

“The Third Wall of Fire”

Scientology and the Study of Religious Secrecy

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the role of secrecy in the Church of Scientology, focusing on one of the most confidential and least studied aspects of the Church’s advanced auditing levels—Operating Thetan VIII. I use this example as a way of highlighting the complex ethical and epistemological problems in the study of secrecy in new religions. Here, I suggest an alternative approach to the study of secrecy by shifting our gaze away from the attempt to uncover the content of the secret and instead focusing on the more visible forms and strategies through which secrets are maintained, transmitted, revealed and concealed. I trace the “history of a secret” by examining five periods and five key strategies in the Operating Thetan materials from the late 1960s to the present: the advertisement of the secret; secrecy as an adorning possession; the litigation of the secret; the liability of the secret; and the irrelevance of the secret. Finally, I conclude with reflections on the comparative implications of this example for the study of new religions more broadly.

KEYWORDS: Church of Scientology, esotericism, L. Ron Hubbard, secrecy, Operating Thetan, Dianetics, Fishman Affidavit

This utterly astounding level reveals the truth you need to know—about yourself and your power as an Operating Thetan, and the actual fulfillment of the Aims of Scientology. . . . Before long you’ll be crossing through the doors that open to the highest states of OT on New OT VIII Truth Revealed.

—“OT VIII: Truth Revealed”¹

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Secrecy (that lies at the core of power) [is] a powerful stimulus to creativity to what Simmel called the magnification of reality, by means of the sensation that behind the appearance of things there is a deeper, mysterious reality that we may here call the sacred, if not religion.

—Michael Taussig, “Transgression”²

Popular media accounts and journalistic exposés of the Church of Scientology often make a great deal of the role of secrecy in this complex religious movement. Dubbed “America’s most secretive religion,”³ the Church of Scientology also has been the target of numerous critical documentaries such as the BBC’s *Secrets of Scientology* (2010) and many others. Despite this intense media attention to the secretive aspects of Scientology, there has been relatively little serious scholarly analysis of the deeper role of secrecy in this movement, or to the complex ethical and epistemological challenges involved in the attempt to examine aspects of new religious movements that are confidential or off-limits to outsiders.⁴

A great many aspects of Scientology are shrouded in layers of secrecy, concealment, obfuscation and/or dissimulation. The founder of the Church of Scientology, L. Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), was quite secretive about his own biography, and many of the details of his life’s narrative later proved to be false. As well, he spent the last years of his life in hiding, wanted by the FBI and other law enforcement agencies.⁵ Scientology also was highly concerned with internal surveillance, and in the early 1960s it developed a practice called Security Checks designed to identify potentially subversive members within the organization.⁶ The Church had its own sophisticated intelligence bureau called the Guardian’s Office, which was engaged in fairly remarkable acts of espionage including infiltration of the Internal Revenue Service and other government agencies during the 1970s.⁷ Finally, Scientology developed highly esoteric levels of advanced training called Operating Thetan levels, or OT, which claim to reveal the ultimate secrets of the human spirit and the history of the universe.⁸ On the whole, Scientology during its first few decades might even be described as a kind of *Cold War religion*—it reflected and often epitomized the larger concerns with secrecy, information control and surveillance that pervaded the United States during the 1950s and 1960s.⁹

In this article, however, I focus on just one aspect of Scientology’s complex teachings, namely OT VIII, the last of the Operating Thetan levels thus far released. Ironically, despite the fact that it is the last and highest level within the current Church of Scientology and is claimed to release the “total freedom and power” of the human spirit,¹⁰ it has received little serious attention by scholars of religion. To date, most scholarly and journalistic attention has been focused on the infamous “Xenu” narrative in OT III, satirized in the American television show

South Park.¹¹ Despite its rather provocative and highly sensationalized science fiction narrative, however, the OT III Xenu story is not in fact the most interesting or controversial of the OT materials leaked to the media; indeed, it is arguably only the tip of the "esoteric iceberg."

One of the primary theoretical questions that interests me is what I call the *ethical and epistemological double bind of secrecy*.¹² By this I mean the following questions: First, how can an outsider ever really know the content of a tradition that is secret or closed to non-members? Second, should one even try? Even if one were an insider, could one in good conscience reveal those secrets to a broader public audience? Moreover, is the very attempt to penetrate the secrets of another tradition itself an act of violence, a form of intellectual imperialism or a kind of cultural theft (or at least a breach of copyright laws)?

