unable to find rational explanations for the causes, “those who had not attained a certain level of intellectual culture”\textsuperscript{42} would find nothing strange in voicing commands and using gestures to affect the elements and summon better rains, etc.\textsuperscript{43} These settled agricultural beginnings facilitated the development of belief in the mystical and supernatural. The moments and practices of settlement marked the beginnings of civil constitution and growth of a cultural identity. The occupants of one settlement become defined by their differences and would set out to protect itself from another, thus demonstrating cultural variations between settlements.

For humans, as social creatures, the campsite or group then becomes an important aspect of social development as it fulfils an innate need to belong. This implies that as a species, humans have a level not only of social awareness but also of social dependence, and as the campsites/groups grew, systems of control were needed in order to maintain group cohesion and stability. Wilson further suggests that as the level of social intelligence or awareness increased within these groups, so a multi-level selection process was then constructed and utilised in order to generate maximum benefit. These various levels, operating both individually and simultaneously, consisted of “individual selection based on competition and cooperation among members of the same group, and group selection which arises from competition and cooperation between groups.”\textsuperscript{44} This perhaps indicates the beginnings of group and cultural identities and that this multi-level selection process is an important part of social behaviour. It also suggests a shifting map of inhabitants within groups as each member is elevated emotionally in “shades of trust, love, hatred, suspicion, admiration, envy and sociability.”\textsuperscript{45} As social creatures, people consciously and unconsciously scan others in relation to their own individual agendas of acceptance and acknowledgement. Group members are then also engaged in the process of checking and rechecking their own position within the group just as they check and

\textsuperscript{41} Kant, \textit{An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?}, 98.
\textsuperscript{42} Durkheim, \textit{The Elementary Forms of Religious Life}, 23.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Kant, \textit{An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?}, 24.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid.
recheck the positions of others. This is from a psychological position and dependent on
the individual’s emotional needs and wants that confirm a sense of the self. As well as the
individual, the various settlement groups or campsites/communities were also in
competition with each other. The need to belong to an in group becomes important, as a
sense of superiority comes with belonging to the right group and identity is further
defined and confirmed by that membership. Wilson writes,

Human existence may be simpler than we thought. There is no
predestination, no unfathomed mystery of life. Demons and god do not vie
for our allegiance. Instead we are self-made, independent, alone and
fragile, a biological species adapted to live in a biological world.46

It is the “alone and fragile” aspect that most people fear, and so there is a need to belong
to or align with various groups. Physical, mental and emotional needs are gained through
belonging, and being accepted by the various groups that are associated with. The groups
people belong to may also vary or change depending upon the person’s developmental
stages in life. As well as encouraging a sense of belonging, groups are also used to give a
confirmation bias. Security is gained when likeminded members support group thinking,
beliefs and values. Human beings want to belong, be acknowledged, and to have meaning.
Robert N. Bellah argues that a strong sense of community and working together for a
shared benefit developed in these early settlements or campsites. Myths and ritual arose
as a demonstration of this shared-ness of community. Members of the community would
enact stories, with actors representing the various aspects of the tale, be they human,
animal, nature, or spirit.47 Referencing Plato’s thoughts, Bellah also argues that festivals
became valuable to the well-being of the community and interestingly links the invention
of ceremony and festival to “the play of children.”48 This innocent play developed into the
sacred and then into religion: “Language and culture have given play the possibility of
enormous creative elaboration, and…. I have found that ritual and religion emerge from
play.”49

The development of the campsite, a pastural lifestyle, and the introduction of agricultural
practices was accompanied by a religious revolution.50 The hunters and gatherers that

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47 Bellah, Religion in Human Evolution, 104.
48 Ibid., 109.
49 Ibid., 112.
50 Sunderland, The Obelisk and the Cross, 17.
preceded these now sedentary groups lived by foraging for food and occasionally hunting wild animals. In the process of foraging and hunting, the hunter-gatherers considered themselves as equals to the flora and fauna. Yuval Noah Harari stresses that “The fact that man hunted sheep did not make sheep inferior to man, just as the fact that tigers hunted man did not make the man inferior to the tiger.”51 It is proposed that these beings, the humans and animals alike, communicated with each other and negotiated the rules that governed their occupation of common grounds. This animist approach saw all creatures as part of a greater whole, living in harmony and off the land as best they could. With the coming of agriculture and the domestication of animals, these systems of mutual understanding and equality developed into a process of ownership and manipulation. Human-beings were now in control and could not lower themselves to the same level as that of animals and plants. Superiority was exercised as this pre-historical agricultural revolution turned plants and animals from being equal members of a spiritual collective into property.52 But this development only brought limited control. The domestication of certain species of animals and plants was still subject to outside devices. Effects of fertility and weather created potential problems, and safeguards against famine and epidemics were necessary. Here the gods offered a solution: “gods such as the fertility goddess, the sky god and the gods of medicine took centre stage.”53 Exchanges took place with these gods in the form of sacrifices to these divine powers in return for plentiful harvest and healthy and generous flocks. There was a shift from an animistic system of belief to a polytheistic one. An important aspect to the creation and recognition of these gods was superstition, not unlike the lucky rabbit’s foot or the broken mirror. If someone performed a private ritual of sorts and the crops were fruitful, that ritual would be remembered and repeated the following year. The rituals that were deemed as beneficial to the community would then be incorporated into the cultural beliefs, rituals that brought rain and fruitful harvest, rituals that staved off famine, plague, and illness. Good crops or yield was credited to the god/s, not to their own resourcefulness, hard work, or the effects of the climate and nature. Religious ritual became interwoven to settlement life and the seasons.54 But this use of ritual was essentially “wishful thinking in action.”55

52 Ibid., 236.
53 Ibid., 236.
54 Sunderland, The Obelisk and the Cross, 14.
Richard Holloway takes up the discussion on the farming of animals but proposes a longer period of respect being afforded to the domesticated beasts. Early in agricultural development, it was realised that it would be easier to domesticate and farm animals. As well as being safer than risking life and limb in the process of hunting, it became a food source that was more readily and easily accessible. Holloway acknowledges the sense of respect people had for an animal that was to give its life for the good of the community and that it was usual for the person who had cared for the animal to also slaughter it.\(^{56}\) This was much like the respect some earlier cultures might have afforded animals that had been caught in a hunt. It is as the animist approach as described earlier by Harari. But Holloway contends that this level of respect was lost later in the nineteenth century with the industrialised nature of factory farming that started in Western Europe and North America. The industrialised breeding, managing, and slaughter of various domesticated animals on a much grander scale demonstrate the “tragic interconnectedness of our relationship with animals,” which are experiencing a “double–dying now, their life being a kind of death.”\(^{57}\)

Perhaps common to the development of all belief systems that involve the supernatural and a god is the conception of the soul. Otto Rank proposes that a double or second–self was created which acted as a spiritual and immortal self. This appears to be a two–fold consideration in an attempt to understanding the processes of life and death, processes that are intrinsically connected. The physical or first–self is connected to one's shadow, which in the earlier mind might have represented the self just as a reflection might. The shadow becomes a symbol for a second–self suggests Rank, a second–self in which the individual sees their own image. The individual is inseparable from this image, which changes form as the individual moves about, and disappears at night only to reappear the following morning. Here, death and rebirth are observed, which makes it a “perfect symbol for the idea of the immortal soul.”\(^{58}\) This then connects the self with the life–giving force of the sun, an astronomical object that creates our shadow during the day, which then journeys to the underworld. Here it gives life to those who dwell in the underworld,

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., 44.  
to those who have passed, and gives possibility and hope that they may survive and eventually return just as the sun will. Our shadow appears at dawn, changes form during the day, and disappears at night, and like the sun, to return again the following day. For Rank, it is the regular disappearance and return of one’s shadow with that of the sun that becomes important in early ideas around the soul, spiritual belief, and immortality and that “from the belief in the soul of the dead in one form or another sprang all religions.”

Many of the pre–historic cultures had various superstitions regarding one’s shadow and saw in the shadow an image of the self and one’s soul. One superstition cited by Rank is that of the African Zulu “who believe that the large shadow of a man will someday join his ancestors, whereas the short one will remain with the dead.” Other superstitions include not allowing one’s shadow to fall on to food, a pregnant woman, or on to the dead. For Rank, the second–self or double “in its most primitive form, the shadow, represents both the living and the dead person.” There was also an attempt to humanise the cosmos in earlier cultural representations. Earthly things were projected onto the stars and human concerns then took on timeless and super–human validity. The immortal stars presided over human destiny, and humanity, projected onto the stars, became the centre of things; thus, the stars were humanised and the earth was spiritualised. The animal condition was transcended and the human–being assumed a special status above nature. Eternal life then became promised by means of a communal ritual of cosmic regeneration. Humanity expanded symbolically into the universe and these extended aspects of the self, the natural, and the spiritual were then held in balance within a supernatural or magical world view. An adherence to belief in the supernatural world thus acted to sustain and reinforce the notion of the soul and with it the hope of immortality. Importantly, Rank’s second–self, or the soul, along with the personification of the cosmos, implies an outward inspection or observation as a means to establish a sense of meaning in existence. This outward inspection as a means of establishing a sense of self becomes important.

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid., 72.
61 Ibid., 71.
Lisa A. Maher, Tobias Richter, and Jay T. Stock state that settlements, or more sedentary lifestyles, began in the early parts of the Epipaleolithic period (EP) c. 23,000–11,500 before present (BP), but were more significant during the Middle EP. The sites of the Early EP tended toward open-air settlement or cave occupation, while the sites of the Middle EP were more encampment style settlements which varied considerably in size, with some being very large and significant. Stone–grinding tools were prominent in domestic and burial contexts within both the Early and the Middle EP, while art objects and ornaments were somewhat rare. This would indicate that, at that time, a material culture was in existence with regional interaction and material exchange. The subsistence and sedentary trends were established which then laid the foundations for the Late EP, a significant period in the evolution of larger human groups that led to the emergence of a more sedentary village life with greater domestication in animal and plant species, and increased social complexity.

With a sedentary and subsistence lifestyle came a favouring of the collective identity and acknowledgement of collective beliefs and activities. It was through religion, Rank argues, “that man became alike because they wanted to be alike, inasmuch as they thereby gained a new kind of collective immortality.” There is a level of safety and security in the collective. A religious totemism was born out of this collective identity and group immortality was brought together by a special clan–totem which was itself a forerunner to the more contemporary god figure. The immortal totemic figures were seen to guarantee eternal survival of the individual as part of the group through shared ceremony and ritual. It was a gained self–perpetuation by vicarious means. Any individual sense of immortality was then lost to this totemic symbol as it became the symbolic figure that represented the group. Rank describes this as the “second stem of all religion,” with this collective personification termed the will–god, which overshadowed the original and individualistic soul–god. As Rank attempted to understand the concept and purpose of the soul, he suggests that it was “one of mankind’s earliest and most clever inventions,

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64 Ibid., 74.
65 Rank, Beyond Psychology, 103.
66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
enabling humans to dodge death by perceiving themselves as more than just physical beings.”

Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski propose that our Neolithic ancestors showed a devotion to transcending death, and certainly since the advent of writing, humans have demonstrated a preoccupation with living forever, with a “dedicated pursuit of literal immortality since the birth of our species.” Since early civilisation, humans have developed sophisticated belief systems designed to quell the fear of death and a continuance beyond it. Religious faith of some form or another seems to have served to alleviate concerns about death through much of human civilisation. In many cultures throughout the world, significant architectural structures have been constructed for religious purposes, specifically surrounding death; for example, the enormous stone pillars of Gobekli Tepe in Turkey, and the great pyramids of Egypt. These sacred buildings were “intended to create a bridge between the divine realm and that of earthly existence.”

Genesis 11:1–9 describes an earthly population that speaks just one language, a population that has come together in the land of Shinar (Babylonia). In order to keep the population together, in what seems to be in a place of cooperation and harmony, it is decided to construct a city with a tower that is tall enough to reach heaven. For some unexplained reason, god has deemed this an act of blasphemy, and as a means to halt the construction of the tower, god decides to “confuse their language so they will not understand each other” (Genesis 11:7) and to then have “scattered them from there, all over the earth, and they stopped building the city” (Genesis 11:8). This would suggest that humans have always, in some way, pursued immortality, even in religious texts, and that “symbolic yearnings for immortality have accompanied our ardent efforts to literally dodge death since antiquity.”

Civilisations have combined the rational with irrational elements to create a world view based on the conception of the supernatural. Rank alleges that anthropologists and psychologists alike “look down on this supernatural world view as an interesting relic of

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68 Rank cited in Solomon et al., The Worm at the Core, 88.
69 Solomon et al., The Worm at the Core, 98.
70 Sunderland, The Obelisk and the Cross, 40.
71 Solomon et al., The Worm at the Core, 99.
the primitive's belief in magic which we discarded long ago as superstition." But Rank suggests that people still have a spiritual self in common with their remote ancestors. As much as it might be questioned or denied, people are now just as superstitious as their ancestors; people are "still primitive beneath the surface." From the cultural group life of early settlement to the contemporary and highly mechanised, it would appear that humanity has always had a need for otherworldly values and sought supernatural meaning along with a spiritual sense of the self.

Rank likens religion to culture, both being human constructs, and also argues that they are intrinsic to each other. Rank proposes that the development of culture and of the civilised self consists of three layers: "the supernatural, the social and the psychological." The basis of culture is a human–made supernatural world view, with the most powerful instrument within this construction being "religion as expressed in cult ('culture')," and from this distancing from nature comes the arts, architecture, drama, and literature that are embedded in the beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies held in a bid to deny death. This early and seemingly consistent need for immortalisation is supported by symbols and objects through which the supernatural was made real via constructed ritual and ceremony: "It is the role of religious symbols to give a meaning to the life of man." Rituals and culture, as a collection of abstract ideas, then provide codes and systems for self-aggrandisement and a means of acknowledgement. The individual, of course, cannot impart eternal life unto themselves but might receive it via shared beliefs and rituals, which are a means to secure a level of self-importance, acknowledgment, and recognition. These rituals are often also designed to recognise, support, and protect the individual as part of the group identity.

Culture is created by changing the surrounding natural conditions, which are then used to shape various personality types. Culture and personality grow and develop simultaneously, and culture, as an inherited living process, maintains civilisation. Personal and cultural development become one inseparable unit, and individuals become

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72 Rank, Beyond Psychology, 62.
73 Ibid., 63.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid., 64.
77 Becker, Escape from Evil, 12.
victims to the surrounding culture or culture of birth as the group life denies a full sense of the individual or social self. Cultural identity, both individual and group, then becomes a means to deny death; they represent a removal from nature and a created symbolic immortality. The individual may attempt to deny the beliefs of the past through developed culture and its newer elements of science and technology, but the conscious element of belief and its spiritual values remain.

As the realisations of, and anxieties toward, death grew, a supernatural or mystical universe that affords a sense of control over life and death is an attempt to remedy this. A developing self-awareness stimulated the development of sophisticated language and as our ancestors’ abilities to communicate through language improved, so too did their levels of self-awareness. Thus, a dynamic cycle of evolving language and developing culture as a result of increasing self-awareness was set in place. A fear of death might suggest that someone living in early/prehistoric times may be less likely to take risks, to take part in battle, to hunt, to compete for mates, and to rear offspring. But with the creation of a supernatural world, one has the potential to live forever. Sophisticated belief systems were created to quell that fear of death by providing a sense of continuance in an afterlife. Death could then be transcended, and with the use of sacred objects and ritual not only was the incredible made credible but the supernatural concepts of reality were also concretised and maintained. Ceremony and ritual then became acts of survival as a means to avoid feelings of insignificance and death. But if it isn’t through the supernatural and the promise that some vital aspect of the self will survive death, then it is through the process of a symbolic immortality that one endures. A legacy of one’s existence or symbolic vestige of the self then persists in perpetuity and the individual will still be part of something eternal. A symbolic immortality contained within a constructed symbolic eternity.

Geertz proposed that humans assign meaning to objects that become symbols used to address fundamental questions about meaning and human social life. As Geertz indicates,

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78 Rank, *Beyond Psychology*, 102.
79 Ibid., 65.
80 Solomon et al., *The Worm at the Core*, 66.
81 Ibid., 69.
82 Ibid., 84.
a ritual becomes a way of acting upon a symbol and society develops rituals to imbue and to reinforce beliefs and behaviours. A ritual demonstrates to the community the ultimate truth and reality as available within specific group behaviours. In ritual, “the world as lived and the world as imagined turn out to be the same world.”\textsuperscript{83} The act of ritual and symbolic activity is important as a means to be actively involved in a collective, to be acknowledged, and to ensure continuation. People become personally engaged in, and desire to be seen as directly engaged in, religious symbolic activity. The shared ritual then contributes to and reinforces the belief of continuation in the afterlife; otherwise any meaning in life of the individual is destroyed in death. Repetition of ritual is also an act of renewal; the individual is embodied in and emboldened by ritual, and ritual affirms life and existence in an ongoing process. Through activity, the individual works to repress the fear of being impotent and having no effect on the world; the act of ritual and ceremony then helps the drive toward a sense of importance and away from the meaningless. As Becker observes, “So he fanatically drives himself to see his effects, to convince himself and others that he really counts.”\textsuperscript{84} The individual essentially creates a series of activities embedded in narrative as a means to enmesh with others.

Religious beliefs have often allowed humans to view themselves as being different from and superior to all other forms of life. The Christian bible tells its followers that people are created in god’s image and to have dominion over all other creatures, and that in order to achieve immortality in the afterlife; they must conquer the desires of the flesh. As St Paul wrote in Roman’s 8:13, “For if you live according to the flesh, you will die: but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.”\textsuperscript{85} People in all cultures and all belief systems have gone to extraordinary measures to deny that they are animal and apply regulations to the activities that remind them of their animal nature. Humanity imagines taking control of and transcending the animal world, which creates a sense of the supernatural, and humanity is therefore raised above material decay and death.\textsuperscript{86} Death is then a promotion of the soul to a superhuman state, of power and indefinite durability.

\textsuperscript{83} Clifford Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures} (London: Fontana Press, 1993), 112.
\textsuperscript{84} Becker, \textit{Escape from Evil}, 136.
\textsuperscript{86} Becker, \textit{Escape from Evil}, 7.
As part of religious ritual and cultural subscription throughout the ages, bodies have been transformed into cultural symbols of beauty and power. The adornment with various fashions and accessories and applied fragrances are a means of camouflaging natural bodily excretions.\textsuperscript{87} Humanity’s attempts to distance itself from its animal instincts and visceral natures can be seen as a means to deny itself as a physical creature that is doomed to die. Through constructed concepts of beauty, and by bodily adornment, an individual demonstrates a belonging to culture, not to nature. People are engaged in a continual and evolving process of engaging in ritual as a means to assert an individual or cultural value.\textsuperscript{88} By striving to view life as meaningful and valuable, it potentially becomes its own personal extinction. It becomes a self–defence against death, but often dread and anxiety will bleed through the cracks and create emotional suffering and psychological neuroses.

However, the fear of death is important in the process of creating meaning in life, and of creating a symbolic immortality in place of the religious promise of a perceived literal immortality. Here, the conscious element of religion finds its place in the cultural landscape. Solomon et al. write, “we do know that a strong sense of meaningfulness of life and of one’s own value in society provides a shield against such mortal terror.”\textsuperscript{89} The individual manages anxiety and the awareness of death “by perceiving themselves as significant contributors to an ongoing cultural drama,”\textsuperscript{90} and our existential difficulties of meaninglessness, isolation, and death are mitigated through devotion to various cultural schemes.

Religious belief and the influences of its reinforcing rituals and ceremonies can be a powerful apparatus of social control, particularly since religious ideologies are often taught to young children. As A. C. Grayling asserts, “children are highly credulous, and believe anything that the adults in their immediate circle tell them”.\textsuperscript{91} Learned knowledge is used to navigate the world, to function and to interact with others. This knowledge is

\textsuperscript{87} Solomon et al., \textit{The Worm at the Core}, 151.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid., 158.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid., 199.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 211.
acquired through instruction and institution, particularly from parents, and children will generally absorb it without question. From birth, a person becomes an acculturated individual within a wider world of meaning and acknowledgement of symbols, but it is not until a child reaches about eleven years of age that the inevitability of death is realised, and with this realisation a permanent psychological allegiance to the dominant culture, and to a level of emotional security, is formed. The importance of belonging to the in group, as discussed earlier by Wilson, extends to religious congregation. Grayling argues that there is a “conviction among votaries of any one religion that the other religions—and other sects of their own religion—are wrong.” Daniel Dennett tells us that group selection is an important aspect to life, and for those who believe that they are part of the in group, there is a significant investment in believing you have the right religion and a motivation to protect that investment is required. Religion, Grayling maintains, should be withheld from children and should not be taught until a level of maturity has been reached.

In the fourth century CE, the Roman emperor Constantine sought to unify a diverse and fractured empire after a century of civil war. Rather than stay with a traditional polytheistic tradition, and with any number of religious cults spread through the area at that time, Constantine chose Christianity in an attempt to bring the various populations into a peaceful alignment. Here, religion was used as a unifier, bringing together and binding the various local and exclusive religions into one narrative.

At the end of the fourth century, Christianity became the one ‘true’ faith. This was despite an attempt by Emperor Julian to reinstate paganism across the Roman Empire. But, as Ferdinand Mount offers, Christianity, or the cult of Jesus, was not the only religion that “blew in from the desert.” Numerous other religions and belief systems were brought in by itinerants and immigrant labour. These included such gods as Baal of Damascus and Haadad of Baalbek. These, and others like them, developed and existed alongside each

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92 Solomon et al., *The Worm at the Core*, 36.
93 Ibid., 29.
97 Harari, *Sapiens*, 234.
other. The cult of Jesus was active alongside the cult of Antinous, which it closely resembled, and the cult of Cybeck had rituals in common with the cult of Mithras.\textsuperscript{99} The old Roman religions were obligations that were inherited, along with rituals that were passed on through the family, but this influx of new belief systems offered religious choice as not known before. As the fourth century drew to a close, many cults had either disappeared or were absorbed into others, and the cults of Jesus and Mithras, which shared many similarities such as the shedding of blood and the sacred repast, were coexisting. Myth replaced myth and the Roman gods, which might have been replaced by Mithras, were instead replaced by a monotheistic god and the cult of Jesus. It was a belief system armed with the intoxicating promise of salvation and immortality, and it had positioned itself above the others by offering better returns.\textsuperscript{100}

For Christians, the cult of the body, regarded as an object of pleasure to be toned and exercised, caressed and pampered in Roman society and enjoyed as a common pleasure, represented a sin against the spirit. Attention to the body was a weakness of the flesh and any sexual activity, unless properly controlled and sanctioned, was by nature a sinful act. In early Christianity, there was a sexual renunciation, a wholly different attitude toward the sexual act and sexual pleasure particularly.\textsuperscript{101} But, as Mount asserts, “sex is, after all, only an expression of our natural instincts.”\textsuperscript{102} Mount later tells us that “The Christian way of life was both a rebellion against and a merciless commentary on the slack, unfocused mores of the pagan world.”\textsuperscript{103}

Mount cites the French historian Ernest Renan in regard to the adoption of one cult over another and that “if Christianity had been stopped in its growth by some mortal malady, the world would have been Mithraist.”\textsuperscript{104} Had this been the case, and the cult of Mithras then absorbed into the Abrahamic religious system to become part of the monotheistic religion in place of the cult of Jesus, what effect might this have had on the development of the third of the Abrahamic religions, Islam?

\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 233.
\textsuperscript{101} Mount, \textit{Full Circle: How the Classical World Came Back to Us}, 60.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 104.
\textsuperscript{104} Renan, cited in ibid., 234.
Mount tells us that the didactic poem *De Rerum Natura* [On the Nature of Things] by the Latin poet and philosopher Lucretius summarises all the sciences of the ancients and draws the previous five centuries of Greek thought into logical conclusions. The Roman politician and lawyer Marcus Tullius Cicero viewed the writings with caution. He did not question the thoughts and information presented in the *De Rerum Natura* and did not deem them as being untruthful; rather, Cicero felt that such information would be unwholesome and essentially dangerous in the hands of the masses. Cicero argued that ideas such as the world being wholly composed of atoms, and that the gods did not interfere with the affairs of the individual, should be kept to the discussions of senators and professional philosophers. If such information, which Mount describes as atheistic views, was made available to the public, the power and stability of Rome would be seriously undermined.\(^{105}\) This politically motivated censorship of information would suggest that city governors, statesmen, and elders believed that societies needed orders of rank to properly function.

As Mount contends, the political view of the likes of Cicero was that “what the public needed was not scientific knowledge but moral instruction, backed up by the authority of the state religion.” Mount also tells us that Cicero was quite open about the “need to use religious awe to control the plebs,” adding that Cicero considered it important that the priests should also come from the officer or upper class that produced Rome’s statesmen and lawgivers, “for they would understand by instinct and training what the interests of the state required and adjust the verdict of the gods accordingly.”\(^{106}\) This is further evidenced, as Mount describes the old Roman religion as being intensely patriotic and thoroughly civic, and as having a controlled and cool-headed nature. Mount then cites Cicero who boasted that the system ensured “that the most eminent and illustrious citizens might ensure the maintenance of religion by the proper administration of the state and the maintenance of the state by the prudent interpretation of religion.”\(^{107}\) This statement is highly suggestive of the manipulation and use of religion as an effective control mechanism. A quote from Seneca the Younger is fitting here: “Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by the rulers as useful.”


\(^{106}\) Ibid., 211.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 224.
Schopenhauer acknowledges a need in humanity for metaphysical belief and that these beliefs are “often clothed in strange allegories and myths and are often called religions.”\textsuperscript{108} Schopenhauer then states that once the priests saw this metaphysical need in humanity, “they then pretend[ed] to possess the means of satisfying it.”\textsuperscript{109} As the connection of morality and belief is inseparable, it was then exploited by the monarchs and rulers as they aligned themselves with the priesthood. The priests presented as the holders of knowledge, and the holders of knowledge had power.

This is particularly useful when considering religious indoctrination, as Nietzsche discusses, and that “Christianity presupposes that man does not know, cannot know what is good for him and what is evil: he believes in God, who alone knows.”\textsuperscript{110} The Christian resigned themselves to the will of god and whatever happens is as god wills it, \textit{Deus vault}. As part of this resignation to god and god’s will, Nietzsche includes Christian morality and that that morality is a command beyond criticism; it possesses ultimate truth because god is truth and it stands or falls with the belief in god.\textsuperscript{111} This resignation potentially brings with it, a rejection of many of the great and increasing number of cultural ideas of humanity.\textsuperscript{112}

The institutionalisation of religion and its integration into cultural paradigms is the principal reason that it has survived for so long and why it became a useful political and social tool. Sunderland proposes that the ancient creation myths and stories that have been passed on “reflect a civilisation that is intrinsically chaotic” and that religion “is primarily a control mechanism and a safety valve for a culture that is unfair and inherently unstable.”\textsuperscript{113} Religion creates control and as a form of social organisation, it reduces the power of the individual and the potential for anarchy or chaos.\textsuperscript{114} With religion telling people what to think and what to do, there is a gratifying reluctance to make the effort or to take the risk of achieving a level of self–understanding. The individual becomes comfortable in a “one size fits all model from the shelf in the ideas

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 67.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{113} Sunderland, \textit{The Obelisk and the Cross} (Freemantle: Vivid, 2016), 49.
\textsuperscript{114} Ernest Becker, \textit{The Denial of Death} (New York: Free Press, 1997), 46.
supermarket and leave it to that.” Grayling cites Bertrand Russell’s witticism that “most people would rather die than think,” while Mount references archaeologist Colin Renfrew’s assertion that “Christianity survived by a form of group selection because it fostered in–group loyalty and so helped religious groups to survive at the expense of less religious groups.” Groups survive through group allegiance, and Christianity is no different. The population then becomes willingly constrained into a system that offers a wonderful supernatural next world. But this next world holds no assurances other than in the present mind; any mystical explanations or promises hold no profundity. For Nietzsche, “Mystical explanations are considered deep; the truth is, they are not even shallow.”

Biology and culture have been the “yin and yang of the human experience on our planet,” a complementarity of seemingly opposite or contrary forces that give rise to each other through their interrelation. Human biology, defined by dexterous hands, large brains and the ability to communicate via speech, has made technological and cultural inventions possible. The modern western world has benefitted from thousands of years of exploration, innovation and knowledge but also that Western civilisation is a consequence of the ancient Greeks, Romans, Christianity, the Reformation, the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and democracy. Neil Shubin however, contends that humanity has created a disconnect from nature and from evolution, and that due to the ever–increasing pace of development and change, is in a process of breaking the balance. This notion of disconnect is supported by Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, who propose that the modern industrial human broke with the past. They no longer considered nature as a divine gift. Instead, with new dreams in hand, they sought to change the world, to transform their surroundings. As they comment, “Previous peoples might have lamented earthly existence and dreamed of a heaven one

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116 Russell, cited in ibid.
117 Mount, Full Circle: How the Classical World Came Back to Us, 197.
120 Ian Plimer, Not for Greens (Ballarat: Connor Court Publishing, 2014), 144.
121 Neil Shabin, The Universe Within: A Scientific Adventure, 188.
entered upon death. These moderns had a different dream. They would use their power to build this heaven here on earth.”

Human rights are also an important concept in creating and maintaining a stable and prosperous society. Harari argues that there is no such thing as human rights, they are only ideas that exist in our imagination. Indeed, human rights are abstract; they are constructed theoretical systems that are developed into various cultures, and the notion of privilege in human rights then changes from one cultural identity to another. Cultural systems of control, with collective human rules, create the means for large numbers of people to cooperate effectively. As part of a collective, the individual has no absolute authority, and all meaning is built into the individual from the outside. The individual becomes shaped by their dealings with others and the notions of “right and wrong, good and bad, our name, precisely who we are, is grafted onto us ... We feel ourselves in many ways guilty and beholden to others, a lesser creation of theirs, indebted to them for our very birth.” Therefore, as the forces of socialisation make us who we are, the individual becomes burdened by their dealings with others.

Harari quotes Voltaire to demonstrate the importance of religion and religious belief as a means to bring order: “There is no God, but don't tell that to my servant, least he murder me at night.” Religious belief becomes important in creating a sense of stability and order, as a basis for a sense of human rights when, essentially, the individual has no inherent rights. This imagined order relies on myths, and a continued belief in them to remain stable. God, therefore, can be no more than an abstract concept due to the complete lack of evidence in support of its existence. But religion requires a god as an integral element in this culturally constructed means of control in order to keep functioning. God becomes the ultimate authority figure, and belief in such a thing keeps people in line. But with a complete lack of proof of god's existence, it can be seen as being no more than a human creation, just as religion is a cultural construct, and as Hitchens states, “that which can be asserted without evidence, can be dismissed without

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123 Ibid.
124 Harari, Sapiens, 123.
125 Becker, The Denial of Death, 48.
126 Harari, Sapiens, 124.
evidence.”\textsuperscript{127} Once these myths, and ideas of god are questioned or rejected, the imagined order is then in danger of collapse.

Myths go back to the earliest storytellers who were motivated by their dreams and imaginations. Jung likens the poets and philosophers of later generations to these early storytellers.\textsuperscript{128} These raconteurs were not necessarily concerned with the origins of their fantasies that, over time, would grow and develop in illusion and complexity. The Ancient Greeks, however, understood that these tales of gods, these myths, “were nothing but archaic and exaggerated traditions of long-buried kings or chieftains.”\textsuperscript{129}

Kant’s discussions on freedom from religious indoctrination ask for the ability to think for oneself without repercussion: people should be encouraged to think for themselves and to be able to openly discuss thoughts and conclusions.\textsuperscript{130} This suggests, or rather reinforces, the notion that religion and religious indoctrinations are there to do the thinking for people, or perhaps more accurately to convince people that they do not need to think for themselves. According to Kant, subscribers to religious belief\textsuperscript{131} hand over a level of responsibility and become intellectually lazy and inculcated into a “self-incurred immaturity.”\textsuperscript{132} If others, such as the priests and other religious hierarchy, are placed in a guardian role and the solutions to life are presented as part of religious belief, it becomes easier for the individual to remain immature. They need not make any effort as it is all decided for them; it becomes deus vault, or god’s will. Humanity, therefore, need not make any effort in understanding itself and the surrounding world as it is all is divinely decided. As well as the immature man, Kant took issue with the “guardians … who have taken it upon themselves the work of supervision.”\textsuperscript{133} Kant considered that these guardians work to contain or restrict the individual, discouraging the seeking of enlightenment or personal freedoms and warning that any step forward is not only

\textsuperscript{128} Jung, “Approaching the Unconscious,” 90.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{130} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{131} Kant, \textit{An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?}, 1–11.
\textsuperscript{132} I would argue here that Kant was primarily considering rationalist Christian orthodoxy being that that is what he was raised in.
\textsuperscript{133} Kant, \textit{An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?}, 1.
\textsuperscript{134} Ibid.
difficult but also highly dangerous. It is therefore better to remain docile and frightened, with immaturity then becoming second nature. A level of security is contained within that immaturity and any fears are absorbed by faith.

With religion came not only surrender and control, but also a sense of belonging to a collective which helps give one’s life meaning. Religion made people more than mere animal; it elevated and gave a sense of meaning and importance. Life had purpose, and religion as a part of human evolution became increasingly important as civilisations grew. For some, the institution of religion helps them deal with important questions of life, how to live according to a higher way of thinking, and what comes after death. It infers beliefs about the world and how to bring order and be good. With religion and the promise of the afterlife, humanity has created a cultural context within the processes of nature. It implied a sense of authenticity, meaning, and hope.

God cannot be seen, but stories are continuously told to convince of divine action and presence; and the individual has also been told that it is in their own best interests to believe. J. Anderson Thomson states that belief and ritual are used as survival mechanisms, and that to believe is easier than it is to not believing. The act of believing enables one to hand over responsibility, whereas not believing means one must think for oneself and be self–responsible. Yet, how can one not believe, but also keep life simple? Perhaps this is where the process of self–definition and the act of consumption come in to play, whereby one engages in a process of connection through consumption and presentation of the self as an individual, rather than through collective worship and ritual. A bond is formed with those who perform ritual together, between those who sing and dance. Is the same happening with a shared display of objects and actions in a contemporary world? A sense of togetherness may be formed through shared interests in music, fashion or sport, etc. Does this activity spare the individual from having to think for themselves, from the pressures of self–responsibility, and importantly the neuroses of modern life and the discontents of civilisation? As it is for religious belief, is the process of consumption and presentation acting as a distraction from self–responsibility?

134 Harari, Sapiens, 124.
135 J. Anderson Thomson, Why We Believe in God(s) (Charlottesville, Virginia: Pitchstone, 2011), 93.
136 Ibid., 115.
Engaging in religious belief diminishes our level of self-responsibility, whether subscription to these belief systems is by choice or by indoctrination as a child. The moral decisions by which people live are defined, and the collective of belief is held together, through shared ritual and ceremony. This is reinforced by considering that only the priestly caste can know the correct procedures and guide the right rituals. Belief makes life easier. If finding meaning in life is hard, or is fraught, then one might hand that over. One's sense of self is often improved through association and participation; which them gives people meaning and a sense of belonging.

Thomson discusses the notion and use of personal ritual, such as a Catholic athlete crossing themselves just before a race. Thomson suggests that “such repetitive obsessional actions serve as a means of allaying fear” and to ease anxiety. This compulsion to ease anxiety is further explored by Thomson via Sigmund Freud:

Sigmund Freud thought that religion was society’s obsessive–compulsive disorder and that obsessive–compulsive disorder was an individual’s private religion. He saw the link but did not have the tools to fully understand it. We now know that the brain has precautionary vigilance systems that can be triggered to take repetitive or stereotyped action to ally anxiety. These same mechanisms are used in religious ritual and help allay the anxiety generated by uncertainty or risk, both inherent to life, but especially so in the harsh and dangerous world of our ancestors.

Humanity has the ability to understand itself and the capacity for good and evil; this is the human condition. The institution of religion helps some people grapple with questions about what comes after death and how to run a life according to a higher way of thinking. It presents beliefs about the world, how to bring order, and how to be good, along with providing guidelines regarding the rituals and ceremonies connected to those beliefs. The rituals and ceremonies are used to reinforce the collective agreement and to compel subscription. The supernatural beyond gives meaning to life, religion masks the fear of self-knowledge and it gives reason, or an excuse to bypass the fear of life and of death. While it might be hoped that any existential and fundamental anxiety about life

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137 Sunderland, The Obelisk and the Cross, 28.
138 Thomson, Why We Believe in God(s), 96.
139 Ibid.
140 Otto Rank, Beyond Psychology (New York: Dover, 2014), 126.
and purpose can be mitigated through religion, religion itself is also responsible for the creation of anxiety due to the possibilities of disobedience to the faith and requisite punishment. This is discussed in Chapter 2, Questioning God and Religion. Some relief is gained by surrendering responsibility and submitting to religious ideologies, but that subjugation creates its own anxieties in adherence to the religious rules. Religion offers a general order of existence, but it also commands adherence. Despite the promises of a life everlasting, religion takes the fundamental anxieties into itself; rather than a happy ending, it becomes perhaps more of a tragic understanding. It is nothing more than immemorial misdirection.\footnote{Bellah, \textit{Religion in Human Evolution}, 36.} Being mortal, finite creatures generate tension and discontent. That, it seems, is part of being human.
Sometimes even to live is an act of courage.

—Seneca the Younger\(^{142}\)

Chapter 2: Questioning God and Religion

“Where is God?” he cried; “I’ll tell you! We have killed him—you and I! We are all his murderers.”
—Friedrich Nietzsche

In his writings during the late nineteenth century, Nietzsche reflected on the cultural shift away from faith and that the moral codes proposed by Christianity were no longer useful. Nietzsche’s god had died in the hearts and minds of his generation as a result of the swing towards rationalism and science and the fact that these qualities in life offered a sense of reality in the here and now rather than the hope of immortality in the afterlife as promised in faith. As philosopher David Hume wrote just over one hundred years earlier: “A wise man ... proportions his belief to the evidence.” Reasoning powers are important and where evidence leaves room for doubt, one should maintain a level of scepticism toward anything that is presented. This indicates a level of objective awareness, which should be influential and persuasive over subjectivity or levels of fear and insecurity.

Religious belief and god had provided the foundations of life; god had offered moral codes and a defining and uniting approach to life through a shared set of cultural beliefs that expressed the social and the cultural outlooks. It was by these codes that people lived their lives. Everything anybody needed to know was contained in the scriptures and so nothing needed to be questioned. Religion determined all that was necessary to lead a fulfilling and moral life. By adhering to essential religious constructs, the supplicant was promised meaning in one’s life and immortality in an afterlife. Religion offered a comfortable surrender. To question the evidence, one risks dismantling the foundations of life, existence, and meaning.

The late nineteenth century in European history was significant for a number of reasons; as well the developing mechanisation and growth in secularism, there was an increase in democracy, liberty and, equality. Darwin’s theory of evolution was also raising serious questions in regard to the authority of the scriptures. It would certainly appear that, as

Nietzsche’s key messages would suggest, god had outlived its purpose, society no longer had a need for a god as it learned to face realities of life. Theistic dogma and faith was being exchanged for rationalism and reason, but perhaps marked with an existential nihilism.

Nietzsche’s parable *The Madman*, originally published in 1882, not only coincides with but is also perhaps a reflection of the impact that technological and industrial changes had on European/Western culture of this era. In the parable, Nietzsche’s character tells us that “god is dead” and that “we have killed him” and, as god’s killers, humanity must find a new way to define itself; humanity must think for itself and find a new mode of being. Nietzsche demonstrates an understanding that this era in European civilisation was to be a cultural turning point, with a decline in god worship and a stronger recognition of the sense of self. This shift was motivated by and acknowledged the developments in the sciences and technologies but was perhaps also developed and sustained through the developing processes of mass consumption and presentation. It was an assertion of modernity and of culture. The West was dispensing with an immersive notion of Christianity and was becoming more driven by individual ambition. With Nietzsche critiquing the predominant cultural religious identity during a rapid and decisive period of scientific and technological advancement, the aspects of production, consumption, and religiosity might then become mutually inclusive.

The lines in the parable, “god is dead” and “we have killed him” are profound and provocative and subject for debate since. Ferdinand Mount describes it as a “harsh and blunt sentence.” Mount, describing Nietzsche as “a crazy–brilliant philosopher,” then tells us that the sentence is meant to be harsh and blunt, and that that is why it is remembered. Mount himself can be equally as harsh and blunt in his writing; he makes the provocative statement that “Enlightened people would soon understand the uncomfortable truth, that God did not exist, but the great mass of stupid people would go on worshipping His flickering shadow, perhaps for thousands of years.”

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146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
Nietzsche’s parable certainly makes some important assertions, yet also asks some significant questions. The statement that god is dead and that we have killed him is challenging and pointed, but Nietzsche follows this by asking if we as god’s killers are strong enough to become gods ourselves. And being that we have killed him, “Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it.”

This entire parable, but particularly the line god is dead, might be considered as a declaration that such an entity exists, or rather existed before we killed him. While making the statement that god is dead, Nietzsche is also presenting the notion that it is the death of belief—belief in a supposedly supernatural being—that has been killed. All religions are instructive and can be observed through their ritual and ceremonial practices and their architectural edifices in nearly every village, town, or city. Each in their own way expresses a religious ideology, but all this does is support continued religious practice, community alignment, and belief, rather than provide evidence of the existence of a supernatural being. There had always been those who had not believed in or had questioned the existence of a god, so perhaps Nietzsche’s assertion that god is dead is an acknowledgment that Western society was at a recognisable and important turning point in god–worship. The element of religious belief however, needed to go somewhere.

Nietzsche realised that the death of god would give birth to something important: the idea of absolute freedom and of the individual as a measure of their universe. This is a major shift for the human psyche, with a loosening of moral and intellectual certainties or codes as dictated through scripture, people are left with questions about what is good or bad, right and wrong. The individual is left to call on their own moral instincts that were previously suppressed by the processes and intentions of religion. The church had been the giver of morals; it had been, and perhaps still is to the religious apologist, the defining path and representative of a final and eternal auditor. Nietzsche wanted to expose the fixed truths of religion and to challenge the ideas contained in them, to campaign for the power of the individual. Nietzsche’s guide was for the individual to think for themselves, to be the epic hero in control of one’s own life process and destiny. Life presents people with choices and by breaking free of imposed and accepted religious shackles, they may

be given the freedom to make and define themselves through their own efforts. In questioning if we are strong enough to take on that role ourselves, Nietzsche challenges the individuals’ ability, as god’s collective killers, to become powerful. With the death of god, a void is created that needs to be filled by something. Despite the death of god, the ego still exists and with it the fear of death. This fear had been appeased by the promise of an afterlife, but the death of god takes with it that promise of religious immortality. Human beings become mere animal again, despite the long–held striving to distance themselves from that category and to elevate themselves above something that just eats and fornicates.

Nietzsche, in arguing that god and religion are no longer credible sources of absolute moral principles, and his pronouncement of the death of god, is asking for a re–evaluation of life and life’s values, perhaps of life’s meaning in its entirety. Jung proposed that god existed only within the psyche and that the question of god existing is futile. For Jung, if the answer to the question “Does god exist?” is yes, then “what are the physical or mental evidences?”150 Jung did however accept the spiritual need that longs for wholeness as real. This wholeness is perhaps an aspect of the human psyche that points to belonging, of being acknowledged and accepted. As people are social creatures, belonging may be an instinctual need. Humans recognise a familial belonging, but what of belonging to community, society, or to a surrounding culture? Cultural belonging requires constructed realities or imagined orders that work to maintain a balance of the cultural identity through laws, rules, and expectations. These laws, rules and expectations then become artificial instincts that are reinforced through conditioning and encourage conformity. Here we could recall Geertz’ assertions mentioned earlier and that cultures are essentially webs of significance.

If, as Jung asserts, god is a psychic creation, then it is not god but a god–image that exists in the mind. In this sense, it is the act of god–worship that is important, not the god itself. The role of religion as part of a cultural identity was to effectively maintain the idea of the existence of god, and this was ensured through the use of sacred artefacts and ritual. This notion of Jung’s is then aligned with Durkheim’s observation that religious phenomena

fall into two basic categories: beliefs and rites. Beliefs are essentially states of opinion and consist of representations, while rites are modes of action. These provide the individual with the thinking and the doing: the thinking directs to the doing, and it is with the doing that a level of importance and conviction is given to the thinking. The thinking and doing, particularly as part of an acknowledging collective then supports and reinforces an emotional response and feelings of well-being in the individual.

The Rev Dr Joanna Collicutt importantly argues that “We need to be clear that the superficially similar notions of ‘religious faith’ and ‘belief in the existence of god(s)’ are in fact profoundly different.” This might suggest that we can have faith in something without the need for a god or gods to be involved. This is an important notion as it recognises that religious faith is an aspect of cultural ideology. And it is cultural ideology with its accompanying religious ideology that binds the group and creates a common identity that creates acknowledgment and acceptance, inclusion, and meaning at various levels within the foremost cultural dynamic. This then filters down through the various sub–cultures that exist within that foremost cultural dynamic.

Christianity, as a premodern tradition of knowledge, asserted that all that was important to know was already known and contained in scripture. Almighty god passed on everything that was needed and the ordinary mortal could acquire all necessary knowledge from the ancient texts and traditions alone. The scriptures stated how the world worked, and how people’s actions should be conducted. Religion offered orientation to one’s life, a secure submission into presented ideas of morality and immortality. And if everyone follows the same beliefs and ideas, they are easier to control. If there is enough fear in the religious penalties not to step outside the religious guidelines, the promise of an afterlife becomes a reward that not only gives life meaning but also offers an escape from the fear of death and the unknown. Morality becomes herd–instinct for the individual and as each was similarly convinced of religious truth and the meaning of life and of how to conduct their actions, so the promised outcome of immortality in the afterlife is also embraced. In regard to Durkheim’s two categories of

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151 Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 34.
religious phenomena, it is the rites (the *doing*) that bind the subscriber to the belief, which is bound into the rituals, thus relieving them of having to do any *thinking*. Kant argued that it is easier for people to remain immature, and to willingly do so as they place others in a guardian role. Kant instead called for a motto of enlightenment: *Sapere aude*! [Dare to be wise!]. This includes having the courage to use one's own understanding\(^{154}\) and to challenge and question that which is presented as truth.

To reach this conclusion, Kant questioned the Book of Genesis of the Judeo–Christian Old Testament. The narrative expresses the central theme that god created the world and appointed man as his deputation. Kant employs reason against the conjectures of this sacred text presented as an historical account, and particularly at the emergence of human–beings. Kant philosophically takes the descriptions of the manifestation of Adam and Eve and tests it against rationality by questioning their immediate abilities as being without the need to acquire basic life skills that were supposedly and suspiciously already present.\(^{155}\) This questioning of innate skills or instincts of Adam and Eve is important for Kant as he considers that it does not tally with experience nor, importantly, with reality. In his questioning of this particular biblical absurdity, one of many, Kant considers the notion of instinct as a "voice of God,"\(^{156}\) which all animals obey, and by following instinct, an inexperienced person’s lot is a happy one. But by experimenting, a capacity for reason is established and as an individual becomes conscious of reason as a faculty; it opens their eyes to then discover in themselves "an ability to choose his own way of life"\(^{157}\) and to extend beyond that which other animals are confined. Kant then proposes that for an individual, having broken from religious indoctrination and with newly acquired freedoms, returning to a state of servitude under the constraints of instinct becomes impossible.\(^{158}\)

Søren Kierkegaard presents us with the notion of a *life ever after* as he describes Jesus's intention to resurrect Lazarus. Quoting verses from the bible, “this sickness is not unto death” (John 11:4), Kierkegaard believes that it was Jesus’s intention to bring Lazarus


\(^{155}\) Ibid., 87.

\(^{156}\) Ibid., 90.

\(^{157}\) Ibid., 91.