While I do not think there is any easy way out of this ethical/epistemological double bind, I would suggest there are some alternative strategies for dealing with it. In the case of Scientology's advanced OT materials, at least, I suggest that we shift our gaze away from the *content* of the secret—which, we will see, is both epistemologically and ethically problematic—and instead focus on the more visible *forms and strategies* through which secret knowledge is revealed and concealed.¹³ While we cannot say much with certainty about the content, I argue, we *can* say quite a lot about the forms and strategies through which secret information is partially displayed and largely obfuscated, advertised and withdrawn, and the ways in which the "aura of secrecy" is constructed, transmitted and protected. I will attempt to retrace the *history of a secret* by pursuing five historical moments and five strategies through which Scientology's esoteric knowledge was constructed and transmitted from the late 1960s to the present.

There is, of course, now a large body of good scholarship on religious secrecy, including the fine work on Western Esotericism, pioneered by Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff;¹⁴ and there are a great many important studies of secrecy from an anthropological and ethnographic perspective.¹⁵ For the sake of this article, however, I borrow some insights from sociologists such as Georg Simmel and Pierre Bourdieu,¹⁶ adapting them somewhat by retracing the complex and shifting historical role of Scientology's secrets during these five decades. After a brief introduction to the origins of Dianetics and Scientology, I will discuss the controversial OT materials with particular attention to the "Third Wall of Fire" or OT VIII.¹⁷ I will then trace five key moments in the history of this secret from the late 1960s to the present, as it was transformed from an "advertised secret" and a kind of "adorning possession" to an increasing source of litigation, liability, and ultimate irrelevance. Finally, I will suggest that the case of the Church of Scientology offers some broader theoretical insights into the study of religious secrecy in a comparative context.

THE BACKGROUND OF THE SECRET: FROM EARLY DIANETICS TO THE CHURCH OF SCIENTOLOGY

The Operating Thetan materials are actually a fairly late innovation within the Church of Scientology, which was incorporated in the United States in December 1953. As most readers probably know, founder L. Ron Hubbard first made his career as an enormously prolific author of science fiction and fantasy tales during the 1930s–1940s, emerging as one of the most widely published writers of the “Golden Age” of sci-fi.¹⁸ Indeed, he wrote so much and so quickly that he was forced to publish under a wide array of pseudonyms, such as Winchester Remington Colt, René Lafayette, Legionnaire 148, and many others. As more than one observer has pointed out, there are many continuities between Hubbard’s early science fiction tales and his later Scientology writings, which also include large amounts of what Hubbard called “space opera” material—discussions of life on other planets, alien races, and the past history of the universe going back billions and even trillions of years.¹⁹

It is also worth mentioning that Hubbard had a keen interest in occultism, magic and paranormal phenomena, which appear as frequent themes in many of his early stories.²⁰ Following his career in the Navy during World War II, Hubbard became actively involved in a series of magical rituals with a young engineer and rocket scientist named Jack Parsons (1914–1952) in southern California.²¹ This episode, we should note, remains one of the most controversial and much-debated periods in Hubbard’s already controversial biography. A student of the work of Aleister Crowley (1875–1947), arguably the most important figure in the revival of occultism and magic in the twentieth century, Parsons was a member of Crowley’s magical group, the *Ordo Templi Orientis*.²² Parsons was in fact performing a series of rituals called “Babalon Working,” which had as their aim the creation of a “magickal child” or “moon child”—a supernatural offspring that would become the embodiment of ultimate power. The rite was intended first to identify a woman who would serve as Parsons’ partner in esoteric rites and ultimately as the incarnation of Lady Babalon, who in turn would be impregnated with this magical child. According to Parsons’ records from March 1946, Hubbard was an intimate participant in Babalon Working and even acted as the “Scribe” or voice for Lady Babalon who spoke through him during the rites.²³

The magical collaboration between the two was short-lived, however. Parsons and Hubbard, together with Parsons’ girlfriend Sara Elizabeth “Betty” Northrup (1924–1997), had entered into a partnership called Allied Enterprises with the plan of buying yachts on the East Coast, sailing them to California, and selling them for a profit. Yet Hubbard ended up running off with Northrup, along with more than \$20,000 that Parsons had put up for the yacht-selling plan.²⁴

Perhaps the most remarkable part of this whole story about Hubbard, Parsons, and secret magical rites is that the Church of Scientology has acknowledged that all of this *really did happen*. In an article published in London's *Sunday Times* in 1969, the Church claimed that these rites actually did take place, but that Hubbard had been sent in on a special "military mission" to break up this secret black magic group. This he successfully did, the Church reported, by rescuing Northrup and shutting down this occult operation.²⁵ It is worth noting, however, that neither the Church of Scientology nor any independent researcher has provided any evidence for this claim.