\(^{158}\) Ibid., 93.
back from the dead and to demonstrate the power of god and the promise of immortality in the afterlife. But this is possible, or rather available, only to those of good faith, “if they believed to see the glory of god” (John 11:40). To create a bias for his belief, Kierkegaard argues that “humanly speaking, death is that last thing of all; and humanly speaking there is hope only as long as there is life.” It was only the true Christian who understands that death is by no means the last thing of all, hence it is only a little event within that which is all, an eternal life; and Christianly understood there is in death infinitely much more hope than merely humanly speaking there is when there not only is life but this life exhibits the fullest health and vigor;

Kierkegaard, being of poor health throughout his life, is convincing himself, as a Christian philosopher, that such a place exists and that life there will be much better. He further extolls the Christian approach to life and death by proposing that the Christian is taught to think “dauntlessly of everything earthly and worldly, including death.” This belief becomes a thread for Kierkegaard as he continues this approach to understanding Christian life and the afterlife. Further convincing himself that there is something in the religious promise of immortality, and what essentially is a fear of death, Kierkegaard proposed that for the Christian, “death itself is a transition unto life” and that death itself is merely “the last phase of the sickness” and that “death is not the last thing.”

Kierkegaard also reasons that as people have free will, that freedom is a choice and it is the exercising of this freedom of choice that makes one human. What is important, is the energy, the earnestness, and pathos with which one makes choices, and for Kierkegaard it is the religious life that presents as the choice of choices.

Hugh McLeod cites Friedrich Engels’s 1844 study of the English working class in which Engels claims that religion had effectively died out, and McLeod advises that while these comments were indicative only of the working class, “some observers [at the time] saw the city as a whole as a religious desert.” In describing Berlin in 1846, the journalist

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160 Ibid., 264.
161 Ibid., 265.
162 Ibid., 276.
164 Ibid., 8.
Ernst Dronke concluded that it was a “many sidedness” that was the essence of the great city: “It is, — it is, — it is. Yes, it is many things, it is the great city. There everyone can live as he wishes, because everything is to be found there. In the great city, no-one cares what anyone else is up to.” Berlin is a persuasive example of the decline in church attendance in the nineteenth century. In 1869, only about 3 percent of Protestant church members attended church services, a figure that dropped to 1 percent by 1913. McLeod proposes that “it seems unlikely that more than about 5 per cent of the city’s population attended the services of all Christian denominations on a Sunday.” A religious census conducted in England and Scotland in 1851 showed that, in most cities, only a minority of worshippers were attending church services.

At the end of the century, there were significant numbers of non-believers within the populations of large European cities, with large numbers of middle-class who regarded themselves as agnostic. McLeod argues that there was a profound relationship between urbanisation and secularisation in nineteenth-century Europe. With the demographic upheavals that took place as people moved into the cities looking for work, the cities became more “pluralistic, and len[t] themselves to the formation of numerous discrete subcultures, since the supervision of morals, beliefs and religious practices by employers, magistrates or the church was no longer practicable.” A relativist outlook then developed from this pluralism of urban life, an outlook, McLeod suggests, that bred religious scepticism. McLeod further proposes that some historians have taken this further, “positing a mental revolution in nineteenth century cities whereby all forms of supernaturalism lost their credibility and a rationalistic and mechanistic outlook came to predominate.”

Without religious conviction, the individual is left to find their own meaning to existence, and to give life a sense of importance. The individual is further left looking for a sense of acceptance and recognition from those around them, rather than from the hopes and promises through belief in a supernatural being. Nietzsche gave an indication that the

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165 Dronke, cited in ibid., 9.
166 Ibid.
168 Ibid., 24.
169 Ibid., 25.
170 Ibid., 10.
171 Ibid.
answer lay within. Life’s meaning was to do with the individual and they were the one who could make the choices, but the courage was yet to be harnessed and comfortably accepted in making that self-affirming decision. Hitchens considers religious faith as irreducible, because human-beings are “still-evolving creatures,” and submits that religious faith will never die out, “not least till we get over our fear of death, and of the dark, and of the unknown, and of each other.” Becker gives this fear of death as the reason for maintaining religious belief, which will be considered in more depth in the following chapter.

To the devoted Christian, god’s death is utterly inconceivable; the existence of god is unquestionable because god is the very basis of all existence and of all meaning. The Christian cultural identities have depended on the existence of a god and the rule of that god for several thousand years, and such a belief has given order to society and meaning to life. Author and bible researcher Grant R. Jeffery is a strong example of the devotion some have toward religions belief and the existence of god. In his book The Next World War, Jeffery discusses religious prophecy about extreme Islam and the West. At the end of the book Jeffery asks the reader about their own sense of belief and where it is positioned. “Who will be the God of your life? Will you give your allegiance to Jesus Christ, or will you choose to worship yourself?” Jeffery warns those who chose to be the gods of their own lives that they are paying the ultimate price and nothing will come of it but an “eternity in hell, separated from God.”

But religious society can make do without an actual god; all it needs is a formalised process of god-worship and faith that is conducted through the use of religious oriented artefacts, ceremonies and ritual. Various items of religious importance (sacred objects), and engaging in ritual, help create the notion that such an entity exists and maintains the position of belief as being an act of faith. Durkheim’s definition of religion supports the importance of the sacred object in religious ritual practice:

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden—beliefs and

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173 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.  

These sacred things are embedded with conviction and represent collective belief and expression. They are important in the rites and rituals of that religious expression and make manifest the intangible elements of the belief system. They bring the mystery of those beliefs and dogmas into being and they help bring the religion to life. As Durkheim further advises in his analysis of religion and the church, which he contends as being inseparable, “religion must be an eminently collective thing.” Geertz similarly defines religion and its use of symbolic systems. The religious symbols articulate an interaction or perceived communication between a particular (sometimes chosen, sometimes imposed) aspect of life and a metaphysical one. This becomes self-perpetuating as the belief in the metaphysic reinforces the lifestyle and the lifestyle sustains the belief in the metaphysic. Geertz’s definition of religion is as follows:

A religion is: (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

In discussing Durkheim’s definition of religion, Sunderland proposes that Durkheim’s approach to understanding religion, one that includes divine and human realities, “may seem foreign to us now” and these concepts have become “increasingly abstract propositions.” Sunderland also contends that modern Western culture is obsessed with material satisfactions, “caught up” with material wants and desires.

Life presents the individual with choices and a level of free will, and they can make and define themselves through their own efforts. The social characteristics of any cultural identity, however, govern the particulars of an individual’s life, and keep the individual in check with consensus among minds. Without a consensus, common life becomes impossible, and society cannot allow free choice of the individual without abandoning

176 Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 44.
177 Ibid., 44.
179 Ibid., 90.
180 Tony Sunderland, The Obelisk and the Cross (Freemantle: Vivid, 2016), 10.
181 Ibid., 11.
The questioning of religious cultural belief systems, which are part of the systems of control and governance as discussed earlier, can be a dangerous thing, as Socrates has demonstrated.

Socrates was sentenced to death for heresy and corruption, for impiety, or daring to question the validity of the state-recognised Roman gods. In the speech purportedly given at his trial, Socrates described the indictment against him, in third person, as “Socrates is guilty of corrupting the minds of the young and of believing in deities of his own invention instead of the gods recognised by the state.” But Mount argues that the state objected to Socrates’s encouragement of critical thought and of questioning everything, rather than his belief in invented gods and professing of disbelief. For Socrates, the promotion of an educational strategy that involved inquiry and discussion was important, to believe in nothing and to understand how little one can know. This is the Socratic method. But it presents as being unwise to challenge conventions and that one must remain pious to the cultural and religious constructions of the state.

Schopenhauer considered a distinction and indeed a separation between faith and knowledge. Faith taught all that which could not be known (or rather was not known at a particular time), but "knowledge is of harder stuff than faith, so that when they collide the latter is shattered.” And again Schopenhauer, “But he is still in his childhood who can think that superhuman beings have ever given our race information about the aim of its existence or that of the world.” The individual is left to an existence where the meaning of life is the meaning that they decide to give it. It would then, that an expanding consciousness was a double-edged sword. This is discussed in Chapter 3, The Bind. Humanity was becoming more aware, and developing a sense of imagination. But it would appear that there was an accompanying, and potentially debilitating and demoralising, fear of death and meaninglessness. The constructed supernatural cultural/religious schemes used to manage this existential terror are then essentially defence mechanisms.

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182 Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of Religious Life, 16.
183 Socrates, cited in Ferdinand Mount, Full Circle: How the Classical World Came Back to Us (London: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 270. Here, Mount references Plato’s Apology, one of the four dialogues titled The Last Days of Socrates, which covers the trial and death of Socrates. In the Apology, Plato presents a vigorous rebuttal of the charges of impiety and a defence of the philosopher’s life.
184 Mount, Full Circle: How the Classical World Came Back to Us, 270.
186 Ibid., 66.
used as diversions against the reality and inevitability of death. They are a convenient lie.\textsuperscript{187}

\textsuperscript{187} Solomon et al., \textit{The Worm at the Core}, 122.
Which is it? Is man only God’s mistake or God only man’s mistake?

—Friedrich Nietzsche\textsuperscript{188}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{188} Nietzsche, \textit{Twilight of the Idols} & \textit{The Anti-Christ}, 33.}
Chapter 3: The Bind

How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves?

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Nigel Llewellyn explored the English death rituals of pre-C.1800 and his findings expose a more ritualised process. In pre-industrialised England, death was not just a moment in time, it was acknowledged and prepared for. The religious teachings also operated as a reminder of death. Llewellyn suggests that due to higher mortality rates and shorter life expectancy in the pre-industrial era, death took place amongst the living. In the past, the rituals surrounding death became a meditation in the course of life. In contemporary Western world, death takes place at a distance. In contemporary Western culture, “death tends to happen in institutions and the bodies of the dead are hidden from view.”

Llewellyn then suggests that “the ritual of death has become ever more muted, its signals ever more bland.” There appears a distinct shift in the processes of mourning death as well as preparing for death. Religious belief presented a notion of an afterlife and that in some form life continued. As human we had something to look forward to upon death, however, with declining religiosity, the individual is left with the existential dilemma. The individual is left to face their mortality and the fear of death potentially emerges and reshapes into a symbolic immortality and the shaping of meaning in one’s life. In the past, “death was a return to life”. As religion has declined, we have distanced ourselves from the processes and rituals of death. Practices toward death now tend to be brief and reclusive. Our contact with death has become displaced, reduced to a passive spectatorship with institutionalised controls and management. Death has become a concealed event in life.

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191 Ibid.
192 Ibid.
193 Ibid., 81.
Humanity attempts to transcend death by either simple visions of a perfumed heaven, or via more complex and symbolic personal method. In searching for meaning in life, the individual may believe they have to fulfil god's purpose or to have done something by which they feel they have enriched the planet and/or themselves, something that demonstrates purpose and importance. As Becker writes, “man wants above all to endure and prosper, to achieve immortality in some way.” \textsuperscript{194} This is an expression of the will of a person to live, a burning desire to count and to make a difference because people have emerged, lived, worked, suffered, and died on this planet. \textsuperscript{195}

For Nietzsche, the religious experience is a system, a consistently thought out and \textit{complete} view of things. If one breaks out of it a fundamental idea, the belief in God, one thereby breaks the whole thing to pieces: one has nothing of any consequence left in one's hands. \textsuperscript{196}

Nietzsche called for everyone to become their own epic hero, and to build a world where they could create their own values using the power of their own will, and to be a law unto themselves. The idea behind this is that the individual is psychologically strong enough that someone can simply decide that something is meaningful for them and create their own values, instead of adopting various beliefs and values that have been created and protected through millennia of human life. This notion sees the individual as being self-sufficient, with no need for a god at all. A common element within many if not all ancient cultural myths is the theme of the hero, the person who is able to transcend the failings of normal human experience. The hero is celebrated as an inspirational icon that represents the best characteristics of humanity. The hero is seen to bring meaning and order into a chaotic world. \textsuperscript{197} Classical heroes such as Osiris, Gilgamesh, and Achilles express an ability that an individual can transform the world and those around them. They convey meaning and purpose of life gained through personal struggle, and they endure to fulfil their own individual fate. \textsuperscript{198}

Becker, however, states that as much as someone strives to be that hero, fear and dread will hold them back. The hero strives to stand apart, to break free of the cultural bonds, 

\textsuperscript{195} Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{196} Nietzsche, \textit{Twilight of the Idols & The Anti-Christ}, 81.
\textsuperscript{197} Tony Sunderland, \textit{The Obelisk and the Cross} (Freemantle: Vivid, 2016), 211.
\textsuperscript{198} Sunderland, \textit{The Obelisk and the Cross}, 212.
but is unable to draw enough strength from within. They become trivialised and held into a network of obligations. They are caught in an endless cycle of safety within the confines of social rules, which become harder to break free from over time. Becker proposes that the despair an individual may feel, is avoided by "building defences; and these defences allow him to feel a basic sense of self-worth, of meaningfulness, of power. They allow him to feel that he controls his life and death." 

Within a religion, an individual becomes embedded into the related superstitions and becomes caught in the surrounding network, sharing a bond with the collective. It becomes safer for them within that bond, safer to be recognised and acknowledged as part of that group than to question it. But in the process of living without the belief in a god, and all that that belief offers, they are bound to living in the present and of defining themselves in the here and now. The individual becomes responsible for the process of their own lives, its finitude, and the terror of the possibility of non-existence. This can create a process of continual self-definition and self-integration in an attempt to understand the self and what it means to exist, and the individual sense of being. The individual becomes further absorbed in the demands of the present rather than the promises of what that religious belief once offered in terms of morals and the afterlife, the individual then potentially moves from one isolated moment to the next. That sense of being in the present leaves some people chasing other external values, drawn to and mimicking perhaps a pseudo-value that is decided outside of the self and which may lead to or increase a sense of existential despair.

The loss/dismissal or denial of an afterlife has the potential to leave an individual challenged in an existence with no meaning. Further, a sense of existential despair or angst may leave the individual with the potential need to create a superficial sense of being, created via a non-reflective absorption into the world of representational objects. With the admission of mortality, the acceptance of the inevitability of death can bring with it a bind where the individual is potentially caught in a cycle of intolerable vulnerability. Religion guaranteed acceptance as part of the in group and the rituals and ceremonies operated to connect and contain the faithful. In constructing the meaning of

200 Ibid., 55.
one's own life, an acceptance needs to be sought elsewhere and other rituals and ceremonies are then required. With the promise of the religious afterlife and immortality removed, a symbolic immortality is then created, each with its own constructed rituals and ceremonial displays. Essentially, one constructed reality that gives meaning to existence is substituted for another.

Becker references Martin Heidegger's arguments that the basic anxiety of the individual is about being-in-the-world, as well as of being-in-the-world. This implies that there is a basic fear of a projected existence as well as an actual or current existent. It is the fear of an existence without meaning, that in an overwhelming world filled with inherent dangers, the individual fears losing themselves. Potentially there is a fear not only of death, but also of living. There is a dread of living, with an overwhelmingness of life itself. The individual was driven away from themselves and taught to seek courage through belief in a god and the promise of an afterlife. But this symbolic relationship with god had flaws that were exposed by science and technologies. Rather than living in the security of a promised afterlife, they are thrust into the present and potentially the angst of reality, a finite life and fear that needs to be placated. Religious armour is then replaced by a symbolic expression of the self. Rather than hiding in a collective ideology of belief and protection, the individual constructs a personal armour to hide any anxieties and vulnerabilities. The individual then directly or indirectly seeks reassurance and acceptance from other individuals through commonality, while attempting to remain unique and independent.

Courage is gained from various symbols and symbolic gestures, from allegiance to a flag or sexual conquests, or from the “fetish of money and the size of a bank balance.” These artificialities of the cultural world are used to create a sense of character. They are defence mechanisms that support a grand illusion, and people are driven toward things that support an expression of both culture and character. A personal identity is constructed and defences are built. These defences allow a basic sense of self–worth, meaningfulness, and power, and the impression that the individual has free will and

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201 Ibid., 53.
202 Ibid., 56.
control over their own destiny. The individual then has a desire to live and act as if they are a wilful and free individual, and to create a self-fashioned identity in the hope that they are somebody.203

This lie of one’s character is built up as an adjustment to the world, to their parents, and their own existential dilemmas.204 They are assembled even before the child is given a chance to learn anything about themselves in an open and free manner. These character defences then become automatic and unconscious, and the child becomes dependent upon them, invested in them as mechanisms of survival. As Kierkegaard has argued, the individual does not belong to themselves. The individual becomes a subject to their social conditioning and they become immersed in fictional games, potentially dashing headlong into a life without reflection.205 The individual becomes a slave to the cultural and social systems in place, caught and confined into cultural paradigms. It is the same for the religious, who are slave to their social constructs, as it is for the person keeping their insurance policy up to date: all become subservient to social systems and various constructed cultures. All are subject to the human-condition, and cannot step out of that condition. All are fashioned by the social, and the material, and death again becomes part of life. But rather than dread or ignore the inevitable, rather than hide behind a cultural construction in order to seek a symbolic immortality and consume daily life as an avoidance process, the individual must acknowledge a self-awareness that celebrates what it is to be human, and what it is to be conscious, and aware.

Human-beings, as with all creatures, are self-considering, but it would appear that being human means having an intent on making an impact. The individual is “the moving centre of the entire world,”206 but is caught up in a world of other moving centres. The individual demonstrates a drive to survive, but also a desire to search out themselves and to know who they are. The individual is simultaneously embedded in their own mind and seeks to be important. There is a desire for life to make sense and to have meaning beyond

203 Ibid.
204 Ibid., 73.
themselves, and an integral part of this sense making appears to involve being acknowledged by others.

Freud treated religion as an illusion and proposed that any feelings of well-being, of eternity were purely subjective. Religion is an article of faith and no assurance of personal immortality should be attached to it. Freud suggested that these feelings were that of being “indissolubly bound up with and belonging to the whole of the world outside oneself.”207 Freud also considered that these notions are “more in the nature of an intellectual insight, not of course without an emotional overtone.”208 It is this emotional energy that is seized upon by the religious systems.

In 1964, Abraham Maslow, who advocated a clear separation between church and state, asserting that “only truth can be our foundation.”209 Maslow however believed in the notion of “spiritual values,” but values separated from the exclusive possession of organised religion or church organisations. The spiritual values that Maslow speaks of are of a naturalistic form where–by only natural forces operate in the world and do not need any supernatural concepts from which to be validated. 210 He argues that the rejection of the priestly caste, and the religious indoctrination that claims that only a select few are the exclusive custodians to the sacred, is “a great step forward in the emancipation of mankind.”211 By redefining religion as a set of imposed and accepted habits, behaviours, and dogmas wrapped up in ritual and ceremony, it becomes bureaucratic, conventional, and essentially empty.

But for Jung, belief—albeit spiritual or perhaps agnostic belief—was an important aspect to existence. To strip away all notions of belief was too much; it was detrimental to existence. Humanity battles with “a complex of inexorable opposites—day and night, birth and death, happiness and misery, good and evil.”212 The individual is caught in a complex existence and needs something to ease the burdens of life, but without these burdens, existence would come to an end.213 Religion provided that sense of ease, and

208 Ibid., 4.
209 Ibid., 4.
210 Ibid., 17.
211 Ibid., 17.
213 Ibid.
because god is beyond human understanding, faith requires no need for evidence. "Why, then, should we deprive ourselves of views that would prove helpful in crises and would give a meaning to our existence?" Jung advises that there is strong reason as to why a belief in what cannot be proven should be cultivated and considers that these beliefs are useful. The individual becomes convinced that these ideas make sense and, as well as finding a place for themselves in the universe, they give the ability, desire, or strength to withstand incredible hardship. Without belief, they are otherwise crushed.

Religion, as the holder of all that needed to be known and how to live one's life, has been demolished by rational critique. Jung looked to understand the critique of religion and to consider what aspects of religion needed to be conserved and what could be dispensed with. With the death of god, the predominant value structure collapses and in finding a new way of being, there is the potential to journey into chaos. Jung considered that the stripping away or denial of belief was detrimental to humanity. This is retraced by anthropologists as they describe the impacts of modern civilisation on the spiritual values of earlier cultures. These cultures lose their sense of identity and collective meaning, their social organisations often disintegrate, and they potentially fall into moral decay. Jung suggests that modern civilisation is in a similar position, it has not fully realised what has been stripped away from these cultures, and the detrimental impacts of the whole of humanity. This, states Jung, is because “our spiritual leaders unfortunately were more interested in protecting their institutions than in understanding the mystery that symbols present,” and that “the Christian puts his Church and his Bible between himself and his unconscious.” For Jung, nothing is holy anymore because everything has been stripped of its mystery and numinosity.

Thunder is no longer the voice of an angry god...no river contains a spirit...no mountain cave the home of a great demon. No voices now speak to man from stones, plants, and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. It appears that as humanity has become more 'civilised,' it has also become lost or has been misled in its endeavours to be human in a natural sense. There is an attachment to

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214 Ibid., 87.
215 Ibid., 94.
216 Ibid., 102.
217 Ibid., 95.
the religion stories, but they have been held at arm’s length by those wanting to hold a position of power and control. Over time, and through the religious journey, the symbolic connection with nature and the profound emotional energy that it provided, has been lost.

These thoughts of Jung’s, particularly the need for belief, can be placed alongside Rank’s notion that while there might be an outward attempt to deny the past through science and technology, humanity is still living with spiritual values.218 If it is not entirely possible to distance ourselves from a belief system of sorts, and these belief systems are of some benefit, perhaps a sense of spiritual attachment is then placed onto the mechanisms by which the self is made. The individual lives in a relationship with consciousness, and has an infinite responsibility with the self and the direction of their being. The individual can and should act with truth and integrity and whatever the truth reveals is then the best of all possible worlds. But with the truth comes a burden of responsibility, a burden that humanity can deny through a nihilistic approach to life. The individual then trades one cultural construction, that of religion and the collective, for another: the individual ego and the processes of consumption and presentation.

Writing in 1952, Theorist Lewis Mumford demonstrated concern for what society might lose as it pursued the benefits of new technologies. Mumford summed up the underlying implications of a purely industrialised focus thus:

The great problem of our time is to restore modern man’s balance and wholeness: to give him the capacity to command the machines he has created instead of becoming their helpless accomplice and passive victim; to bring back, into the very heart of our culture, that respect for the essential attributes of personality, its creativity and autonomy, which Western man lost at the moment he displaced his own life in order to concentrate on the improvement of the machine.219

The spiritual values and belief in the supernatural may console a fear of death, and perhaps of life, but a denial in the existence of god then creates a dilemma as it takes with it the belief in an afterlife and immortality. An individual potentially becomes split into two opposing sides in an attempt to reconcile the real with the supernatural, and the mortal with the immortal, within an existential existence. Adding to this internal conflict

is a second disturbance, that of acceptance of the self as an individual and being accepted by others, particularly that of family. Freud and Rank, like Kant, propose the importance of the family structure in regard to immortality. For Kant, importance lay in the notion of a resigned immortality through offspring. For Freud, religion and god replace the father, and he argues that the exalted figure, the first being the father and then god, is the only one who can know the needs of the children of men.\textsuperscript{220} Interestingly, Rank proposes that if an offspring is too alike to the father, the father is threatened with the thought that the offspring has taken his soul from him and he is then left doomed to die.\textsuperscript{221} The father is shed of what he might deem as his seemingly rightful immortality, something promised to him through belief in the supernatural. From the father’s point of view, as much as he may wish well for his son, it is better that the son does no better than him.

There is a need for meaning in existence, and a spiritual belief of sorts appears to be important. But the religious coping mechanisms of the past that promised an immortal and fruitful afterlife on empty promises and threats have become challenged by science, technology and the reality of existence in the present, and the ego of the individual. Freud proposed that as the power of the individual grew, and the grip of the omnipotent and omniscient gods that were given credit for things beyond human reach or understanding slipped away, so the individual became more neurotic due to the demands of civilisation.\textsuperscript{222} “These gods were cultural ideals,”\textsuperscript{223} and humans have become close to god–like through technology and scientific advances. “Man has become... a god with artificial limbs,” offers Freud, but despite these advances, “modern man does not feel happy with his god–like nature.”\textsuperscript{224} Freud proposed that a level of god–hood has been achieved, as Nietzsche advocated, but that that god–hood is fraught. It appears that the individual finds themselves in an uncomfortable position and needs soothing and/or medicating.

Freud discusses the notion that reality is the source of all suffering, and that in order to gain a level of happiness in one’s life, links to reality must be severed. But any avoidance

\textsuperscript{220} Freud, \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents}, 12.
\textsuperscript{221} Rank, \textit{Beyond Psychology}, 99.
\textsuperscript{222} Freud, \textit{Civilization and Its Discontents}, 28.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid., 29.
\textsuperscript{224} Ibid.
of reality, as a means to gain a semblance of happiness and to avoid suffering, whether working as an individual or as a collective, is “a delusional reshaping of reality.” Thus, the individual is caught in a trap between reality and delusion, between finite and fable. But importantly, as Freud also argues, “no one who still shares a delusion will ever recognise it as such.” Freud is suggesting this in relation to religion and that religion must be described as a mass delusion, but it is also applicable to any other individual or shared delusion, be it of faith or of any means to escape reality. For example, alcohol or drugs can be used to provide a release or complete denial from the realities of life or of any conflict in the sense of self–realisation. Any un–pleasurable experiences and threats can be expelled via these artificial means on a repeated, as–needed process. They detach the ego from the real world and dull the senses as the ego separates itself from external experience. Denial of reality via a constant self–medicating experience may provide temporary relief, but through repeated process becomes a significant pathological disorder itself.

For the individual, time comes to an end with death. In Being and Time, Heidegger advises that if the individual wants to understand what it means to be an authentic human being, then it is essential to project one’s life onto the horizon of death. This is what he terms “being–towards–death.” If being is finite, then an authentic human life can only be found by confronting finitude and trying to make a meaning out of the fact of our death and not beyond it. For Heidegger, there are two overriding modes of being human, the authentic and the inauthentic, and the individual makes a choice between these two modes. There is an engagement in the process of either being self or not, to create an individual narrative or to be guided by another. In order to create a self, the individual must examine themselves as a being, with the awareness to question who they are— “We are ourselves the entities to be analysed.” Being authentic is about being in truth as self–aware, self–analysing creatures. Heidegger’s concerns were about the experience of being that is peculiar to being human.

225 Ibid., 19.
226 Ibid.
227 Ibid., 6.
229 Ibid., 78.
230 Ibid., 42.
According to Heidegger, when in an inauthentic mode, the individual is constantly absorbed in the demands of the present. Life is approached as a series of isolated episodes, one after the other, guided by various external values. In this process, each episode is celebrated separately and the individual is left with nothing but the drive to seek out the next experience as decided externally. This can lead to existential despair and the terror of nothingness and non-existence. Heidegger proposed that there is no pre-given human nature and that mortality is then in relation to how the sense of selfhood is fashioned. The individual is what they make of themselves over the course of a continually developing narrative that persists throughout life, a life that is caught up in a shared world with others. For Heidegger, this is about being-in-the-world, but one that should be questioned in three parts. Firstly, in-the-world as inquiry into the structure of the surrounding world or the notion of world-‘hood; secondly, the entity that is being and to determine the mode of being in everydayness; and thirdly, being-in and the constitution of being-in on the part of the self.

Heidegger contends that being is “the most universal concept”, and also submits that this concept of being is undefinable yet is also self-evident. He argues that humans are an enigma: “the very fact that we already live in an understanding of Being and that the meaning of Being is still veiled in darkness proves that it is necessary in principle to raise this question again.” Does this sense of being, something that belongs to every human—of being conscious and self-aware—perhaps make a person god-like in its undefinable yet self-evident manner? If the individual knows that it is Being, but cannot define that Being, can he/she ever be fully authentic? It appears that there is a paradox to being human; there is the capacity to understand Being, but not itself in that sense of Being. An individual can perhaps only ever be ambiguous in Being. We can search for the authentic sense of the self, or of being human, but authenticity appears unattainable. Being is an acknowledgement of existence, but important to Heidegger was an explanation of how being is to be looked at and “how its meaning is to be understood and conceptually grasped.” It is something that is undefinable, constantly shifting and just

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231 Ibid., 53.
232 Ibid.
233 Ibid.
234 Ibid., 22.
235 Ibid., 23.
236 Ibid., 26.
out of reach. Again, religion provided the answers, the safety net to life, and something that the individual could rely on in its steadfastness if not in its truth. There was some comfort in the surrender to dogma, but the sense of self as individual becomes swallowed up in that faith.

The individual, as human, is driven to protect their self-esteem and the feelings that make them feel that they are a valuable participant in a meaningful existence.237 “The thing that characterises man was his need for self-esteem and he would do anything his society wanted in order to earn it.”238 The individual becomes moulded by society and then rewarded. But the definitions of valuable and meaningful are subjective and are associated with a shifting definition of a meaningful world, and what it means to belong. What does it mean to exist, and to define the self? Religion gave meaning and a vision of authenticity in life, with the promise of immortality in the afterlife, but the loss or dismissal of the afterlife may leave one challenged in a life with no meaning. The admission of mortality and the realisation of the inevitability of death can bring with it a despair. But rather than a sense of existential despair or angst, the individual may rather create a superficial sense of being, created via a non-reflective absorption into the world of representational objects. There is a level of cultural variability when defining personal significance and how that might be demonstrated with the presence of others. That then extends to judgement on an individual’s behaviours and the meeting of established cultural standards. As Solomon et al., comment, “Living up to cultural roles and values...embeds us safely in a symbolic reality.”239 This sense of symbolic reality is the covered in chapter 4, Investing Meaning in Life.

238 Becker, Escape from Evil, 134.
239 Solomon et al., The Worm at the Core, 40.
The concept ‘God’ has hitherto been the greatest objection to existence.

—Friedrich Nietzsche

Chapter 4: Investing Meaning in Life

What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent?
—Friedrich Nietzsche

Marcel Duchamp, speaking at the Convention of the American Federation of Arts in Houston, Texas, in 1957, proposed that the creative act is not performed by the artist alone, but that the spectator has an essential part in contributing to the creative act and therefore brings that act to life. As an individual engages with life, with cultural social practises, and with self-defining objects, they are engaged in creating their own creative act to which a spectator becomes equally important. Are these the festivals of atonement and the sacred games that have been invented?

Philosopher Susanne Langer suggests that there is a basic and pervasive human need to symbolise existence, to invent and invest meaning in one’s world. It would appear that to merely exist is not enough, that there is a need to understand the reasons for existing and its purpose. Existence becomes symbolised as a way of investing meaning, and making sense. It is through this process of sense making that an individual interprets their immediate environment and therefore gains an understanding that enables safe navigation. Gaining a mental and emotional understanding of location and a sense of existence is an important physical and psychological imperative. By understanding the surrounding environment, an individual is likely to feel more comfortable, and that they belong. As a human being, an individual is engaged in human–object relationships, and it is through a material/non–material cultural world that meaning in existence and purpose is made visible. Cultures express themselves through actions and objects, and each culture learns what they are and what makes them different by the particular objects they produce and the actions or rituals that surround them. It is about being involved but also about being seen to be involved.

Langer's observations are reinforced by sociologist Erving Goffman. According to Goffman, the personal organisation of various social practices and conceptual frameworks structure an individual's perception of society and its various aspects. 244 Individuals adopt the attitudes and behaviours that are characteristic of a particular social group or organisation and it is through these social practices and frameworks that our experiences are filtered and understood. Experiences filtered through the self then respond to and shape an individual's engagement to life.

The individual's life experience and life act are important in determining their understanding of and response to any creative act that they are part of or presented with. It is the particular cultural social experience that the individual is first immersed in as a child that initially shapes their personal identity and perspective. Who they are as an individual is shaped by what they are exposed to. 245 This constructed identity and perspective becomes influential on any response to any subsequent experience, including those of an unfamiliar or opposing nature. Langer's contention for the need to symbolise existence, and to invest in meaning is influenced by, and then also influences an individual's experiences and responses. Meaning, according to Langer, has a logical and psychological aspect. For an object employed as an active sign or symbol to be effective, it must be recognised by all concerned. That object must be capable of conveying its intended meaning, it must be the sort of item that can be accordingly employed. In some circumstances, this logical requirement is trivial and tacitly accepted; in others, it can be of the utmost importance. Representational symbols them become linked to the way we think. 246

When considering the thoughts of Langer, Goffman, and Duchamp together, one can see that the creative act is essentially part of the life act, and our life act is itself a creative act. Participation in Duchamp's creative act is merely an aspect of the dynamic nature of personal engagement in life and the individual is defined by the presentation of the self through material and non-material practices. One's choice of self-defining objects becomes important, because these objects not only represent a level of consumption but

244 Ernest Goffman, Frame Analysis (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1974).
245 Ibid.
choices in consumption help define who they are. Objects communicate on two levels; they can be conscious statements, but they can also embody unconscious attitudes, values, and beliefs. In the process of ownership and presentation, an individual is engaged in a language of objects, a language filled with metaphor and visual trope. What becomes important are the choices that are made in regard to objects as acts of self-definition and presentation.

For Illich, the process of an “unending consumption” started with the printing of religious indulgences during the late medieval period. John Man tells us that the ownership of an indulgence, a written or printed document that acted as a contract “by which the church indulged the penitent’s desire for spiritual cleanliness”, was considered as a means to relieve the temporal punishment resulting from the effects of sin in this lifetime. Indulgences were initially hand written but were to become the early mass-produced products of a relatively new invention: the printing press. There was a lack of financial ability on the part of the domestic proletariat to purchase their own copy of a printed Bible, but the Catholic Church saw value in this printing mechanism both as a means to reinforce the word of God, and to further furnish the Church’s monetary reserves.

Rather than writing the indulgence by hand, the church now had the means to increase production, and at a much-reduced cost, a savings that was not likely passed on to the consumer. For the individual, “an indulgence stated that the sinner had done good work . . . and thus qualified for forgiveness of particular sins committed during a particular period” and the religious indulgence became an important self-defining or self-affirming object. Martin Luther, the German-born Augustine monk, famously rebelled against the excesses of the Catholic Church and particularly the payment of indulgences. Ironically, the distribution throughout Europe of ninety-five condemnations challenging the teachings and practices of the Catholic Church, which Luther had originally nailed to the door of a church in 1517 CE, was aided by the printing press.

250 Ibid., 144.
251 Ibid., 155.
252 Ibid., 154.
253 Tony Sunderland, The Obelisk and the Cross (Freemantle: Vivid, 2016), 177.
Sam Harris argues that people have a level of denial in approaching the topic of death; they ignore the fear and inevitability of death via the processes of distraction, pleasure, and success. An immersion into human–object relationships or the province of religion and the religious assurance of life everlasting helps keep the reality of death at arm’s length. For Harris, the “reality of life is always now,” and there is something liberating in belief of the self as a means of attaining an honest level of happiness. But, advises Harris, “we spend most of our lives overlooking this truth,” which becomes a barrier to Nietzsche’s notion of becoming god ourselves as the individual remains outside of themselves and feeds their psychological needs externally and artificially.

The notion of external pleasures is reinforced by Freud’s thoughts on the development of the adult sense of self. According to his pleasure principle, part of the biological and psychological needs of being human includes the avoidance of pain and instinctual seeking of pleasure. The pleasure principle perhaps overrides the reality principle, which is the mind’s ability to recognise and assess the reality of the external world. Freud proposed that the pleasure-seeking and pain-averting aspect of the individual starts developing during infancy. What an infant craves the most is the mother’s breast, and when this is removed, it “can be summoned back only by a cry for help.” Thus, the self is presented with an external object that is only made manifest through certain actions. While there is comfort in something familiar and pain or grief in loss, pleasure, as with belief, is made manifest via the external.

It would appear that strength can be gained through submission. When one is a child, their anxiety can be banished via a cry for help; a specific action can mean the return of something important, such as a mother’s breast. The relief of pain and anxiety, along with the receiving of pleasure, becomes connected with something outside the self. There is control, but there is also dependency, one developed on something external to the self. That dependency is projected onto another person, either a parent or parent substitute, a belief, an object, or a substance. There is a surrendering or denial of the self in order to relieve a sense of helplessness, and there is transference of feelings onto something.

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255 Ibid., 34.
256 Ibid.
external. This transference object, while relieving anxiety and bringing pleasure, does however have its problems, as Becker projects that “the child does partly control his larger fate by it, but it becomes his new fate.” The object, be it tangible or intangible, be it self-defining object or belief system, becomes the individual’s focus, and they become dependent upon it as a means or expression of freedom. It becomes representative of life and fate; Becker writes, “The terror of his own finitude and impotence still haunts him, but now in the precise form of the transference object. How implacably ironic human life is.”

Becker asserts that transference is connected to the foundations of human existence, that it fulfils the drive to wholeness: “Man needs to infuse his life with value so that he can pronounce it ‘good’. The transference object is then a natural fetishization for man’s highest yearnings and strivings.” But, as Becker later proposes, transference is a distortion of reality. It is a distortion due to fears of life and death, and due to the various heroic attempts to assure self-expansion. Transference, then, reflects the whole of the human condition. It is a function of heroism and of finding our place in the world, and it is also necessary in withstanding life, death, and oneself.

The notion of surrender to something external, of submitting in order to control terror, to mediate wonder, and to defeat death, is challenged by the terror of losing that object, of displeasing it and of dependence, or not being able to live without it. The transference object represents all of one’s life, and all of one’s fates. By controlling the object, the individual controls their fate, and has a sense of power over life, and death. Being immersed in an object relationship, they can emerge safely, and their experience becomes their whole world.

Humanity lives in utter darkness as to understanding what it means to be human and to exist. It is a paradox where the human mind is used to try and understand the human mind. The mind attempts to placate what the mind fears. Becker proposes that an attempt

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259 Ibid., 146.
260 Ibid.
261 Ibid., 155.
262 Ibid., 158.
to justify existence is made by presenting a heroic self to others, seeking acknowledgement and acceptance. Here, Becker references Rank’s application of the religious, suggesting that personality is shaped and formed according to the vital need to please another person or ‘god’ replacement, and not to incur his or her displeasure.\footnote{Ibid., 156.}

The ego gives the individual a semblance of self-governance or the ability to have a certain freedom of action and choice to shape one’s own destiny as much as possible. The notion of free will plays a role but the “as much as possible” is limited by our relationships with the social and the material worlds. An individual’s filters of experience then define the scope of their free will and therefore what their ego will and will not allow. Even the notions or actions of rebellion against experiences of family and culture are responses oriented directly at those experiences. The individual becomes who they are because of the relationships they have experienced, familial and cultural, regardless of whether they conform or rebel: “People create the reality they need in order to discover themselves.”\footnote{Ibid., 158.}

The individual, then, in seeking comfort, projects the meaning of life outwards. The individual looks outside themselves for the meaning of life and, if necessary, as a place to apportion blame. Projection becomes necessary for self-fulfilment, which then protects the individual from being overwhelmed by loneliness, separation, and a sense of being overcome by the burden of life.\footnote{Ibid.}

As the world view, as overseen by a god collapses: “If you don’t have a God in heaven, an invisible dimension that justifies the visible one, then you take what is nearest at hand and work out your problems on that.”\footnote{Ibid., 162.} The search for meaning in life continues for all, and when the burden of life becomes too much, it is often laid at the feet of a companion. If the terror of being a separate individual and the pressures of working out who one is and why one exists become too painful, they can be wiped away in surrender or escape to the companion and the confusion and euphoria perhaps of sex. But in the sexual act, humanity risks being compelled into body awareness and resentment. By being reduced to the body, sex reminds the individual that the body must die. As well as life, sex brings
death to the world.267 The sexual act, at the biological level, becomes a reminder that they are but a link in the chain and nothing more than an animal.

Any attempt to construct a “cosmic hero,” Becker argues, is overshadowed by the knowledge that the individual is nothing more than a fornicating beast. But with consciousness and ego, there is a desire to be more than mere fornicating animal, there is a desire for an elevated sense of self and to have dominion over animals. The religious taboos around sex were invented and built into society and cultural ideologies as a means to lift human beings above being that simple animal. Sexual taboos were constructed in order to triumph over the body, and in sacrificing the bodily pleasures, a focus is placed on the highest desires of self-perpetuation as a spiritual being in the eternal afterlife. There is an attempt to place a sense of divinity for godliness on the human form, but the process of projecting godliness onto a partner is also doomed, as neither individual in a relationship can be a god for each other. Therefore, not only is an individual reminded of their mortality and that they are not god, any attempt to be god or to see a partner in that position becomes a struggle, because the partner is also fallible and mortal. The partner reflects their own imperfections and earthly decay. Each is asking the impossible or the other and they can do no more than be a reminder that neither is perfect. As a finite being, the individual is doomed; there remains only “death and defeat of the cosmic hero.”268

Enjoying life, it would appear, is impossible without some form of distraction. The problem of existence then requires a satisfactory answer, but when the collective religious solution to the question of existence is no longer accepted, one has to fashion their own private belief system. Most people will spare themselves the anxiety and suffering in the search for meaning by keeping their minds distracted with small problems, problems that society has mapped out within a cultural paradigm. They are then tranquilised with trivial matters and living trivial lives, so they can function and appear as normal.269 Becker writes, “Instead of living biologically, then, he lives symbolically. Instead of living in the partway that nature provided for he lives in the total way made possible by symbols.”270

267 Ibid.
268 Ibid., 167.
269 Ibid., 178.
270 Ibid., 183.
Religious thought absorbed inner conflict and offered the possibility of immortality, but taking this away leaves the individual with the opportunity to create their own world from within. In losing a collective theology, the individual is left to create their own heroic gesture and place themselves within the mortality of their own ego. But it must be made believable. As Becker states, it must be a wholly unreal belief in self-justification, a striving for a personal religion or a self-achieved symbolic immortality.271 The religious codes release the individual from the problem of self-justification, but in the absence of belief, they must artificially idealise themselves in a new illusion that distracts them from the inevitable. As Becker comments, “The most that any one of us can seem to do is to fashion something, an object or ourselves, and drop it into the confusion, make an offering of it, so to speak, to the life force.”272 An individual daren’t suggest that they are god, but they can create a religion of sorts around themselves.

Objects are used as symbols, communicating as part of a cultural system, where the object becomes an important component of the lived social world. As Tim Dant observes, material culture “affects our values, our actions and our lifestyles.”273 Just as importantly, this system of objects is engaged to represent and reflect our values, actions, and lifestyles. Objects become invested in meaning through intention, association, and usage, and meanings will change and grow over time due to the dynamic nature of objects. For this reason, an object/product becomes wrapped in intelligence and cultural identity. As Dant comments, “this world of man–made things modifies the natural world to provide a material environment as the context in which social interaction takes place.”274 This reinforces Harari’s notion of human–beings exerting control over the natural world

Objects play a role in religion too. With the religious life came the religious icon. Religious objects and ceremony are used to reinforce a thought or hope that god exists, and it is through various religious practices such as prayer, diet, fashion, and ceremony that one

271 Becker, The Denial of Death, 196.
272 Ibid., 285.
274 Ibid., 1.
is fitted into a religious life.\textsuperscript{275} Dean M. Martin describes the importance of the religious object as follows:

Religious symbols re-presented the divine reality: they actually made the divine present in images and metaphors. The ontological richness of the participatory presence of a truly symbolic system of signification appeared in the original conception of sacraments, rituals, icons, and ecclesiastical hierarchies.\textsuperscript{276}

The religious icon is used to anchor and reinforce the believer's subscription to faith in the religious concept, it becomes a means to access the divine and the power of the scriptures. But this adherence to religious activity and ownership of various religious icons does not give evidence of such holy existence.\textsuperscript{277} Therefore, the power dynamic in the human–object relationship of the religiously inclined is given to the religious icon or artefact. For the believer the notion of god is brought to life through ritual and object, and in the process of god worship these religiously conceived objects become intrinsic belief. However, as the individual increasingly looked to discover something that represented what they cared for most and that gave their lives meaning, the religious icon, once part of the widely shared cultural symbol system, started to lose its power to create order.\textsuperscript{278}

Religious and cultural objects and symbols express external truths. They become collective metaphors that have the power to evoke deep emotional responses in some individuals. These objects have the power to become important constituents in the emotional make–up of the individual and the collective community, and as such they cannot be eradicated without serious implication.\textsuperscript{279} The most powerful religious symbol of the Christian faith is that of the cross or crucifix, “a meaningful symbol that expresses a multitude of aspects, ideas, and emotion.”\textsuperscript{280} In religion, the symbol is a sign constructed and rendered serviceable as a means to make real, part of a cultural belief without having to be part of that reality.\textsuperscript{281} During the Eucharist or holy communion, the wafer becomes a metaphor for the body of Christ, and the sacramental wine becomes his blood. This

\textsuperscript{277} Martin, “God and Objects: Beginning with Existence.”
\textsuperscript{280} Ibid., 91.
\textsuperscript{281} Dupre, \textit{Religion and the Rise of Modern Culture}, 116.
Christian rite or sacrament is considered as an act whereby the individual makes a symbolic connection or bond with the group and a particularly close relationship with Christ.

However, the religious icon has been largely replaced by the consumption of material objects. These activities of consumption and the accumulation of self-defining objects now satisfy the higher order needs on Maslow's hierarchy, needs that are no longer satisfied by being a participant in the workplace and doing god's will. The personal defining object creates new ways of being, new ways of existing and of experiencing life as they collectively push the past further into the background. The illusory being of god is then replaced by the corporeal self, and the object increasingly creates the past as the challenge of the machine and its purpose is met. The personal defining object has meaning, and just as it is/was for the religious icon, so the value of the object becomes more important than the object itself.

In regard to materialism and human needs, George M. Zinkhan suggests that “we live in a materialistic culture, and materialism encourages customers to buy and consume,” which promotes the idea that more is better through the practice of advertising. In the process, some basic emotional needs are briefly satisfied, but there is the risk that this temporary gratification can become addictive. This terminal materialism presents as a need to own more things and to show a control of status, a declared or alleged status that is constructed, projected, and received. For Zinkhan, “Consumers, dependent on a market economy and smitten by terminal materialism, feel vulnerable and helpless. Products and services serve as pacifiers for this self-induced state of helplessness.” Advertising has become a powerful medium for creating and presenting meaning through symbols and imagery. Advertising has the power to create myths and transfer values, to promote a desired quality of life. It also plays out a symbolic role within a culture as a means to bind society together.


Ibid., 2.
Zinkhan’s comment about dependant consumers can also have meaning when applied to religious sensibility. Consider Zinkhan’s quote again when applied to a religious idea:

Consumers, dependent on a market economy and smitten by terminal materialism, belief and redemption of sin feel vulnerable and helpless. Products and services God and the promise of an eternal afterlife serve as pacifiers for this self-induced state of helplessness.

The burgeoning materialist culture of the late nineteenth century prompted Karl Marx to explore socio-political theories, including economic critique and capitalist modes of production. Marx’s discussion on commodities generally refers to labour and production values rather than the social or psychological added values of the consumer-able object, but while it is the political critique of labour values that is important, he does take some moments in his discussions that could perhaps reference those other values.

A commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood. Its analysis shows that it is, in reality, a very queer thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.\(^{285}\)

If nothing else, Marx’s comments add a rather interesting descriptive identity that could be applied to those other values. Marx makes reference to the social value of objects as being bound in mystical or religious minutiae. And here, Marx is likening that value, as a social product, to that of a spoken language:

> It is value, rather, that converts every product into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, we try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of our own social products; for to stamp an object of utility as a value, is just as much a social product as language.\(^{286}\)

By equating the value of an object to language, is there a reference to the communicative values of objects?

Thorstein Veblen, like Marx, recognised the adverse effects of capitalism, and that ownership and the means of production should be socialised. While writing much about economic life and the industrial system, Veblen also considered the notion of conspicuous consumption, a term he coined to describe the practice by consumers of using goods of a higher quality than might be considered necessary in practical terms.


\(^{286}\) Ibid., 49.
Veblen’s conspicuous consumption tended toward the practices of the moneyed elites, of aristocracy and their accumulation of wealth. However much of Veblen’s analysis of consumption and the expression of wealth in these circumstances can also be attributed to the presentation of the self at many if not all levels of society within a culture of mass production and mass consumption. Veblen identified two distinct characteristics of products, these being of the serviceability and the honorific. The serviceability of the product essentially requires that the product gets the job done. In a material/non-material cultural consideration, this would be referred to as the material aspect; it amounts to its use and its practicality. The second characteristic of a product, the honorific, considers a non-material component and contains the added values and beliefs that are applied to the product and expressed via the ownership and use of the product, such as in a Porsche sports car which will be discussed. Ownership of a luxury item, as well as lifting one’s level of self-esteem, demonstrates to others that the consumer can afford a product that others may be left only to admire. That admiration comes not primarily from the product’s ability to get the job done but from the visible evidence of wealth and status that the product provides. The product is then an outward display of the owner’s position in society.