In any case, whether Hubbard really was seriously engaged in these occult rituals or sent in as a secret military agent, this incident is worth keeping in mind; as we will see, there is now tremendous debate over whether these occult themes reappeared in Hubbard's later Scientology writings, including the advanced OT materials discussed below.²⁶

In 1950 Hubbard turned his attention from science fiction to what he dubbed a new science of the human mind called Dianetics.²⁷ Derived from the Greek words *dia* and *nous* meaning "through the mind," Dianetics claimed that all of our problems come from the mind; therefore, all the solutions to our problems can be resolved through a proper understanding of the mind. Dianetics was hugely but briefly successful in the years 1950–1951. Indeed, Hubbard's book *Dianetics* (1950) was really the first great American self-help book and pop-psychology manual, leaping to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list and remaining there for many weeks, spawning a kind of "Dianetics craze" across the United States. The initial fervor of the Dianetics fad fizzled and went bankrupt by 1952, but it was quickly replaced by a new and explicitly "religious" movement that Hubbard called the Church of Scientology.²⁸

Both the early Dianetics movement and the later Church of Scientology use a basic technique called "auditing," in which an individual works with a trained counselor, an "auditor," to identify areas of unconscious pain and trauma (called "engrams"). Auditing involves the use of a device called the "E-Meter" or electropsychometer, which works much like a lie detector, to help the auditor identify problem areas and painful memories by asking questions and observing reactions on the E-Meter.²⁹ Once these problem areas and negative memory traces have been identified and talked through with the auditor, they are "cleared" from the mind. When all negative memory traces have been identified and examined, one achieves a state called "Clear"—an optimum state of mental, physical and personal well-being.³⁰

In the late 1960s, Hubbard introduced even higher levels of increasingly esoteric training called Operating Thetan levels.³¹ "Thetan" is the spiritual self or true identity as an immortal spirit, and an Operating Thetan (or OT) is a spirit that is increasingly free from the limitations of the material universe. Eventually, an OT is said to acquire supernatural

abilities or super-powers, such as the ability to “exteriorize” or travel outside the body, clairvoyance, telekinesis and various others.³² Scientology has a map of the spiritual path, the “Bridge to Total Freedom,” which begins with lower-level Dianetics auditing and leads to higher and confidential OT levels. The Church’s official Bridge lists fifteen secret OT levels, though only eight have thus far been released, and it is unclear today whether the other seven were completed before Hubbard’s death.

One of the most common criticisms of the Church of Scientology is that these higher levels of confidential training become quite expensive. In the late 1960s, these materials ranged from \$75 for OT I to \$875 for higher OT levels, and throughout the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s their costs increased rapidly.³³ In 2009 fees and registration rates below level OT ran from \$6,800 per 12.5 hours of auditing to \$56,100 per 150 hours of auditing. Above OT III, costs ran from \$7,800 per 12.5 hours to \$64,350 per 150 hours. Individual OT levels themselves ranged from \$2,800 to \$13,600; above OT III they were \$7,800 per 12.5 hours to \$64,350 per 150 hours.³⁴ The total cost to complete OT training varies depending on the amount of auditing an individual Scientologist requires to move through each level, but conservative estimates suggest that rising to OT VIII would require a minimum of \$350,000–\$400,000.³⁵ That is excluding various other courses, books and materials—such as the latest model E-Meter (the Mark Super VII Quantum at \$4,650)—ranging in price from several hundred to several thousand dollars.³⁶

Most of the media attention has focused on just one of these Operating Thetan levels—OT III. Leaked to the press in the 1980s, it allegedly tells the story of the past history of the universe going back 75 million years. This level, the “First Wall of Fire,” is described as having been extremely difficult for Hubbard himself to attain. It purports to reveal the cause of earthly human suffering. As we read in one advertisement:

A research accomplishment of immense magnitude, OT III has been called “the Wall of Fire.” Here are contained secrets of a disaster which resulted in the decay of life as we know it in this sector of the galaxy. The end result of OT III is truly the stuff of which dreams are spun: The full return of self-determinism and complete freedom.³⁷

The main character in this tale is an evil emperor named Xenu (or Xemu in some versions of the story) involved in a complex narrative of a Galactic Confederacy, atomic bombs, volcanoes, and other elaborate space opera details.³⁸ While this is indeed a fascinating story, it is not the most interesting or potentially volatile aspect of the OT materials. Indeed, the truly interesting and complicated mysteries go well beyond the widely known and often-ridiculed Xenu story.