In a 2008 study, Gad Saad and John Vongas tested the endocrinal responses in a group of men to gauge fluctuations in status as triggered by acts of conspicuous consumption. Using evolutionary psychology, Saad and Vongas argued that men use the act of conspicuous consumption to communicate social status, particularly to prospective mates. Participants were asked to drive two distinctly different vehicles: a Porsche sports car and an old family sedan. It was found that their testosterone levels rose markedly when driving the luxury sports car but dropped when driving the old sedan. It was also found that driving the older vehicle in front of an audience produced a lower testosterone measure as compared to driving it in a more isolated location. This study demonstrated the importance of objects in relation to the respondents’ status and that objects play a particularly important role both in regards to levels of self-esteem and as a means to communicate. The emotional or psychological belief in an object and how

288 Ibid., 34.
someone is perceived when presenting with that object become important. In the human–object relationship, the object then becomes important for the information it conveys about its owner and its links to, or how it is received by, others. “Put a guy in a Porsche and his T–levels [testosterone] shoot through the roof.”

The relationship between people and material objects has become increasingly complex. Modernity has brought a greater proliferation of objects that have required the individual to make a distinction between the various available items, and to consider which is the more desirable. This is a shift from the use of objects in earlier cultures, where an object was “absorbed into the practice of everyday life with little distinction between subject and object.” Dant cites Georg Simmel, who states that in modernity, there is an increased distance between subject and object than in previous times, which can be measured in terms of desirability. The notion of desirability is an important aspect in conspicuous consumption and the ability to purchase particular objects. There is an advantage to having and to be seen to have if there is a distance between that wanting and having.

Jeanette Winterson reasons that a moneyed culture depends on a symbolic reality and that this then depends upon a confusion between an object and what that object represents. The act of buying is important, but to keep consumers buying products, these products must have an acquisitional value. This not only keeps the consumer tied into purchasing and upgrading objects, but also becomes a means of demonstrating purchasing power and that “people who cannot buy things are the underclass.” The individual then surrounds themselves with objects over which they can exercise a level of control. As Winterson further argues, objects do not fully satisfy, which is partly because an object’s symbolic value continually changes, as do the impulses and fancies of the consumer. Objects fail to satisfy because they are temporary, they are “illusion, narcotic, hallucination.”

292 Ibid.
294 Ibid., 145.
Desired ownership, or the conscious development of the objectification of an object, places an emphasis on an object’s aesthetic usefulness and value rather than its functional usefulness. It can be said that an object is functioning in a secondary manner through its desirability. In modernity, a dynamic relationship is created by which objects are consciously assimilated. It becomes a psychological process as well as a social one. It is no longer just a matter of meeting practical needs, as a layer of desire is projected onto the object that potentially also includes, or rather adds, a layer of presentation awareness. A desire of ownership amounts to product fetishism, and personal well-being is then identified through the possession and presentation of physical objects. This is also evident in war and in sports and participation in a victory celebration, through these events the person involved may potentially experience and demonstrate a sense of achievement and power in their lives.\(^{295}\) It becomes a public display of supremacy over a vanquished enemy: the weapons of the enemy may be displayed in a public manner as a means to demonstrate strength and vitality. Conspicuous consumption can perhaps be likened to a victory celebration. The defining object then has the potential to operate as a demonstration of acquisition, and of power over another’s lack; as an outward display, it has the potential to become an act of trophy taking.

As industrialisation increased the range and availability of objects, it likewise increased the list of identifiable and desirable needs. Dant notes, “Manufactured objects increasingly constituted the material environment of the social world, and took up much of people’s energy in looking at them, using them, becoming familiar, even attached to them.”\(^{296}\) The notion of being attached to an object is important in regard to the user and the values applied to an object, as is the notion that this sense of attachment can develop from desire. As social creatures, people seek acceptance and acknowledgement, and these may be attained through the private or public display of various select objects. They may be personal objects, imbued with emotional connection, which, as Dant reflects, “involved acquiring them and displaying them in the home as part of the décor.”\(^{297}\) This logically extends to the public display of objects and of the individual being seen as they engage in the social world. Dant continues:

\(^{296}\) Dant, *Material Culture in the Social World*, 139.
\(^{297}\) Ibid.
The era of modernity is marked by the proliferation of made objects, their display in public life, the reverence with which they are treated, both by those who can afford to collect and those who can afford only to view.298

Jean Baudrillard argues that objects occupy two places in human–object relationships: a use value and a possession value. The value of an object in relation to each place is dependent upon the psychological needs of the owner, and the value may to a larger degree, or perhaps entirely, come from merely possessing it.299 Daniel Miller proposes that material objects such as fashion “creates us in the first place,” and that clothing is not merely superficial. Miller tells us that individuals are in the process of creating themselves by using fashion as a self–defining object.300 For Miller, “once they [objects] exist, they become part of who we are.”301 The important aspect to this is the process of presentation and being seen in that act of presentation. This happens at many levels, from the personal to the familial and cultural, national and international levels. Various objects define a sense of being when placed within these levels, and the individual is defined on a personal level by the conscious choices that are made about the objects they choose to surround themselves with.302 Miller also presents the notion that objects, and particularly clothing, are signs or symbols that actively represent aspects of ourselves. These intentionally chosen items are significant in the action of wearing and of display. The choices and uses of the self–defining object are understood through a semiotic perspective, a perspective that on the surface makes sense. Clothing acts as a servant to the human subject and is used in presentation to the outside world, but these objects are surface to the self. Miller proposes also that while clothing may be used to represent the self and may reveal a truth, they may also lie. Objects, as signs and symbols, cannot be entirely trusted; clothes make us “what we think we are.”303 Objects become what the individual wants them to be, what the individual wants them to mean or signify, and how they want them to be perceived. The object is an active constituent, but one that is dynamic and fluid in its semiotic understanding, and our identity becomes a negotiation

298 Ibid., 141.
301 Ibid., 59.
and we are engaged in the construction of a symbolic self. A narrative is constructed that either presents or masks a truth.

In its consumption and presentation, an object is used as a means of self-definition. People make things, and things define people. The accumulation of objects creates social relationships, as evident in all societies and at all levels. The accumulation of objects, and the right objects, is important as representative of growth. This notion of Miller’s supports Dant’s position in terms of "who can afford to collect and those who can afford only to view." Having the right object and being able to (be seen to) afford it become important in the definition and presentation of the self. Self-image is projected onto the world, an expression of conscious choice. Miller suggests that rather than being defined by birth, as in earlier times, a person is now defined by a meritocratic ideology of cumulative achievement. This achievement is then demonstrated through the complex strategy of display and response, a combination of an accumulation of achievement and the right personal-defining objects. The physical objects and the ideas and values associated with them become an important aspect in the definition and presentation of the self.

Jules David Prown considers an artefact or object as an historical event and that despite being made in the past, it also has a location in the present because it can be re-experienced. The object is then loaded with memory and is emotionally significant due to that remembrance, and becomes a means by which to recall or remember specific events and the associated emotions or sentiments. But Prown argues that “the past cannot be retrieved in its affective totality.” What is retrieved can only be an interpretation of the past, the object can only be representative of the reality of the past (its time, place, process, and reason for making). The history that is retrieved, either by conviction or coercion, can be erroneous. For various reasons, it can be an intentionally selected history. The object, either the true object itself or a replica, becomes representative of historic event/s. These events can be factual or invented, and the

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304 Ibid., 145.
305 Ibid., 19.
306 Dant, Material Culture in the Social World, 141.
308 Ibid.
person acknowledging the power and perceived authenticity of the object then becomes invested in that selection and its non–material value.

Social psychologist Beth Gill declares that prior to industrialisation, work or useful employment carried with it a quality of the sacred, and that everyday life was imbued with a religious eminence.\textsuperscript{309} It was seen as important aspect to life that people toiled for the good of god. A link between religious character and labour is then recognised. Gill suggests also that “with the obsolescence of craftsmanship, the loss of individual control over the totality of production, and the forces of secularization, transcendence became diffused and no longer possible through work experiences.”\textsuperscript{310} The link between religious character and labour is then considered as being diminished by the processes of industrialisation. In \textit{Far from the Madding Crowd}, written in 1874, Thomas Hardy sets a scene during a busy time of year in the farming calendar. Farming of the era was very labour intensive; the travelling sheep shearers had arrived, and all available local hands were needed to ensure all necessary work was completed in an efficient and worthy manner for the benefit of everyone. However, many of the young had left the village to seek work in the growing industrialised cities. Hardy tells us that “God was palpably present in the country and the devil had gone with the world to town.”\textsuperscript{311}

This new mode of working also gave the worker an income as never before experienced.\textsuperscript{312} Thus, not only did the process of mass production change the way people worked, it also gave them the ability to engage in a material consumption, a consumption that increasingly responded to the social demands of mass marketing and advertising. People now had the ability, in a rapidly modernising culture, to surround themselves with a vast array of objects including items such as clothing, furnishing, technology, and architecture, all of which were extremely complex and more diverse than in any previous era.\textsuperscript{313} People had “become to an increasing degree [part of] a material–based culture based on an object form.”\textsuperscript{314} These material objects, being all the things humans make and use, are layered in meaning and carry with them material and non–material values.

\textsuperscript{309} Gill, “Temples of Consumption: Shopping Malls as Secular Cathedrals.”
\textsuperscript{310} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{311} Thomas Hardy, \textit{Far from the Madding Crowd} (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), 112.
\textsuperscript{312} Gill, “Temples of Consumption: Shopping Malls as Secular Cathedrals.”
\textsuperscript{314} Ibid.
The meaning is constructed, and the value is applied dependent upon the individual’s, the
group’s, and society’s various ideals and expectations. The object then becomes wrapped
in culture and intelligence as a means to communicate identity and personality. They
become cultural signifiers and evoke modes of social distinction through presentation
and spectacle with the potential that the value layered upon the object is more important
that the object itself. These material objects then legitimise the society and the individual,
and this legitimisation and the increase in consumption continually redefines the
relationship between humans and objects.

Becker proposes that “the symbols of immortal power that money buys exist on the level
of the visible, and so crowd out their invisible competitors,” and that “the pull of the body
is so strong, lived experience is so direct, the ‘supernatural’ is so remote and problematic,
so abstract and intangible.” This therefore suggests that it is easier to contend with the
physical, particularly because it is what an individual is most familiar with. Rather than
focus toward the promise of the hereafter, which is entirely abstract and intangible and
essentially without evidence, it is easier to focus on being in the present and to construct
an immortality that is recognised and remembered in the here and now, something in
which the individual can be directly involved. Rather than subjugation to religious ideals
and denial, it is the physical and visible worth of an individual is what now gives a sense
of eternal life. The individual becomes distinctive with a dedication to consumption,
accumulation, and display, and seeks an acknowledgement that attempts to locate
themselves in a self-defined position, as much part of an in group and as distanced from
others. And, just as it is for religious belief, if these acquired symbols and their specialness
were to die, the subject dies with them, and if these symbols are challenged, the individual
will come out in defence of those symbols and the values they hold. The regenerative
rituals of the past are no longer deemed useful, so the powers of immortality now reside
in accumulated wealth and material possession, with the individual free to negotiate their
value. Christianity has proven to be an idealistic ideology that has failed, and in becoming
secular, we are free to pursue the accumulation of wealth without the problem of sin.

Being secular, there is nothing to be separate from; everything is here. By acknowledging

315 Becker, *Escape from Evil*, 84.
316 Ibid., 85.
317 Ibid., 88.
the body, there is no experience of sin and separation, so the individual has full control over their physical destiny. In denial of the invisible dimension, sin is avoided and the individual is released to construct their own narrative and their own symbolic immortality.

But is it all as easy as this? Becker proposes that despite this freedom from sin, the individual is still trying to escape a sense of immediacy and mortality. The fears of sin and of death are deep seated, and in an attempt to repress and deny them, they are driven into the unconscious. The individual is therefore “more uncontrollably driven” by it.318 There is a change from being a giving animal (of oneself to religious belief and through religious offering or sacrifice) to a taking–and–keeping animal. A sense of control over destiny is felt in the accumulation of wealth and material possessions, which become a visible testimony to power. The individual is then the heroic maker who expresses a physicality via what is created and that which is considered as rightfully theirs. This heroism allows a human to push any feelings of sin, incurred punishment, or need for apology away, and now gives expression to a sense of physicality. There is no longer a sense of sacrifice, but the desire for an immortality remains. Sacrifice in the past was considered as a gift to the gods, which helped direct the flow of power and helped placate any feelings of guilt. The gods were fed in the hope that they would shine their light over all people and the process of ritual helped make visible the invisible.319 It affirmed power over life and over death, and it created a reciprocal agreement in which society could live in relative, if not ignorant, peace with themselves. In its place, the self–defining object is fetishised as a means to survive and to maintain a semblance of normal mental health. Allegiance is given to a group and each group becomes a created and codified hero system.320

In the human–object relationship, the object becomes a symbol that conveys meaning. There is an intention in that relationship that they be read by others and, according to Roland Barthes, that “meaning can arise only from articulation.”321 Are secular symbols such as a new Porsche equivalent to a religious symbol of the contemporary world and, if

318 Ibid., 89.
319 Ibid., 102.
320 Ibid., 153.
so, what do they communicate? Are objects used to define a larger order that can give personal meaning to an individual’s life, just as religion did in the past? Are they another human construct that is used to give the individual the feeling that their life means something? Are objects venues for both consolation and veneration, or is the individual just masking that fear of death with these secular symbols? Through increased industrialisation, society and the individual become immersed in the processes of production, consumption, and presentation.

Musician and film maker David Byrne makes interesting commentary on cultural evolution and consumption in the 1986 Talking Heads film, True Stories. Byrne essentially recounts the history of the world and humanity via the fictitious Texan town of Virgil, and in one scene he walks through a shopping mall speaking directly to the camera: “People here are inventing their own system of beliefs; they’re creating it, doing it, selling it, making it up as they go along.” This perhaps sums up the processes of belief and ritual in the acts of consuming, and that the shopping mall is essentially a temple of consumption. The retail mall is perhaps not only entertainment but also ritual, and we define ourselves as individual via the process of consumption while concurrently signifying social alliances.

Becker discusses a notion of a defiant self-creation, or living for today alone, a hedonistic approach to life that operates as an attack on all of life; a revolt against existence. But perhaps, rather than an attack against life, it is a self-creative grasp for life, a symbolic gesture as a revolt against death. Perhaps it is about living for the moment and for today alone, a defiance of tomorrow and the finitude of death. In the attempt for us to become god–like, a dread of mortality takes over and the power and control is lost. The defiant self-creation then becomes an attempt to display a sense of power and control over our lives.

Becker argues that through consumption, the world is attempting to deny the person their own body, their own sense of being, and to make themselves a completely

The individual becomes a false representation of the self as they distance themselves from nature and the reality of life and death. In the quest for immortality, a *causa sui* project is pursued, a sense of purpose is assigned and the individual becomes the cause of themselves. Freud and Becker both consider the concept of *causa sui* as being an immortality vessel; it is something that creates meaning or continues to create meaning beyond its own life. Becker describes this as a “personal vehicle for heroism, for transcendence of vulnerability and human limitations.” But, Becker argues that the *causa sui* project is a lie that takes an emotional toll that must always carry with it the temptation to admit dependence and a fight against that admission. In other words, a *causa sui* project is a heavy burden; it is an attempt to manage a defiant self-conception that is greater than the self. Despite finding safety in the thought that by living unto themselves and of fulfilling their individual nature, the individual bears a cost in lying to themselves and the reality of life. Becker asserts that Freud yearned for fame, and through that fame he would create his own immortality: “Immortality means being loved by many anonymous people.” For Becker, “this definition is the Enlightenment view of immortality: living in the esteem of men yet unborn, for the work that you have contributed to their life and betterment.” The individual is active in their own personal immortality project, creating their own religion on a noble road to immortality, and because the religious promise of immortality is an illusion, the creation of one’s own immortality cannot be abandoned. The use of luxury goods becomes a diversionary tactic used as a distraction from thoughts about death.

The surrender to the symbolic religious world has been replaced by a surrender to the symbolic object world, which is then manipulated by the individual as a means to achieve a sense of the self and to earn immortality on the basis of their unique qualities. Regardless, the individual is tied into the lie of the cultural world and the illusions of the *causa sui* project. The individual is trapped between natural reality and cultural

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324 Ibid., 85.
325 Ibid., 109.
326 Ibid., 116.
327 Freud cited in ibid., 121.
328 Becker, *The Denial of Death*, 121.
330 *Causa sui* (Latin pronunciation: [kawsa suɪ], meaning “cause of itself” in Latin) denotes something which is generated within itself. This concept was central to the works of Baruch Spinoza, Sigmund Freud, Jean–Paul
construction and there is an attempt to become god, using others to reinforce existence, and an encounter with others constitutes the primal circumstance of self-formation.

Symbolic objects occupy space, accumulate, travel, and are associated with meanings, desires, and ideologies. The symbolic object operates as a means to connect with particular beliefs and values, reinforcing a cultural identity. It becomes a sign, but a sign that is not natural. It is a social construct that is created and passed on as part of our relationships and interactions with other human beings. It becomes meaningful within the society in which the individual lives.\textsuperscript{331} It is then not the object itself but what the object represents that becomes important. The object, wrapped in intelligence and culture, represents and reinforces underlying cultural values and attitudes. An object, with its material and non-material components, becomes culturally and personally significant. The illusion of the beyond gave meaning to life and religion masked the fear of self-knowledge, it gave reason or an excuse to bypass any fear of life and of death. But now the individual has become self-aligned and with an inner life that they can only analyse as a product of social conditioning.\textsuperscript{332} The meaning is again projected elsewhere. The religious object through which an individual might acknowledge, affirm, and essentially create a connection through ceremony and ritual to a supposedly all-powerful god who offered eternity in paradise has been replaced by the creation of a symbolic immortality and the self-defining object. Objects are affirmed by the ideological and culturally defining machinations that the individual chooses to align with, and just as for the religious object, these self-defining objects and external cultural structures reinforce and give meaning to the self.

While objects are used to give meaning to existence, they inform a picture of the world and the values and the way of life one adheres to, they are also used to project information to others about how about that way of life. Thus, the object becomes an important part of non-linguistic communication, providing a materiality to language and communication.\textsuperscript{333} This use of objects and what they symbolise are perhaps used as aids to acquire the acknowledgment and recognition so readily needed in a complex,

\textsuperscript{332} Becker, \textit{Escape from Evil}, 157.
\textsuperscript{333} Barthes, \textit{Elements of Semiology}, 34.
contemporary world. By using objects as symbols for reality, or preferred reality, the individual is pushing away the anxiety surrounding death and gaining a level of symbolic immortality. Selected objects convey a message to the world, to tell others about how life is lived and about ideas, values, and ways of living. Objects are then used to create a picture of the self and a lived experience; they inform the choices made and, just as importantly, the choices discarded. A material culture is important in defining as much about who an individual is not as it is used to define who an individual is. In the process of showing allegiances to one group, the individual is actively distancing themselves from another.

Personal identity resides in the telling of a narrative, which changes due to circumstance, desire, and anxiety. Just as personal identity resides in a narrative, so too can a community or cultural identity. The individual is practice in action, and not theory. The individual is a distributed and presented self, involved in a continual process of creating, and re-creating, telling and re-telling personal and cultural narrative or collection of narratives that are constructed to benefit the cultural identity and the self within that cultural identity and its social context. Bellah tells us that this “Narrative truth is no more secure than any form of truth, but it can be stable, reliable, even profound.” Each individual creates their own narrative and their own truth through experience and interaction with others; these constructed narratives are consciously or unconsciously negotiated. Through human–object relationships, the self-defining object, and the ego, there is an attempt to exist and to owe experience, as a personally defined existence, to ourselves alone. The individual observes and is aware of being observed, but there is a struggle as to how one might be perceived. The individual needs others to reinforce existence. Sam Harris discusses Jean–Paul Sartre’s notion that it is the encounters with others that constitute the primal circumstance of self-formation and that “we have become objects in the world for others.”

People are conscious, self–aware beings, creatures with names who have cognisance of death but are potentially driven by the fear of death. The individual strives to find

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336 Ibid.
meaning through the creating of a symbolic self, but bodily desires and functions bring them back to physical reality, reminders of limitations and of finitude. Self-preservation becomes important, and through the presentation of the self through self-defining objects, value, recognition, and acknowledgment are achieved. There is an attempt by the individual at a re-evaluation of beliefs and values, and a lessening of the morality of the herd in a move toward the development of higher ideas. But this can be challenged by feelings of impotence in the face of an existential reality. Can the individual become a higher being, able to be themselves, or are they still someone who seeks shelter in the herd? Having lost faith in the ancient histories, is it really possible to find the authentic self or is refuge sought, trapped in a restless and constant search or grasping for one novelty after another?

Mount presents a maxim credited to G.K. Chesterton, that “when people cease to believe in God, they will believe in anything.” This reads as a potentially disparaging judgement on someone who might cease to believe, and Mount recommends an alternative notion that “when people cease to believe in a single God, they feel entitled to believe in anything, everything or nothing.” Mount then proposes that for the first time since the fall of Rome, the individual is free to make a choice between belief and non-belief, and best of all, there is, in the spiritual supermarket, the opportunity to save yourself. Here is the opportunity perhaps, as Nietzsche advocates, to become gods ourselves.

There is a duality to being human, the natural and the symbolic. The modern human creates a symbolic self, and as such is pulled out of nature. But while cultural and individual constructs may help create a sense of freedom and immortality, the body reminds the individual of their fate:

Life imagines its own significance and strains to justify its beliefs. It is as though the life force itself needed illusion in order to further itself. Logically, then, the ideal creativity for man would strain toward the grandest illusion.

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338 Mount, *Full Circle: How the Classical World Came Back to Us*, 246.
It is as if the life force itself requires illusion in order to further itself, and, as self-aware beings, we must maintain that illusion. Caught in a hero system that attempts to repress fear and deny death, there is a shift from one illusion to another. The individual is conscious and self-aware, but a price is paid for that privilege.
Civilisation is a conspiracy . . . Modern life is the silent compact of comfortable folk to keep up pretences.

—Buchan\textsuperscript{340}

Chapter 5: The Machine

This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men.
—Friedrich Nietzsche

In *Machines and Art*, Jasia Reichardt says that “Since there is no cure for progress, we may assume that machines will play an increasingly significant role in every area of our lives.” Progress is a constant part of human evolution, and the early tools and weapons have developed into the technological advances we experience today. The use of tools in various forms has also had a significant impact on cultural processes and cultural progress. For Kant, even in the eighteenth century, such progress was not entirely positive. The forging of cultural identities from the development of pastoral settlements and the defence of those settlements also generated levels of separation. The separation, Kant offers, arose from the aggressive protection of one's settlement and the oppression of other settlements as a result of war. This may have come from acts of aggression as felt by the community, but also of an “unremitting, indeed ever-increasing preparation for war in the future.” This call to arms becomes a relentless war machine, working as much as a means of deterrent as well as aggressive nature when deemed necessary. Kant describes this process as an evil that oppresses a civilised nation and all efforts that might be used to enhance a culture are sidelined and transferred into the efforts of the war machine. This, of course, becomes a defining or underlying component of that culture. Freedoms suffer as the general well-being, respect, and support for the population are replaced by the demands of the potential for war by creating and maintaining an ever-vigilant system of defence and control. In the effort to maintain the industrial military complex, individual freedoms are given over in the name of nationhood and protection of a cultural identity. This then becomes ingrained into the affected culture/s and a liberation from external danger perhaps becomes an obstacle for cultural growth.

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Jung, in acknowledging the benefits of technology and the machine, suggests that humanity has made them so useful that it not only relies but is also subservient to them. An inventive and scientific mind, an intellect, has created a new world, one that is working to control nature and is populated with what Jung refers to as monstrous machines. Jung also challenges the notion of war and the intentions and possible outcomes in its militaristic use. These “adventurous promptings,” this genius, has a “tendency to invent things that become more and more dangerous, because they represent better and better means for wholesale suicide.”

Becker proposes that the proliferation and use of military weaponry is a rage against impotence. It is used in defiance of our animal condition, of our pathetic creature limitations. If humanity does not have the omnipotence of god, then humanity can at least destroy like a god or, in many circumstances, destroy in the name of god.

Writing in 1986, Alan Trachtenberg described the art and design of the Machine Age as “inspiring symbols of unprecedented human well-being,” and that it was not unusual for artists and intellectuals of the era to speak of the machine as a religious force, a "new divinity." The Machine Age signalled a new epoch in communications, transportation, and the mass production of consumer goods. There was a shift from a predominantly rural, religious society to an urban, modern world of motor vehicles, radios and electric appliances. The Machine–Age has provided a lens through which society could re–focus its self–image. It was the promotion of a man–made environment with new urban and industrial landscapes from which mechanical forms and forces presented themselves as inspiring symbols of unparalleled human comfort and happiness.

When considering the impact of the machine on the arts, Robert L. Herbert interestingly submits that it is not really the past that he is discussing in The Arrival of the Machine, but “our present culture, its desires and its expectations.” Herbert writes that prior to World War 1, the machine was considered the enemy of what many of the modernist

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347 Ibid.
artists held dear. Herbert discusses the notion that the machine has reduced the individual to a “mere robot”\textsuperscript{349} with objects being produced as being “uncreative perfection.”\textsuperscript{350} Qualities such as the mark of the craftsperson, originality, and individuality are lost as the hand of the craftsperson was eliminated by the machine.

From the onset of World War 1, the machine took on an immediately stronger presence and the machines of war—planes, tanks, cannons, and machine guns etc.—took on a new importance. The war had created an acceptance of the machine and its benefits to humanity, but the detrimental could also be seen. At the war’s end, it was “...far easier to equate modernity with industrial forms.”\textsuperscript{351} Humanity has become fully engaged with the machine and what it can offer. And god–like, the machine can offer sustenance and protection, but it can also destroy. The war machine is perhaps a symbol and also a reflection of the human condition; it gives a greater understanding of ourselves as it reveals our capacity for good and evil, protection and aggression.

The Machine Age accelerated progress, and as Reichardt argues, “the image of the machine as an unstoppable force is prophetic of our contemporary world.”\textsuperscript{352} Humanity has a continual and growing reliance on machines, a reliance that borders on totality that is not only for commercial and medical uses but for the pleasures of basic sustenance and entertainment. These aspects of total reliance are interesting; for Reichardt, the machine is not so much a metaphor for labour but “a metaphor for the world itself.”\textsuperscript{353} The machine is a multi–faceted life support system and as well as being used to support our existence, they offer us reasons for existence. Perhaps, rather than being a metaphor for the world, the machine is a metaphor for life. Humanity is creating new industrial landscapes where the objects within them can be considered as if religious iconography. Author John Steinbeck, however, did not see these environments in a necessarily positive light. Steinbeck, in \textit{Travels with Charley}, a book written late in his life as he travelled across the United States to reacquaint himself with the country he knew and wrote about in depression era 1930s, described the factory engaged in mass production as a “great

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{349} Ibid., 1275.
\footnotetext{350} Ibid.
\footnotetext{351} Ibid., 1281.
\footnotetext{352} Reichardt, “Machines and Art,” 367.
\footnotetext{353} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
clanging organism of progress.”354 In the introduction to _Travels with Charley_, Steinbeck also tells us that he saw very little poverty, not like he had seen before. What he witnessed was a country of people no longer experiencing the pressures of existing, “there were wishes but no wants;” and that “the pressures are debts, the desires are for more material toys and the anguish is boredom.”355

Art was becoming a commodity in the twentieth century and was therefore considered more useful; however, Benjamin also commented on the loss of the _aura_ of art due to the processes of mass production.356 As with the work of art, the religious icon was also perhaps losing its sense of authenticity; rather than being an object of ritual, it was becoming an object of politics. But perhaps, by their very nature and reason for existence, the religious icon and the art have always been objects of politics and control and therefore of questionable authenticity. From a contemporary perspective, the Machine Age might sound a bit old-fashioned and peculiar, but the machine soon became a force embedded in and inseparable from social processes; it was never an abstraction.357

Beth Gill, citing Walter Benjamin, tells us that the process of mass production was changing the way people worked and our reasoning for working.358 The order of discipline had changed to a process of industrialisation, and as the world became more mechanised, industry and commerce became the driving force of life. The machine has a lot to offer; it can be seen as being of benefit to humanity and that an increased individual freedom would result from industry and technology, but it could also be seen as dehumanising and enslaving through the effects of mass production, standardisation, and consumption.

Andreas Broeckman suggests that labour and knowledge, the physical and the mental aspects of being human, “are all subsumed into the machinery, as well as in the modes of subjectivation and socialization.”359 Broeckman considers Marx’s readings and that it is

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355 Ibid., xxii.
357 Trachtenberg, “The Art and Design of the Machine Age.”
not the machine that serves the worker but the worker who is serving the machine. This integration could be considered as a dehumanising form of submission, or as a positive form of cooperation between human and technology, between human and machine. Either way, Broeckman proposes that “the direct and necessary coupling and companionship of human and machine are undisputed.”

As director of New York’s Museum of Modern Art during the 1934 exhibition ‘Machine Art’, Alfred H. Barr suggested that there was a refinement to modern materials and a precision to machine manufacture, a perfection of surface. But for Barr it would seem that the machine was more than mere functional object, it was a force that has direct impact on human life and as human in Western culture, it has become important to engage with the technology of the machine. There is a utilitarian spirit of the machine and as human we live among machines; the machine is an outward expression of the self.

In his article “Humanizing the Machine,” Jim Jenkins discusses the particulars of kinetic art and artists who pay homage to the machine. Referring to twentieth-century artists Duchamp, Francis Picabia, Vladimir Tatlin, and Jean Tinguely, Jenkins sets a path through the various stages and uses of technologies as the Machine Age added its influence to the art world. Jenkins considers that

... as our society has grown more and more comfortable with these technological advances, it is not surprising that artists have come to impose their own values and emotions on the technological work they produce, thus humanizing the machine.

Jenkins concludes that as human, we are biologically, scientifically, and artistically “compelled to reproduce ourselves.” This notion of reproduction of ourselves could operate on multiple levels, from the physical to the mental, emotional and spiritual. It is a reassessment of life and what it means to exist. There is a seduction but also a struggle between humanity and machine, there is an attempt to see the best in ourselves and perhaps to find a stronger sense of meaning or purpose in life itself, and the machine has become important in this expression of meaning.

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Ibid.
Ibid., 12.
Ibid., 14.
Ibid., 41–42.
Ibid., 46.
Picabia, one of the early twentieth century artists mentioned by Jenkins, was heavily influenced by the processes of mechanisation. Picabia commenced using the machine as an ironic metaphor for human life after visiting New York in 1915 and sighting the impact of an industrialised culture. Discussing Picabia’s symbolic visual language, Willard Bohn proposes that Picabia, reflecting on the symbolism of the human body and of the machine in his work such as with *Daughter Born without Mother* (figure 1), considered that there was indeed a relationship between the two seemingly disparate forms, the body and the machine. Bohn focuses on Picabia's sexual symbolism, a sexualisation of various objects that may not be immediately obvious but is made manifest on inspection and is realised for its deliberate intention. Picabia’s machine paintings present impersonal yet intrinsically human qualities.³⁶⁶ Pepe Karmel describes Picabia's machine paintings as being “strongly gendered and very much alive.”³⁶⁷ For Picabia, the machine was more than a mere adjunct to life, it perhaps defines the paradox of being human: the desire to be individual yet wanting to belong. Looking to machinery for influence and through referencing feminine and masculine qualities, Picabia came to define the machine as “a part of human life—perhaps the very soul.”³⁶⁸ The machine may have been humanised, but perhaps humanity has become de–humanised in the process.

Picabia considered the machine as the sexual self, while this is tangential to this research it becomes an interesting aside but nevertheless strengthens Picabia’s ideas of the machine as metaphor for the greater human condition. In humanising and sexualising the machine, Picabia's paintings not only represented gender but the sexual act itself. This furthers Jenkins’s humanisation of the machine; to be human is to be sexual. The machine is no longer just an object, it is more than a useful object; it is alive and it is sexual. William Camfield quotes Picabia: “the genius of the modern world is in machinery and that through machinery art ought to find a most vivid expression.”³⁶⁹ This quote conveys an

³⁶⁸ Picabia cited in ibid., 203.
almost religious eminence, perhaps the machine, as well as being humanised, is also worthy of worship?

Figure 1
Francis Picabia *Daughter Born without Mother* 1916–17
Gouache and metallic paint on printed paper
50 x 65cm

The art of Jean Tinguely sometimes considered and satirised a modern advanced society fully immersed in the process of the mindless overproduction of material goods and the obsolete technologies of a changing world. Tinguely’s *Homage to New York* (figure 2) was a self-destroying kinetic sculpture that was set in motion in the grounds of the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1960. The primary intention of this kinetic work was that it lived in order to destroy itself. This machine was brought to life and then set to its own devices, and as it is with human existence and mortality, it came to its

370 Jenkins, “Humanizing the Machine,” 43.
371 In 1960, Tinguely created a sensation with his first large self-destroying sculpture, the 27-foot-high metamatic entitled *Homage to New York*, whose public suicide he demonstrated at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. The event was a fiasco, with the complicated assemblage of motors and wheels failing to operate (i.e., destroy itself) properly; it had to be dispatched by city firemen with axes after having started a fire.
demise. As Jenkins states, “Tinguely's performance piece helped redefine the machine by allowing it to be symbolically linked to human mortality.”

Tinguely tells us that “all machines are art, even old, abandoned, rusty machines for sifting stones.” If Tinguely’s notion of machines as art being brought to life with the intention to die has justification, it would seem natural to follow with a notion proposed by Jack Burnham. Burnham argues that Western culture, in full control of the machine, has a Faustian goal; that it is possessed by “an unstoppable craving to wrest the secrets of natural order from God—with the unconscious aim of controlling human destiny, if not in fact becoming God itself.” The machine has the potential to give us anything we may want, including a sense of power and wealth. But is this a deal with the devil and have we handed over our soul as we search for other meanings in existence?

It is the machine, or Burnham’s notion of the machine, which appears as “the key to this transference of power” and that it “constructs our destiny.” Burnham also considered the machine as “becoming the legitimate heir to the sculptural tradition of form creation” and suggested that it was now worthy to be aligned with the “artistically superior tradition of figure sculpture.” Rather than the machine being a literal expression of the human form, the machine becomes perhaps a literal expression of humanity, and of what it is to be human. It is no longer an abstract expression. Burnham also advises that the communication between a work of art and the observer should be sustained; but for this to be successful, the artwork “must itself possess some degree of intelligence.” The interaction between the artwork and the viewer must be held and held as a dialogue rather than a one-way stimulation. This recommends for a call–and–response type of interaction, a two-way experience, with one responding to the other. The degree of intelligence in the artwork must then consist of its ability to engage the viewer.

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372 Jenkins, “Humanizing the Machine,” 43.
374 Faust, also called Faustus, or Doctor Faustus, hero of one of the most durable legends in Western folklore and literature, the story of a German necromancer or astrologer who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for knowledge and power.
376 Ibid.
377 Ibid.
378 Ibid., 313.
The machine then, may indeed have or be imbued with not only human–like qualities but perhaps also that of a god. Tinguely himself implied that *Homage to New York* was a "simulacrum of catastrophe," a "cynical object, both luciferian and phantomatic in nature." Tinguely cited in Eric C. H. De Bruyn, “Ghost Story,” in *Artforum International*, 51, no.1 (2012), 527.

Perhaps the machine has become sacred rather than just *humanised*, and we have indeed signed a deal with the devil.

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**Figure 2** Jean Tinguely *Homage to New York* 1960
Various found objects

Eric De Bruyn advises that “kinetic art creates a false copy, a simulacrum of life.” De Bruyn also references Burnham in regard to sculpture’s Faustian goals. However, De Bruyn is perhaps implying that there is a transparency to the machine; as a false copy or simulacrum the machine can be seen through, and it is not something to be trusted or to be believed in. Burnham’s presentation of the machine wrestling power from god is both

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*380* De Bruyn, “Ghost Story.”
acknowledged and challenged by De Bruyn and this builds on Burnham's commentary about Tinguely's *Homage to New York* as a mechanical simulation of life, as a machine or mechanical contrivance brought to life only to die.\(^{381}\) The machine *is* mortal.

Duchamp stated that “there has always been a necessity for circles in my life, for . . . rotation. It is a kind of narcissism, this self-sufficiency, a kind of onanism.”\(^{382}\) It would appear that Duchamp's use of the term onanism\(^{383}\) was in reference to his use of circles and rotation in some of his creative outcomes, and their use personally as being narcissistic and satisfying with a sense of self-gratification. But perhaps the outcomes themselves also operate with a sense of the narcissistic, created for their own self-satisfaction and self-gratification. Duchamp's fascination with machines and rotation is supported by the appearance of machines and machine-like structures of invented meaning and purpose in his work. Structures such as *Chocolate Grinder* (1913), *Bicycle Wheel* (1913), and *Rotary Reliefs* (1935). However, these machines are perhaps nothing but an act of masturbation and of spilling one’s seed, making the act pointless in terms of production or reproduction and thus acting for purely narcissistic purposes, for one’s own pleasure.

In his discussion on various styles and approaches to kinetic art, George Rickey considers Duchamp’s *Bicycle Wheel* alongside the “Realistic Manifesto” by Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner.\(^ {384}\) Kinetic art is perhaps a result of as well as a reference to the Machine Age, and Rickey makes a connection with Gabo and Pevsner’s Manifesto. Rickey’s use of the Manifesto is specifically in regard to time and movement and the suggestions that the artist should be concerned with movement itself and thus renounce static rhythms.\(^ {385}\)

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1. Ibid.
2. Duchamp cited in Andrew McNamara, “*An Apprehensive Aesthetic: The Legacy of Modernist Culture*” (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 117.
3. Definition of *onanism*:
   1: masturbation
   2: coitus interruptus
   3: self-gratification

   — onan•is•tic adjective

   Origin of ONANISM probably from New Latin onanismus, from Onan, son of Judah (Genesis 38:9)
4. The *Realistic Manifesto* is a key text of Constructivism, written by Naum Gabo and Antoine Pevsner. The *Manifesto* laid out their theories of artistic expression in the form of five “fundamental principles” of their constructivist practice.
Rickey supports these ideals by quoting from an interview conducted in the 1950s with American Constructivist sculptor Ibram Lassaw and Russian/American abstract painter Ilya Bolotowsky that “Constructive sculpture is not only three dimensional, it is four dimensional, in so far as we are trying to bring the element of time into it.”

In the “Realist Manifesto”, Gabo and Pevsner discuss the notions of space and time and that as well as concepts being “reborn to us today,” they are “the only forms on which life is built and hence art must be constructed.” These comments are an outcome of the era and the politics of change emerging out of both the Russian revolution of 1917 and the ending of World War I. The Russian Constructivists embraced the process of change offered by both of these events despite, or rather because of, the intensity of the changes to the social structure of the population and the loss and destruction as experienced during the war. In keeping with the notion of the good of society, Gabo and Pevsner present the notion that by the removal of “labels of their owners,” the “reality of the constant rhythm of the forces in them” is left behind, allowing the objects to be of themselves. New opportunities made available due to the political, social, and technological advancements of the day polarised the practices of the determined art practitioner and theorist alike.

The Russian artist Vladimir Tatlin is quoted in Gabo’s 1957 translation into English of the original Manifesto, referring to the opportunity of “creating a new world.” This opportunity is motivated and encouraged by, as well as being an extension to, the Machine Age. Tatlin, looking to grasp these new opportunities, saw the potential of new technologies and industrialisation with his Monument to the Third International (figure 3). Operating at a monumental scale, this proposed tower was a symbolic embodiment of the new society. Consisting of four large rotating structures, it employed movement to reinforce the processes of change, strength, and certainty of a new era.

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386 Lassaw & Bolotowsky cited in ibid., 221.
389 Tatlin cited in ibid., 4.
Commenting on the transformations to human behaviour and human identity over the last two centuries, Julie Wosk discusses how artists have reflected the impact of technology. Wosk discusses various aspects of the Machine Age, observing that technologies can “enhance and expand our human capabilities,” as well as potentially cause alarm and anxiety due to our need to adjust to new advances in technology. In her introduction, Wosk presents the concerns of novelists and social scientists alike, noting that these technologies can be “dangerously dehumanizing.” The human–machine interaction may initially be considered as being beneficial; however, there is also the danger of becoming automatons ourselves and that we may cultivate insensitive, self-destructive qualities. But perhaps those qualities have always been present, and it is just that the machine exposes them for what they really are and in turn further exposes aspects of the human condition. Wosk also considers that contemporary artists are

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391 Ibid.
charging themselves with the taming of technology and that through creative expression, the artist is looking to bring a sense of civilisation to the machine.\textsuperscript{392}

By acknowledging the power of the machine, there is also the need to consider that there is a continual battle with machine-age technologies, and that despite the potential for advancement, moral implications are also involved. Wosk's discussion continues about the desire for material goods and their sociological and psychological functions. Is this human–object relationship part of, or fundamental, to a material/non–material culture and does this then extend to an object when used in a self-defining process as adopted by the individual? Wosk concludes that we “must temper our technologies or risk deformation and death.”\textsuperscript{393} Has humanity succumbed to the benefits and pleasures of the machine but also to systems of restraint and control? Has humanity bowed down to the machine? And like a god, a machine can giveth and a machine can taketh away. “The Lord giveth, and the Lord taketh away” (Job 1:21).

The potential for the machine to change existence for the good and the bad is also acknowledged by Barbara Zabel, who asserts that Dada artist Man Ray “soon found in the machine a means to express the dilemmas of twentieth-century existence.”\textsuperscript{394} Zabel also considers two of Ray's contemporaries, Morton Schamberg and Henry Adams, as “identifying the machine as a new religion of the modern world,”\textsuperscript{395} with Adams equating such things as forty feet (12.2 metre) dynamos to that of the early Christian notions of the cross for its moral force. Here, is the power of the crucifix as an icon of the religious institution being challenged by the dynamo as an important humanity–defining object of the early twentieth century. Fried makes an interesting observation in regard to the scale of sculptural forms and the relationship between the viewer as subject and the form as object. The presence of a work is potentially intensified by the use of scale, and as Fried suggests, “The larger the object the more we are forced to keep our distance.”\textsuperscript{396} Presence as a theatrical effect or quality, and sculptor Tony Smith is quoted in regard to his work

\textsuperscript{392} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{393} Ibid., 152.
\textsuperscript{395} Ibid.
and the notion of presence: “I didn’t think of them as sculptures but as presences of a sort.” This suggests that a work has a presence when it demands that it be taken seriously by the viewer and that the presence of the work can be experienced. There is potential to connect the viewer to the work, asking that the work be felt both through physical and psychological terms and implications.

These aspects are important, so too the considerations of Man Ray and his contemporaries, as probing the metaphysical nature of the machine and the machine’s ability to affect human existence and man’s relationship with god. The machine was considered as being more than mere object in the explorations and artistic representations of Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp, and Francis Picabia; rather, “they used mechanical forms and ideas to raise philosophical questions about the complex interrelationship between man and machine.”

Indestructible Object (figure 4) is described by Zabel as being Man Ray’s “most powerful and ambivalent combination of the human and the mechanical... the work represents Man Ray’s commentary on how the machine has come to set the tempo in twentieth-century life.” Zabel suggests that by fixing an eye to a metronome, the artist gives the mechanism a “seemingly human consciousness.” However, Ray’s description of how he came to assemble such a device seems rather unassuming and humorous. He would set the metronome in motion and paint to its regulated frequency. Then, deciding that a painter needed an audience, Ray fixed the photograph of the eye to the swing arm, thus creating an illusion of being watched. As a kinetic construction, this Surrealist work alludes to the ‘all-seeing eye’ or the notion of a watchful god, which implies that our days are numbered. The object represents a god–like figure with an unyielding stare, and the days become measured by a monotonous beat. Has humanity, like Ray, looked to the machine for support but in the process created a reliance on the machine; and has humanity become ceremonious and habitual to the routine of the machine, in work and in play?

397 Smith cited in ibid., 3.
398 Ibid., 69.
399 Ibid., 78.
400 Ibid.
Mona Hatoum's *Self Erasing Drawing* (figure 5), re-created a number of times since its origin in 1979, is representational of deliberate and repetitive purpose. *Self Erasing Drawing* is continuous in its motion and appears to carry on regardless, but it also shows that that which is given, or is constructed can just as easily be taken away or destroyed.

This work references the patterning of the Ryoanji Zen gardens in Kyoto, Japan, a reference that perhaps suggests a tranquil and reflective nature to the work. However, this potential is disrupted by its continuum of construction and destruction, repeated in an automatic manner with a concealed driving force that is literal and metaphorical, a hidden agenda. The rate at which the arm cycles, 5 rotations a minute, potentially destroys any sense of rest or quietening that might be reasoned; and any that is reasoned is certainly of a temporal nature. This work is heavily influenced by Hatoum’s Palestinian and Lebanese heritage. Themes of alienation and displacement, and issues of violence and oppression are considered along with notions of collective memory and belonging.
Its cyclic nature, its repetitive and potentially meditative action, is simultaneously constructive and destructive. A sense of peace to be disrupted thus creates a sense of tension as the next arm approaches. But which arm is constructing and which arm is destroying? Thus, confusing and disrupting the viewer experience. What is also evident in this work is that someone else or perhaps something else has the ultimate power.
Isaiah 45:7. I form the light, and create darkness; I bring posterity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things.\textsuperscript{401}

Chapter 6: Form and Scope of Studio Outcomes

What then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchres of God?  
—Friedrich Nietzsche402

My studio research considers the industrial and the mechanical. It draws a relationship between kinetic construction and industrial apparatus in order to conceive and construct outcomes that use motion to activate the object, the space it occupies. These kinetic constructions aim to represent the notion that humanity has become increasingly reliant on the machine, not only as a means of supporting and contesting existence in the here and now but also through the processes of consumption and presentation, and that our reason for existence is being redefined.

My architectural and industrial inspired art practice is approached from a minimalist, constructive perspective. For these works, materials that are perhaps more familiarly used in engineered structures have been replaced by timber, further distorting or challenging any reading that the sculptural forms might suggest. Timber has been a primary material of choice for some time because of its expressive qualities, with other materials including steel and natural fibre rope. The specificity of the materials used and the act of leaving parts raw, exposing the craftsmanship of the object, are essential as I work to create objects that are meticulous in their making, yet are charged with a curious symbolism. As Warren Feeney observes of my work, “These are works that fluently shift between aesthetic experience and potential parable.”403

The intention with my earlier work was not to be specific about any story or to load the work with a particular narrative, but to allow the viewer to interpret any association or connection for themselves. In this manner, I desire the work to provoke recognition and narrative but also to allow the potential for them to be read as abstract forms in their own right. They are aimed as shapes that lurk at the edges of recognition, alluding to things or

states of being without fully representing them. Another important aspect is the narrative that lies within the making of the object, a narrative that adds to the work. As Feeney continues,

Aitken’s interests reside in cultivating the potential of these objects as symbols and formalist constructions. ‘Useless’ objects, in fact, but pervaded by narratives and allegories, alluded to in titles that acknowledge an oblique human presence.\footnote{Ibid.}

The titles Feeney is referring to are \textit{An Unwanted Visitor in the Dark, As a Consequence of Being Looked At, A Brief Glimpse of Moving Ahead,} and \textit{To Have Arrived without Coming into the Room.}\ Titles of my work from the past have a separate evolution to the physical object; they stand alone and perhaps have the potential to be works in themselves.

In my earlier work, colour was used to add another layer of information, almost as if an overlay of cultural identity or masking of the natural/original. The paint denies access to the materials and processes used in the construction of the form, changing the identity of the existing object. That part of the resultant outcome becomes form–oriented, it can then only be considered for its shape and not its material. This follows the artistic sensibilities of Anthony Caro’s steel sculptures from the 1960s, such as \textit{Early One Morning} (figure 6) and \textit{Yellow Swing} (1965), in which Caro uses colour to unify the elements of the sculptures and places the focus on the form rather than the materials.
**Figure 6** Anthony Caro *Early One Morning* 1962
Painted steel and aluminium
289.6 x 619.8 x 335.3cm

**Figure 7** Jessica Stockholder
From *Kissing the Wall* series 1988
Furniture, light, newspaper, glue and paint
75cm high
Another influence in my application of paint was the work of Jessica Stockholder, an artist who uses paint to mask parts of her installations. Stockholder’s works, particularly those from the late 1980s such as the *Kissing the Wall* series (figure 7), are of interest due her use of materials and her process of masking areas of the assembled objects with paint. This became important in my work as I covered the materials and methods of construction and craftsmanship. A sense of memory is then required in taking that which is observed in the natural state across to that which is concealed, with the viewer having to transfer known or presented information given in one place across to an area in which that information is no longer made available. An image of static sculptural forms made before this doctoral research, *A Preoccupation of Other Things* (figure 8), is included for reference. These particular works, constructed and exhibited in 2012, have been described as being “emphatic, directly experienced objects that recall stylised but recognisable items—furniture, architecture, even a sort of wagon, reduced to intersecting planes... serious in intent but with a humorous edge, non—functional objects masquerading as functional ones.”

The observations of my work by commentators like Feeney and Wood are important considerations and acknowledge the desired presence of the constructed static forms, but also the ambiguity of the form itself and what they might reference. It is these qualities to my work that I am hoping will transfer across to the suite of kinetic works as studio outcomes in this research. The notions of *masquerading* and *serious intent* along with comment such as *objects as symbols* and *potential parable* become valuable in the readings of any subsequent works.

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Two works that followed the exhibition *A Preoccupation of Other Things* were instrumental in solidifying my desire to pursue kinetic works. The first artwork was included in an exhibition that was part of the Christchurch Press Writers Festival, held in Christchurch, New Zealand, in August 2012. The prompt for this exhibition was to select and use in an artwork, a book that had been removed from circulation from a local library. Having chosen a book of interest, a textbook on physics, I responded to its title and content. I devised and constructed a motorised action to physically raise the book off the floor and then drop it via gears, wire, and a swing arm, back to the floor. The book was repetitively raised and dropped every seventy–five seconds, with the result being the
gradual destruction of the book. The title of the resulting work is *It’s Not the Fall That Gets You* (figure 9).

The second kinetic work, titled *A False Memory to an Earlier Self* (figure 10) was also part of a group show and was the first work to be created after being accepted as a doctoral candidate. This work was essentially an early exploration into kinetic work and was fitted to a wall and the ceiling of a small gallery space. A steel two arm crank was rotated continuously above head height. Two natural fibre ropes were attached to each crank arm, these ropes were just long enough to reach down to the floor and as the crank rotated, these ropes shifted and dragged across the floor to their own accord.

![Image](image.png)

**Figure 9** Phil Aitken *It’s Not the Fall That Gets You* 2012
Timber, motor, electronics, book, wire
200 x 80 x 40cm
The visual presence of a machine when not in motion was also explored in the studio component of this research; when the machine is static the viewer is left to consider the ‘potential’ of the machine. This element follows further discussions by Rickey and also Valdis Clems of the elements of kinetic art. Clems acknowledges the various elements or stages of kinetic artworks as being stasis, motion, light, and colour.\textsuperscript{406} Emotional aspects of kinetic art and the aesthetic perception of the work in regard to the viewer are also included in Clems’ discussion. Particularly of interest in terms of the stages of a kinetic artwork is the acknowledgment of the opposing states of stasis and motion. A recognition and understanding of these states and how they might be used in kinetic constructions to heighten the viewer’s visual and experiential impact of the work is valuable for the work to be successful. Rickey considers the state of stasis or motionlessness in a work and how it might be utilised to maintain a sense of tension. The actual and symbolic nature or representational aspects of these stages becomes an interesting aspect to kinetic work.

and important in terms of visual experience. Rickey's discussion of time in kinetic art extends to perception of time and the various ways it is understood, consciously and unconsciously. Rickey considers the notion of the interval as an important aspect of understanding time and movement in art practice. However, based on my theatre experience, I consider a better term to be the pause, as interval appears too abrupt and that the energy, even implied, is lost but with an expectation that it will start again. A pause suggests the energy is held and an element of tension is expressed. The pause and the movement equal real energy and life, as opposed to referencing energy and life through stationary means.

These notions of space and time, stasis and motion are exemplified in The Big Wheel (figure 11), a work by American artist Chris Burden that explores and represents technological innovation and engineering. In The Big Wheel, a motorcycle is engaged and through the process of energy transfer sets the large wheel in motion for a lengthy two-and-a-half hours. The visual simplicity of this work belies its content and perhaps its raison d'être. The work displays a robust sensibility in terms of its construction, all of which works well proportionately, and the chosen materials and construction methods sit well against the older model motorcycle.

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408 I spent a year studying physical theatre full time in Sydney. Performing in both Australia and New Zealand around this time.
When it is static, this work has an undeniable sense of potential and this would engage the viewer into considering its action and intent. The procedure of an attendant mounting the motorcycle, starting it up and using it to bring the cast–iron fly wheel up to speed enhances the intrigue. The attendant then abandons the work and leaves it to its own devices as the energy of the wheel is disbursed and its momentum slows, eventually coming to a stop. The motorcycle indicates human involvement, so the presence of an attendant becomes part of the work, even in their absence. The work is visually interesting and equally dynamic when at rest or when set in motion.

American mixed–media artist Ann Hamilton often engages the active human form as an integral part of her installation work. *Human Carriage* (figure 12) exemplifies this process and the work conveys the notion of being useful. This large–scale installation occupied the rotunda space of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. The viewer potentially had the feeling of being immersed in a working environment and possibly the sense of intrusion. The unhurried yet deliberate action of the attendant operating the mechanism engages the human form with a sense of purpose in the mechanism and asks...
questions of the work rather than giving answers. The idea of being ‘gainfully employed’ suggests the manufacture of products and/or services, and the inclusion of a human worker becomes vital.

Figure 12 Ann Hamilton *Human Carriage* 2009
Mixed media installation

In wanting to consider the notion of the theatrical in a sculptural work, the theatrical combined with the industrial, *Bed Machine* (figure 13) by Shin Egashira becomes important. This piece is of particular relevance to my research by being a structure that appears to work toward an uncertain objective, yet the work also contains some very obvious suggestions in the movement the work describes. The circular platform as a deliberate aspect of the work serves to create a boundary for the viewer and creates a ‘no–go’ area as if an industrial working environment. The scale of the work is effective as being suggestive of industrial machinery and fits with the notions of presence and theatricality as discussed by Michael Fried. The duration of experience and movement is an integral element in this work, thus further engaging the viewer with the potential to bind them to the work. The aspects of viewer engagement along with the ambiguous nature of its functional intention are of relevance here.
Roxy Paine’s *Schumak 2* of 2000 (figure 14) is a machine with purpose in the act of creation. Its function is to create a series of individual but linked forms. Individual in regard to the shape of each Teflon form, but linked in terms of colour and most likely volume. The forms, as they are being created, are a culture of their own and have a level of free will. There is no control over the behaviour of these forms during the process of creation other than them being of the same species. The work has a sense of mass production, but without a known or prescribed outcome, with each object expressing as individual despite the industrial and very clinical process presented and applied. These aspects of Paine’s machine are of interest; there is an actual outcome notwithstanding its questionable purpose and there is the impression of it being engaged in an endless, repetitive process. The funnelled hopper to the top of the machine holds the raw plastic, and the size indicates that there is room to hold enough material for only one object of the size presented on the conveyor belt. This then presents the need for an attendant to refill the hopper and possibly activate the conveyor, so another new form can be produced alongside the previous one. While the process of creating these forms is interesting, any potential reading as being a god in the process of endless and uninterrupted creation is unseated. There is an interruption and an interval between each form, accentuated by the need for an attendant to service the machine.
Turning the Place Over (figure 15) was a visually challenging architectural intervention by British artist Richard Wilson that was located in Liverpool’s city centre in 2007. An eight-metre diameter segment was cut from the façade of the building and then attached to an offset shaft and motor. This assembly and the angle to which it was set, presented the viewer with a two-minute cycle whereby the architectural disc was rotated from the once familiar position to disrupt the façade and to almost turn this segment of wall inside out, thus exposing the interior of the building for a short period. Wilson’s intention was to challenge the viewer’s experiences or preconceptions of architectural structure, particularly as the work was viewed from the pedestrian level on the street. This work had the potential to disturb, upset, or challenged things being as they should be, or as they might be expected to be. In this instance, an architectural structure was manipulated on a scale that might be hard to imagine and as part of the physical disturbance, people were provided with an opportunity to get a momentary glimpse into the structure of the building, as it cycles through again.
Wilson's intervention brought attention to the structure in a thought-provoking and rebellious manner. To challenge the reasons and rules of architecture and the visual engagement of an existing and previously accepted structure. A structure which, due to its age, is perhaps rendered invisible/unnoticed in the everyday cityscape as people go about their business.

For the studio practice component of this doctoral research, I then looked to draw on human psychological and sociological needs as a means to construct meaning. Influenced by kinetic constructions, I wanted to create a suite of works that presented the idea of function but with questionable purpose and/or outcome. As Broeckmann comments in regard to machines in art practice, “the contemporary understanding of the term ‘machine’ is extremely diverse.” While considering recent artistic developments driven by many new media technologies and the potentials for sound and video, I became particularly interested in the notion of kinetic works that were inspired by early industrial machinery, machinery that existed but were trapped within their own existential concept. Typically, tools and machines are designed and made to complete useful tasks, but my own invented machines are not performing any seemingly useful assignment. The machines’ reasons for operating, and the operations themselves, have

409 Broeckmann, Machine Art in the Twentieth Century, 6
no defined use value and therefore the point to them is there to be challenged. They can be considered as part of an existentialist existence, as the machine is removed from any useful or productive context other than that which might be applied to it. This then contradicts the invention and intention of technology and machinery.

Acknowledging the need to understand our environment and the objects in our environment in order to negotiate or make sense of our place in it, I ask the viewer to observe and make sense of useless machinery. This is intended to mimic the increasing challenges to religion and the existence of a god. As alluded to in previous chapters of this research, god is potentially nothing more than a concept, and people believing in the concept of god are bound to a process of god worship through ritual and ceremony. As people dare to be wise (*Sapere aude*) and have the courage to use their own understanding, one can see that religion might be useful but with a potentially questionable purpose and/or outcome. This suite of useless machinery is ironically titled *Useful Tasks* and has been catalogued by a numbering system ranging from *Useful Tasks #1* to *Useful Tasks #8*. It is the intention that they operate as machine/not–machine and simultaneously god/not–god.

*(not–) machine – (not–) god

The studio outcomes are informed by Industrial Revolution and early Machine Age industrial mechanisms, such as Samuel Crompton’s spinning mule of 1779 (figure 16). As discussed earlier in this research, this era was defined by advancements in manufacturing and production technologies that marked the beginnings of mass production and were perhaps influential in the shift away from god worship. These useless machines then represent the notion that due to humanity’s reliance on the machine, the machine has now become ceremonial and it supplies us with our identity and meaning.

While the potentials for sound and video have been considered as part of an installation, it is the industrial nature of machines that is of particular interest in the works developed for this research. There is a focus on the functionality of the work, or as Alfred H. Barr Jr described of the Russian Constructivists Tatlin, Gabo and Pevsner, that they “employed the technique, the materials and something of the structural feel of
The structural feel of machines in my work is important, but so too is an encounter of familiarity and understanding of the materials. This is countered however as there is no friendliness or easiness in regards to the machines actions, they are social but almost antagonistic. These qualities could also be identified in the likes of Crompton’s spinning mule.

Figure 16 Samuel Crompton Spinning Mule 1779
Wood, steel

My intention was for these sculptural forms to be cycling in useless repetition, aligning themselves perhaps with Duchamp’s “kind of onanism.” The repetitive actions of the machine are an exercise in futility that mimics an existentialist view of life, that life has no inherent meaning other than that which the individual affords it. These machines represent technological advance; however, they serve no useful purpose other than being just of themselves. They are useless machines/not–machines. As well as influencing the theoretical context of this research, Tinguely’s work Homage to New York has also influenced the sculptural context. Tinguely’s work appeared cluttered and overburdened.

both visually and in terms of function. While sophisticated, there was no elegance to his contraption. It was my intention to follow Tinguely as he considered and satirised a modern advanced society fully immersed in the process of a mindless overproduction of material goods, but my desire was to present a level of refinement that reflected a sense of deference.

I approached my sculptural outcomes from a minimalist perspective. Their components have a strong sense of repetition or uniformity, but with each form having potential for a different narrative in regards to its mechanical intention. The resultant forms are pared back to a number of basic elements—a collection of frames, gears, cranks, spars—and presented in such a manner as to thwart any absolute reading. The intention is that the forms are semi-representational, alluding to purpose in their existence, but carrying no specific or absolute intention. These sculptural forms resemble industrial machinery insofar as they lurk at the edge of recognition. The forms, being ambiguous yet complex in their reading, then adapt to their own purpose. It is as if the machine is spilling its seed and the viewer is left to consider any particular association or narrative for themselves. These machines are incapable, operating but not producing anything; impotent and yet hopefully demanding of attention, as if god–like. Machines are evidence of existence; however, in this instance it is an existence or purpose that is yet to be defined.

A repetitive motion or rotation is sought, deliberate in an intention to convey a sense of meaning and purpose, slow so as to persuade contemplation within that action. The objective of each of the outcomes in this suite of works is that they describe a captivating but importantly thoughtful or reflective quality. That they each represent something that once set in motion, give the impression that they could carry on regardless. These qualities are perhaps best represented by Ralph Steiner’s Mechanical Principles of 1933.411 My intention is to capture the mesmeric quality with the slow and repetitive rate of motion to create a captivating but importantly contemplative or engaging quality.

The work of John Douglas Powers, who explores aspects of the self, including memory, emotion, and passages of time, also has relevance to my art practice. Powers’ work lalu

(figure 17) is a conceptually and materially engaging installation that consists of sophisticated and well-crafted mechanisms. The mass of the reeds, with their artificiality, uniformity, and containment, intrigues the viewer as does the works repetitive cyclic motion, its well-considered use of materials and construction of form, and its associated colour palette. Powers’ work often includes visual imagery and a soundtrack and this work is no exception. There is however a potential for conflict between the visual imagery and the construction in works of this nature; the proximity to each other raises questions. Given more space, each of these elements has the potential to operate as an outcome in itself. These concerns, and the use of other media in combination to create a whole, have relevance to the intentions of my research. Consideration needs to be given to perceptions of certainty or ambiguity in any creative combinations that are being used in a final outcome. The content and nature of the video, a sky—scape folding in on itself, demonstrates a relevance to the object, the sounds emitted from the object, and the overall work, but the visual shift between the object and the video feel like a possible overworking of the idea. I had considered presenting animations of concept drawings as part of an installation however seeing this work by Powers’ has shown that the proximity of the sculptural forms becomes important. It is better to present as separate works rather than risk a loss of impact of each if combined as one work.
Figure 17 John Douglas Powers *Ialu* 2011
Wood, steel, plastic, electric motor, and video projection

Another aspect I have hoped to achieve in my sculptural works is a sense of static potential; it is important that the machines at times be motionless and quiet. A sense of static potential in machinery is captured in the artwork of Carl Grossberg (figure 18). Grossberg was particularly known for painting industrial landscapes and machinery during the 1920s and '30s, which he rendered with acute precision. These works, many of which he did as commissioned works, focused on industrial sites, factory interiors, and machinery. The elegant and refined nature in which the factory environments and machines are presented reflects a fascination with industrialisation and manufacture.

The visual forms presented in Grossberg's work are compelling and full of insight into what the machine had to offer at that time. The austerity of the environments and that Grossberg chose not to depict the workers in much of his work speaks of the potential for such objects to be considered as pure sculptural form, stripping back the action of the machines themselves and presenting them as potential in terms of their purpose. The stripped-back colour palette and the visually dynamic forms are important as they aid understanding in the mimicking of and potential for presentation of this type of sculptural object.
I considered a number of ways to introduce and regulate motion in my work. Following Ann Hamilton’s lead, I considered employing an attendant to crank the machine or perhaps to invite the viewer to crank the machine themselves. These ideas would bring the body into direct contact with the machine and make the attendant or viewer responsible for its movement and therefore the concept of the *machine as god* is weakened if not lost entirely. The intended dynamic is potentially reversed if the machine is operated by the viewer. God as a supernatural being is not something an individual is necessarily allowed direct contact or experience with. God must be approached in the appropriate manner through church service and ritual as conducted by the religious hierarchy. Including an attendant as part of the installation to engage in cranking the machine at various intervals is negated for the same reasons. While it may be considered that only the special few—namely, the priests—can have any contact or dialogue with god, an attendant (priest), even neutrally dressed and with no engagement or
acknowledgment with any viewer, potentially shifts the concept from that of an unattainable being/machine to a mere apparatus.

Powering the machines with electric motors was also considered in a number of ways; (a) the machines could be in continuous motion; (b) the machines could be set on a timer that presents intermittent phases of movement; or (c) the machines could be activated by movement sensors that are triggered by the movement of viewers entering the gallery space. The continuous motion of any machine (a) could be considered as equating to the omnipotent, omnipresent god, the all-knowing, all-seeing superstitious presence. This leaves the viewer as a mere observer with no potential for interaction or acknowledgement of presence. Intermittent phases of movement (b) prescribed through the use of a timer perhaps demonstrates that god is ever present; however, the individual is unsure as to if and when god will act and for how long. The viewer is essentially at god’s mercy and the involvement with god is kept at a distance. This could perhaps be likened to making a prayer to god and hoping god is listening, and while interesting as part of the development, I was wanting to give the machine a greater sense of interaction. Triggered movement (c) on the part of the viewer gives direct contact and an opportunity to respond to the machine reacting to their presence. The viewer is observed, by the hidden sensor, in the course of their actions and is thus reminded of the presence of the machine/god. A dialogue between machine and the viewer is then generated as the viewer questions their possible role and responsibility in activating the machine.

A series of ideas was explored through sketching and some selected ideas are included here (figures 19–32). As the ideas developed, those deemed to have potential were taken into a CAD program (figures 33–34), with some of those concepts then printed three-dimensionally.
Figures 19 & 20 Philip Aitken *Exploratory drawing* 2014
Pencil on paper
42 x 29.7cm
Figures 21 & 22 Philip Aitken Exploratory drawing 2014
Pencil on paper
42 x 29.7cm
Figures 23 & 24 Philip Aitken Exploratory drawing 2014
Pencil on paper
42 x 29.7cm
Figures 25 & 26 Philip Aitken *Exploratory drawing* 2015
Pencil on paper
42 x 29.7cm
Figures 27 Philip Aitken *Exploratory drawing* 2015
Pencil on paper
42 x 29.7cm
Figures 28 & 29 Philip Aitken Exploratory drawing 2015
Pencil on paper
42 x 29.7cm
Figures 30 Philip Aitken  *Exploratory drawing* 2015
Pencil on paper
42 x 29.7cm
Figures 31 & 32 Philip Aitken *Exploratory composite drawing* 2015
Digital render
Figures 33 & 34 Philip Aitken *Concept drawing from CAD program* 2015
Digital images
As discussed earlier, I had considered including video with my sculptural work. A possible video idea was to animate some of the concept drawings in Photoshop and to have a continuous loop playing in the gallery space. Some drawings were indeed animated and various sound-scapes were added to these. These animations involved the layering of processing information in Photoshop to ensure the animations flowed well, layers that were hidden as each image was captured but brought back as the next image was constructed. A typical animation still, with its layers of usually hidden information is included (figure 35), and a link to a compilation of some sampled animation clips is included here. Sound-scapes assembled from found sounds are layered to the video samples.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LyVHei4-G1c

Figures 35 Philip Aitken Exploratory animation drawing with overlay if incremental placement included
Pencil on paper 42 x 29.7cm taken into Photoshop. 2015
The first sculptural outcomes were *Useful Tasks #1* (figure 36) and *Useful Tasks #2* (figure 37), and they were exhibited in the White Box Gallery on the Gold Coast campus of Griffith University in late 2014.

The making of *Useful Tasks #1* and *Useful Tasks #2* included the process of masking part of the timber construction with paint. Aside from the use of black on the rotating components, the two colours used in these works are Colonial Red and Marigold Yellow. I had used these specific shades in earlier static works dating back to 2006. These colours reference those used in various road markings, used in circumstances in which there is an intention to attract attention and convey a particular message. Red, the colour of courage and strength, has the potential to stimulate the physical sensibilities, raising heartbeat, blood pressure, and accelerating the respiratory system, while yellow has the potential to raise tension in people. The American National Standards Institute (ANSI) recommends that warning signs should be a combination of specific colours—namely, red, orange, or yellow—along with textual terms such as “danger” or “caution.” Research has found that red has a high arousal effect, and that yellow is just as effective as warning against a particular harmful action. Colour is used to increases comprehension and specific colours and reasons for their use becomes relevant. While responses to the colours used in my artworks are essentially subconscious, they nonetheless reinforce the *look but don’t touch* sense to the work as the intended machines are operating as god itself. The use of black on only the rotating components—the gears and cranks—is directly influenced by the large ships winches on display at the Brisbane Maritime Museum. The fixed components and casings of these large winches are of various colours—in these instances, either green or red—however, all moving components look to be painted in black. It is considered here that this was done for reasons of safety, with the moving and potentially dangerous components being identifiable by the use of colour. It would appear however that painting moving components black is not necessarily a common practice in the maritime industries.

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413 Ibid., 230.
415 Ibid., 107.
Fig. 36 Philip Aitken *Useful Tasks #1* 2014
Timber (raw and painted), ply, steel, natural fibre rope, motor with motion sensor and timer 220 x 450 x 180cm

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Mwi22e4zeA

*Useful Tasks #1* and *Useful Tasks #2* occupied the gallery space as individual works on two separate occasions, with each being situated in the centre of the gallery. While not shown in the above image, two spotlights were directed onto the work itself, highlighting the construction and leaving the fringes of the gallery space darker, so as to create a sense of the theatrical. This use of lighting and sense of theatre was intended to create a sense of reverence toward the machine and to evoke the sense that the viewer is stepping into a complete environment and therefore is becoming part of it. My hope is that this raises in the viewer a feeling or awareness of being in the presence of something sacred. I had opted to incorporate a hidden motion sensor and timer to the work as a means to regulate the movement of the works. It is hoped that the viewer, on unknowingly triggering the sensor and setting the machine in motion, is further engaged with the work and left to question what activated it. This is furthered when the machine comes to a halt, perhaps to be triggered once again as a potential dialogue between the viewer and the work continues.
A constructed soundscape was played continually through the gallery sound system. It was composed of four found environmental sounds: a continuous electronic buzz overlaid with the sound of dripping water, which were then disrupted at various intervals by the sounds of flushing water and a compressor discharge valve being released. These collected sounds were considered important due to their relationship to technology and to nature. The purpose of having the soundscape playing constantly was to suggest that the space was continually active, that there was an endlessly present energy. It was hoped that this would add to the reverence of the machine. Upon entering the gallery, the viewer experienced a spot lit but motionless construction in the centre of the space surrounded by the darkened fringes and the soundscape playing. The viewer being in the space but separated from the machine was an important element. The intention is for the viewer to acknowledge the static work as a machine with potential, but with a sense of anticipation and/or apprehension toward that potential. At some point, moving through the gallery...
space, the viewer unknowingly triggers the motion sensor which activates the work with, it is hoped, an emotionally jolting sense of responsibility on the viewer’s part, thus creating a connection to it. The sounds of the machine in operation also filled the space; this included the sounds of the crank moving against the crank housings as well as the motor itself and the gears meshing together. The rotating crank and the spars were set in motion for approximately thirty seconds before the timer switched off and the construction came to a standstill once again. According to the viewer feedback I received for this exhibition, this sense of anticipation on seeing an inactive machine in the gallery space, and apprehension around the work was considered as successful. These viewers also reported a sense of being startled and alarm when the machine came to life.

*Useful Tasks #3* (figures 38 & 39) followed in April 2015. This machine was fitted to the White Box Gallery at the university’s Gold Coast campus. The dimensions of the gallery space are 7.8 metres by 6.6 metres, with a ceiling height of approximately 5 metres. Running through the gallery at a height of 4 metres are two steel beams, with one of these being slightly off centre. It was to this beam that this work was fitted. The construction methodologies and materials followed that of the previous works (*Useful Tasks # 1 and 2*), but the timber frame components were left entirely raw with no application of or masking with paint. It was decided that this element as well as the soundscape could be omitted to test the work and its integrity within the gallery space. The black painted finish to the rotating plywood gears and steel crank was maintained. While the paint applied to the frame was considered as being unnecessary, the black rotating elements again strengthened the integrity of the forms and highlighted these elements and perhaps a sense of caution toward them.
Figure 38 Philip Aitken *Useful Tasks #3* 2015
Timber, timber ply, steel, motor with motion sensor and timer
650 x 650 x 90 cm
Figure 39 Philip Aitken *Useful Tasks #3* (detail) 2015
Timber, timber ply, steel, motor with motion sensor and timer
650 x 650 x 90cm.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yMukyn0fot0&t=1s

Unique to this work in the growing suite of sculptural outcomes was that the floor was left clear. The entire machine was suspended from one of the beams and attached to a wall at one end of the gallery. A large timber framework hung vertically from a near central beam, and to this was attached the motor, crank axle, and gears. One end of a 5–metre–long spar was attached to the crank, with the other end being attached to a steel fixing that was secured to the wall at a height of about 2 metres. As the motor drove the crank axle, the attached spar was rotated through the crank axle, and was caused to pivot at the fixed (wall) end. This movement also required the timber frame to pivot as it hung from the beam. This machine and its unique qualities was not without its difficulties. Being that this is not a free–standing work, there was no opportunity to test it before installation. Various issues were encountered and resolved during installation, but the result proved valuable and worthwhile.
Useful Tasks #4 (figure 40) was part of a group exhibition. This was a good opportunity to consider my work in a shared space with a variety of other works on show. Lighting became an issue as the opportunity to be specific and hold to a theatrical composition was much diminished. There was also the potential for the actions and resultant sounds of an activated machine to disrupt the viewing of other work in a shared space. These possibilities had been considered before installation, but on consultation, it was considered a worthy inclusion.

Figure 40 Philip Aitken Useful Tasks #4 2015
Timber, timber ply, steel, motor with motion sensor and timer
180 x 340 x 120cm

Useful Tasks #5 to #8 followed in subsequent exhibitions. The resultant sculptural forms have become steadily stronger and, combined with specific lighting, demonstrated persuasive and sturdier outcomes.

Common to the resultant sculptural outcomes was a sense of reverence, sought with specific lighting, and allowing the machine to be static and in silence until activated by
someone unwittingly triggering the motion sensor and bringing the machine to life. After being used in the first exhibitions, the inclusion of an accompanying soundscape on a continuing loop was carefully considered and deemed unnecessary and thus discarded. I determined that the potential of the machine was as evident, if not more so, in the silence of the gallery space as it was when the soundscape was playing. Lighting was carefully arranged to bring about a theatrical sensibility, the intention was to immerse the viewer in an environment where the machine is elevated in an exalted manner and the viewer is in essence left in the dark. This manipulation of the environment, with the heightened awareness of the machine, is considered as a means of simulating a ritualistic or ceremonial atmosphere and a veneration to the lit object or machine. It is hoped that any sense of reverence experienced in the viewer is then confused as the machine is triggered and a dialogue between the viewer and the machine is constructed.

*Useful Tasks #5 and Useful Tasks #6 were exhibited together as a solo show consisting of just these two machines. I was conscious of the need to give each machine some space, for each machine to be allowed to stand alone yet be part of the group of two. Each machine had a common basic framework, again made from timber which was left raw. *Useful Tasks #5* (figure 41) has a large rotating wheel, this wheel has a think diameter natural fibre rope attached at one point to the outside of the wheel. As the wheel rotates, the rope, drawn by its own weight, slides forward off the wheel to slam into a wooden trough which is connected to the base of the machines framework. The wheel then gathers up the fallen rope, pulling it up and around the wheel only to fall once again into the trough. As with all machines, this is on sensors and timers and stops with the rope in different places around the wheel. As well as the sound of the machine itself, there is the sounds of the rope as it slams down into the trough and is variable dependent upon the acoustics of the gallery space. During the course of the exhibition the loose end of the rope became more frayed due to it falling into the trough. As the end of the rope frayed, small pieces of the rope broke away and became scattered onto the floor at the end of the trough. This machine has also been shown in the White Box Gallery space on the Gold Coast.*
**Figure 41** Philip Aitken *Useful Tasks #5* 2015
Timber, timber ply, steel, natural fibre rope, motor with motion sensor and timer
190 x 120 x 300 cm

*Useful Tasks #6* (figure 42) was a wider machine with a steel axle that had 4 arms fixed to it, each arm set at 90 degrees to the next. Four timber swing-arms were attached to the axle inside these swing-arms. As the machine was activated, the arms would draw the timber swing-arms around with them. As the swing-arm reached a vertical position upright from the axle, gravity would take over and the timber swing-arm would fall forward and swing on the axle. With the axle arms set at 90 degrees to each other, there was always one timber swing-arm in motion. No sooner had the swing-arm stopped swinging, it would be gathered by the axle arms to be taken around again.
During installation, the freefalling nature of some of the components to these two machines became a focus of the institutions Health and Safety officers. They had voiced a concern that viewers might stray too close to these machines and be struck by these components. Some consultation was entered into and as a compromise to their concerns I constructed the timber frames or safety guards, one for Useful Tasks #5 at the end of the timber trough and one either side of Useful Tasks #6. Having to address these issues, I wanted to work the compromise in some way as to make these extra components become part of the work itself. Using the same materials and construction methods, I think that this has been achieved. While these elements were not part of the original development, construction or installation concerns, I believe that these elements have actually strengthened the visual dynamics of each machine and heightened the sense of awareness and perhaps apprehension for the viewer on initially encountering these objects.
Figure 43 Philip Aitken *Useful Tasks #7* 2016
Timber, plywood, steel, natural cord, motor with motion sensor and timer
220 x 160 x 320cm

*Useful Tasks #7* (figure 43) is a double framed mechanism. Each frame has a three-crank axle and one drives the other through their connection of white natural cord. A large diameter set of ply blades are turned by the first motor driven crank. The ply blades are set on a very slight angle as if the blades of a fan. The speed at which this mechanism turns, and the slight angle of the ply blades produces very little movement in the surrounding air. The visual dynamics is in the rotation and its large diameter, and the cord suspended between the two mechanisms which transfers the motion form the first frame to the second. This work was exhibited along with *Useful Tasks #6* and a composite machine *Useful Tasks #8*. Again, this was a solo show and the layout of the gallery space allowed for the set up of three machines.
**Figure 44** Philip Aitken *Useful Tasks #8* 2016
Timber, plywood, steel, rope, motor with motion sensor and timer
180 x 340 x 120cm

*Useful Tasks #8* (figure 44) consists of various components used in earlier machines. The main frame and extending timber bars are from *Useful Tasks #1*, the steel axle is from *Useful Tasks #3* and the small frame to the front is the safety guard from *Useful Tasks #5*. As a new exhibition in a new gallery space, this gave me the opportunity to explore the potential of interchanging components to devise new machine layouts.

This candidature has culminated in a suite of kinetic sculptural outcomes, an exegesis that has contextualised these works and a thesis that informs the themes explored. My intention has been to construct visually interesting and dynamic forms that engage the viewer psychologically. These sculptural forms were developed in tandem with my academic research on the Machine Age and the effect that technology and mass production have had on the institution of religion and existential musings. It became an intention to construct forms that mimicked early industrial machinery, but forms that have no purposeful or productive outcome other than simply *being or existing* in and of
themselves. These machines are also meant as an ironic reflection on the nature of religious belief, offering the potentials of comfort and meaning in human existence in an attempt to deny long-term futility.

Toward the end of this candidacy, other sculptural forms were developed. While not of a kinetic nature, and not representative of or demonstrating a connection with the notion that god is dead and/or the Machine Age, they are representative of other themes explored in this research. A suite of static works was exhibited in the Webb Gallery on the university’s South Bank campus in November 2017 in an exhibition titled Like the Wind through an Open Wound, I Make Myself (figures 45–46). The artist statement written for this exhibition is included as Appendix 4. This work explored themes of existence and mortality together with Heidegger’s call to look upon the horizon of our death (being–towards–death) as a means to be authentic human beings. As with the Useful Tasks series, the work in Like the Wind featured timber (ply and solid) as a primary material; however, this time, canvas and bitumen paint have also been used.

Heidegger makes it clear in Being and Time that the individual is faced with a question of being and what it means to be alive, to exist. As has been explored in this work, the questions of life and mortality are something that has concerned people for centuries. As human beings, we are inextricably bound together in a complex web of social practices that make up our world. What it means to be human is to exist with a certain personal and cultural history, it is a past that we are born into, and that we become part of. We cannot exist independently; the world is integral to who we are. And the question of being, one way or another, is ours. But time is finite and what does it mean for a human being to be, to exist temporarily in the period between birth and death? This brings us in touch with our mortality and what it means to be alive. It could be said that we are here to die, because life and death go hand in hand. One implies the other, death exists because of life, and any meaning to life is life itself, and it is also death. Is there any great purpose to life, or is it merely to be alive and to experience life itself and later death?

The suite of objects in Like the Wind act as an installation comprising two distinct forms, whereby a cluster of three repeated forms are in dialogue with a different set of two repeated forms. The trio comprises a set of upright, roughly sawn timber structures with
the joins bound in canvas that were then daubed in bitumen paint. These structures, with the bitumen–daubed canvas as a significant element, present a strong vertical presence but rest tentatively/precariously on the floor on pointed tips. Sitting on top of two of these structures are a series of plywood cross forms. These act as platforms on which something could be laid to rest and help bring the focus upward. These forms are totemic in nature, referencing the practices of some Indigenous cultures whereby the body of the deceased is placed onto this type of structure, allowing carrion—eating birds\textsuperscript{416} to pick at the flesh of the body and leave only the bones behind. The bones are then either stored in an ossuary or bound together and placed in a rocky outcrop or in the crook of a tree as a form of remembrance. Thus, an acceptance of death is represented in these forms.

This group of structures is in dialogue with a group of two identical forms, burial–casket–sized frames of dressed timber that sit horizontally and appear as firmly grounded on the floor. A length of raw canvas, acting as a covering or protection from the elements, partially wraps one of these forms. While referencing burial caskets in size and shape, the forms are also suggestive of a house form, which in turn also speaks of existence, the individual, and social structures. As horizontal casket–like forms, they also reference containment and perhaps the fear of death. By wrapping them in canvas—canvas that was used as a drop cloth when painting all of these forms—and then showing the ‘drippings’ of bitumen paint, there is a securing and protecting element. In this instance, the sculptural forms are anchors to mortality; they speak of life and of death. They become monument and memorial. The title, \textit{Like the Wind Through an Open Wound, I Make Myself}, also speaks about existence and mortality, of experiencing life, yet to die.

As this work has progressed, it has become more apparent that my art practice previous to my doctoral research contained deeper elements of monument and memorial than I was cognisant of at the time. The works and their accompanying titles have acted as monument and memorial. Titles such as \textit{The Tiring of a Long–Held Caution, A False Memory to an Earlier Self} (both 2013), \textit{The Futility of Regret} (2012), \textit{Resting on the Truth}

The rituals around death respect those who have passed but are also important for those who are left behind to mourn them. Various rituals become part of the process of life and death and are embedded into culture and existence. We exist temporarily between the moments of birth and death. To project onto the horizon of our own death, we become more aware of our mortality, our existence, and what it means to be alive. Where have we come from, why are we here, and where are we going? What is the ultimate reality? As Holloway penned, “it could be argued that it was death that first whispered the idea of God and the soul into our heads.”

Figure 45 Philip Aitken Like the Wind through an Open Wound, I Make Myself 2017 Timber, plywood, canvas, bitumen paint Dimensions variable

417 Richard Holloway, Between the Monster and the Saint (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2008), 64.
Figure 46 Philip Aitken *Like the Wind through an Open Wound, I Make Myself* 2017
Timber, plywood, canvas, bitumen paint
Dimensions variable
Conclusion

This research, the theory, explores psychological aspects of the machine within western society. It links these to theories of religion, the individual, and being as advances in science and technology have influenced the psychosocial aspects of existence and the primacy of meaning.

The machine has become important in terms of our protection, self-definition and well-being. Acknowledging Nietzsche's thoughts that advances in technology and sciences were important in bringing about the death of god, I propose that increases in production and opportunities for consumption were equally important. This 'death of god' is essentially a discontinuation of the belief in a divine religious deity which had been important in the early development of the self, of community, and of civilisation. The questionable promise of immortality in the afterlife has progressively been replaced by a symbolic immortality that is presented via a complex process of consumption and presentation, with meaning created via the self-defining object. Modes of social distinction, and relationships between people are mediated through presentation and spectacle. Objects exist in the world, they occupy space, accumulate, travel and are associated with meaning, desire and ideology. Objects are cultural and personal signifiers. Consumption then involves the communication of personality, where-by the values layered upon the object potentially become more important that the object itself. The symbolic life is potentially an aestheticised existence and the machine has become an important component in that existence.

My intention is that the sculptural forms generated through this candidature represent the reliance we have in a contemporary mechanised existence and that the consumption and use of the self-defining object can be considered as being akin to belief in a religious ideology. Just as there was a reliance on god to give meaning to life, so there is now a reliance on the machine. I propose, however, that rather than finding meaning in these cultural ideologies, we must find meaning in ourselves, but potentially here again, the machine and the self-defining object become important.
Nietzsche suggested it was an individual’s duty to rise above our own condition, to find a new way ahead in total freedom and be gods ourselves. Perhaps a modern sense of being real, of being existential, has developed and the individual, rather than religion, is now responsible for giving meaning to life. A level of authenticity is created and maintained as the individual works to be true to their own personality or character, or perhaps what one perceives or desires of their personality. A personality as determined by conditioning, environment, heredity, and the social structures in which it exists. These give the individual motives that determine the way in which the individual acts. The individual comes to terms with being in a material world as they encounter various external forces and influences in the presentation of the self and the development of a symbolic immortality. But with the individual having no eternal life, death becomes a reality and the individual is potentially consumed with existential angst. As a conscious and an evolving creature, there is the ability to comprehend a futility in existence.

There has been a shift from a belief in an omnipotent parent figure—one that is expected to protect the individual from the traumas of life and what that may or may not bring—to a search for meaning of the self. With a sense of self, the individual gains a level of self-control, albeit with a degree of external influence, toward a destiny that seeks a symbolic immortality. How the self is presented then becomes an important part of self-expression, an outward projection that life has meaning, and that the self is important. Through self-control, the individual becomes the maker of their lives, of their destiny, and how they present as an individual. While a sense of self is important, so too are feelings of acknowledgement, and acceptance from others. This helps gives an individual a sense of meaning and a symbolic immortality. Just as it is for religion, a level of faith is needed in the hope that the individual is ‘getting it right’ and that their ‘truth’ is the right truth.

Human-beings are animals that have evolved to their present state over the last 200,000 years. Early in that evolution, no one pondered the origins of the universe because they were too busy surviving, physically. The urge to survive has now shifted to the emotional, caught in a loop of finding purpose in life when there is potentially no reason for existence other than existence itself. Is the finding of purpose and meaning in life nothing more than an illusion? And if it is an illusion, is there anything better to do, is there an
alternative? The individual is resigned to selecting their own illusion—the illusion of religious faith and dogma or the illusion of a self-imposed purpose and meaning. Whichever one, an outcome is always inevitable. Does the individual prostrate themselves to a superstitious almighty or to the presentation of the self and the self-defining object? The individual is engaged in the process of looking for themselves and of being themselves and perhaps also looking for something that helps them forget themselves.

Considering the Machine Age as an era of improved methods of production and increased consumption along with Friedrich Nietzsche’s notion of the death of god from the parable The Madman, I conclude that a reliance on the machine has been created and on machine-produced items whereby the machine has replaced god or become a venue for god-worship and that the self-defining object has taken on a new religious cultural significance. Humanity is in a continual process of transcending itself, and via the self-defining object, the individual creates a symbolic self and a symbolic or abstract power over life and death. The symbols or objects employed help to express a freedom from a fate-determined existence as a created symbolic immortality. The mundane, be it object or individual, is then superseded by the symbolic. We are and simultaneously we are—not. In an attempt to determine existence and define reality through Freud’s delusion of religion and/or neuroses of civilisation, the individual is then simultaneously Heidegger’s authentic and not-authentic. If life is about perception and illusion, then perhaps the individual has indeed become god, but also not-god. In this contemporary era of unending consumption, rather than a belief in a life everlasting, there is a dependence and religious-like worship that is often afforded the machine.

For the studio outcomes, a suite of machines titled Useful Tasks #1 to #8, and an installation Like the wind through and open wound, I make myself were constructed and exhibited during this candidacy. Material decisions were carefully considered in relation to these constructions, as were the implications of site and the placement of objects within each gallery space.

Attention is primarily directed to the look and construction of the machines in the Useful Tasks suite of works, but once activated it becomes the movement and the repetitive
gestures that become the focus. Repetitive and perhaps hypnotic movement which is not complicated. These machines are constructed to carry out their various tasks with a consistent monotony. Important to the construction is that these machines become reminiscent of agricultural or industrial machinery from the 19th or early 20th C. Constructed machinery that carries with it an antiquated quality that becomes emphasised through the use of timber in their construction and the groaning and creaking quality of the sounds these machines generate once activated. These machines are at once ironic and dislocated from any usefulness, uselessness other than operating for their own reasons and purposes.

The later work, *Like the wind through and open wound, I make myself*, becomes an important contrast to the *Useful Tasks* suite of works. The machines reference a futility in life, a mundanity and purposeless of existence. They respond to presence and draw the viewer in to a cause and effect cycle. They suggest an artificiality in the meanings that are constructed to give reason to existence. Simultaneously they engage and they amuse.

The inanimate objects in *Like the wind through an open wound, I make myself*, as funerary forms, offer a clear relationship to death. This installation references mortality with objects that respond to the human scale. A stillness is created in the space around the objects that suggest ritual and containment. These objects reference loss and memorialisation through ritual, but a loss that operates at a deep level and a loss that cannot be restored.

The collective of works created during this research becomes a summary of the ritualised cycle of life and death.

Machines demonstrate our existence in terms of our various human collectives as well as of being an individual. Perhaps, rather than being a metaphor for the world, the machine is a metaphor for life. Humanity is creating new industrial landscapes and new ways of finding meaning via the mass–produced object but, as Wosk counsels, humanity must consider the moral imperative of the machine, given that god–like, the machine can giveth and the machine can taketh away.
The difference between assuming a mask, which is always an opportunity for freedom, and having it forced upon one, is the difference between a refuge and a prison.\textsuperscript{418}

\textsuperscript{418} Sam Savage, \textit{Firmin} (London: Phoenix, 2006), 143.
Appendix 1: Friedrich Nietzsche’s Parable

The Madman

Haven't you heard of that madman who in the bright morning lit a lantern and ran around the marketplace crying incessantly, "I'm looking for God! I'm looking for God!" Since many of those who did not believe in God were standing around together just then, he caused great laughter. Has he been lost, then? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone to sea? Emigrated? – Thus they shouted and laughed, one interrupting the other. The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. 'Where is God?' he cried; 'I'll tell you! We have killed him – you and I! We are all his murderers. But how did we do this? How were we able to drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns? Are we not continually falling? And backwards, sideward, forwards, in all directions? Is there still an up and a down? Aren't we straying as though through an infinite nothing? Isn't empty space breathing at us? Hasn't it got colder? Isn't night and more night coming again and again? Don't lanterns have to be lit in the morning? Do we still hear nothing of the noise of the grave-diggers who are burying God? Do we still smell nothing of the divine decomposition? – Gods, too, decompose! God is dead! God remains dead! And we have killed him! How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! The holiest and the mightiest thing the world has ever possessed has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood from us? With what water could we clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what holy games will we have to invent for ourselves? Is the magnitude of this deed not too great for us? Do we not ourselves have to become gods merely to appear worthy of it?

There was never a greater deed – and whoever is born after us will on account of this deed belong to a higher history than all history up to now!’ Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; they too were silent and looked at him disconcertedly. Finally he threw his lantern on the ground so that it broke into pieces and went out. ‘I come too early’, he then said; ‘my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightning and thunder need time; the light of the stars needs time; deeds need time, even after they are done, in order to be seen and heard. This deed is still more remote to them than the remotest stars – and yet they have done it themselves!’ It is still recounted how on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there started singing his requiem aeternam deo.* Led out and called to account, he is said always to have replied nothing but, ’What then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchres of God?’

*’Grant God eternal rest.’ A transformation of that part of the service for the dead which reads ‘Requiem aeternam dona eis [siclicet, mortuis], Domine’ (‘Lord, grant them [the dead] eternal rest’).
# Appendix 2: Exhibitions Undertaken During Candidature

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Venue</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td><em>Aitken, Aitken, Aitken</em></td>
<td>Sumner Art Window, Christchurch, New Zealand</td>
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<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td><em>Useful Tasks #1 &amp; #2</em></td>
<td>White Box Gallery, Gold Coast, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td><em>Useful Tasks #3</em></td>
<td>White Box Gallery, Gold Coast, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td><em>Useful Tasks #4 (Group)</em></td>
<td>LMTD Space Gallery, Gold Coast, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td><em>Useful Tasks #5 &amp; #6</em></td>
<td>Webb Gallery, Brisbane, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td><em>Useful Tasks #5</em></td>
<td>White Box Gallery, Gold Coast, Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td><em>Useful Tasks #6 &amp; #7 &amp; #8</em></td>
<td>POP Gallery, Brisbane, Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td><em>Like the Wind through an Open Wound, I Make Myself</em></td>
<td>Webb Gallery, Brisbane, Australia</td>
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Philip Aitken is a sculptor working in what might be called the minimalist or constructivist mode, that is to say shifting sculpture away from autonomous composition and focusing on the materials and the architectural construction of objects. During constructivism's heyday in early revolutionary Russia (before the commissars brought their boot down on this brief avant-garde flowering), it was hoped this fundamental analysis and synthesis would lead on to the design of functional objects like furniture and buildings. This is a strong tradition in New Zealand, by way of England and Victor Pasmore, from Don Peebles to Morgan Jones, and including architects like Sir Miles Warren, Peter Beavan, and Ian Athfield.

Aitken's sculptures are emphatic, directly experienced objects that recall stylised but recognisable items – furniture, architecture, even a sort of wagon, reduced to intersecting planes subtly offset by peculiar angles or by having areas painted in a different primary colour. This is a strong, bold work, serious in intent but with a humorous edge — non-functional objects masquerading as functional ones. There are elements, too, of later minimalist sculptors like Anthony Caro, Richard Artschwager, Robert Smithson and Tony Smith.
Appendix 4: *Like the Wind through an Open Wound, I Make Myself* (Artist Statement)

Is it through an act of belief or as a consequence of a fear of non-existence that I must *make myself*? There is no beauty in an insidious deception, consumed by an avoidance of critical thought. Nor a meaninglessness that is shaped by anxiety and the fear of death. I think beyond the routines and rituals, only to come face to face with my own finitude and the possibility of nothingness, attached to a dread of non-existence.

Caught in the making of my own narrative, I stand like Hamlet in the grave with Yorick’s skull, as the experience of being human pulls me back to my mortality. In a fiction that will last my own lifetime, I become part of the world that cannot be experienced alone. I am liberated as I live in the knowledge of my own mortality, projecting this life onto the horizon of my own demise, and attempt to exhaust the lived experience. Because it is only through confrontation with death, that the self can truly become what it is.

Phil Aitken
Can there be any absolute answers? Is there any meaning to life other than that we which we care to give it? Is it a case of “To be or not to be?” or that we are, or we are not.

Martin Heidegger makes it clear in Being and Time that the individual is faced with a question of being, of what it means to be alive, to exist. A question Aristotle raised 2500 years ago and was asked even earlier in the Epic of Gilgamesh. It would suggest then, that the questions of life and mortality are something that has concerned people for centuries.

We are, as human-beings, inextricably bound together in a complex web of social practices that make up our world. What it means to be human is to exist with a certain personal and cultural history, with a past. We cannot exist independently; the world is integral to who we are. And the question of being, one way or another, is ours. The choice is whether to be oneself or not to be oneself, to be one's own author, or not to be one's own author.

Being and Time is simple: being is time, and time is finite. What does it mean for a human-being to be, to exist temporarily in the period between birth and death? Heidegger suggests that if we want to understand what it means to be an authentic human-being, then it is essential that we constantly project our lives onto the horizon of our death, what he calls, being-towards-death.
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