The most controversial of the OT levels is actually OT VIII, the latest to be released by the Church (and some argue the last one Hubbard completed before his death). This "third and final Wall of Fire"³⁹ promises to reveal the ultimate truth of human existence and restore the full power of the thetan, or spiritual self. Rather surprisingly, however, this key portion of Scientology's esoteric materials, and *supposedly the ultimate secret of Hubbard's teachings*, has never been examined critically by contemporary scholars.

The OT VIII level was completely secret until 1990, when a Scientologist named Steven Fishman was involved in a complex legal case involving the claim that he had committed fraud in order to pay for his Scientology auditing. In the course of the court proceedings, all the OT materials became part of the public court record and, not surprisingly, were quickly leaked to the press and posted to the internet.⁴⁰ Initially, the Church of Scientology claimed rights to *all* the Fishman materials, including OT VIII, but it later amended its claim to exclude the OT VIII version in the Fishman affidavit, claiming it was a forgery.⁴¹ Throughout all of this, there is the larger question of OT IX to OT XV, which have never been released, but which current Church of Scientology leader David Miscavige (b. 1960) claims to have in his possession.⁴²

THE THIRD WALL OF FIRE: THE OT VIII TEXT FROM THE FISHMAN AFFIDAVIT

So let us examine the text from the OT VIII materials in the Fishman Affidavit, dated 5 May 1980, and is explicitly labeled "CONFIDENTIAL." Again, this material from the court proceedings has been ruled (after much litigation) to be in the public domain, so one can now easily find it on the internet. It is a fairly long document, but I want to focus on just a couple of key paragraphs.

In the Fishman Affidavit writings, the author seems to make the remarkable claim to be the future Buddha Metteya or Maitreya, who is predicted to come at the end of this cosmic era. Similar claims to identify the future Buddha had been made by other new religious movements, notably members of the Theosophical Society.⁴³ This claim also, we should note, had been made by Hubbard in a mid-1950s document entitled *Hymn of Asia*.⁴⁴ The document given the title OT VIII Series I in the Fishman Affidavit, allegedly taken from the Hubbard Communications Office, Saint Hill Manor, East Grinstead, Sussex, *HCO Bulletin*, 5 May 1980, starts with the claim that it is written by L. Ron Hubbard for OT VIII students to read after he is no longer in his earthly body. The document states:

With the exception of the original Buddhism, virtually all religions of any consequence on this planet, mono- and pantheistic alike, have been

instruments to speed the progress of this “evolution of consciousness” and bring about the eventual enslavement of mankind. As you know, Siddhartha Gautama never claimed to be anything more than a man. Having caught on to this operation, he postulated his own return as Metteyya, part of which prophecy will have been fulfilled upon the passing of L. Ron Hubbard.⁴⁵

If this claim were not remarkable enough, the same text *also* appears to identify Hubbard with the figures of Lucifer and the Antichrist (a reference that may also reflect the influence of Theosophy).⁴⁶ Hubbard’s mission in this world, the text claimed, was actually to *derail* or *prevent* Jesus’ Second Coming described in the book of Revelation in the New Testament. The OT VIII Series I text in the Fishman Affidavit also connects the narrative of the Second Coming of Jesus with aspects of Hubbard’s space opera cosmology, such as an ancient civilization called the Galactic Confederacy, and another, more sinister, alien civilization called the Marcabians, with which Jesus is said to be aligned:

No doubt you are familiar with the Revelations [*sic*] section of the Bible where various events are predicted. Also mentioned is a brief period of time in which an arch-enemy of Christ, referred to as the anti-Christ, will reign and his opinions will have sway. . . . [T]his anti-Christ represents the forces of Lucifer (literally, the “light bearer” or “light bringer”), Lucifer being a mythical representation of the forces of enlightenment, the Galactic Confederacy. My mission could be said to fulfill the Biblical promise represented by this brief anti-Christ period. During this period there is a fleeting opportunity for the whole scenario to be effectively derailed, which would make it impossible for the mass Marcabian landing (Second Coming) to take place. The Second Coming is designed, among other things, to trigger a rapid series of destructive events.⁴⁷

The text goes on to present a fairly severe criticism of Jesus himself, who is described essentially as a “lover of young boys” who had an anger-management problem:

For those of you whose Christian toes I have stepped on, let me take the opportunity to disabuse you of some lovely myths. For instance, the historic Jesus was not nearly the sainted figure he has been made out to be. In addition to being a lover of young boys and men, he was given to uncontrollable bursts of temper and hatred.⁴⁸

Finally, in what is perhaps the oddest portion of the document, the text concludes with a promise about L. Ron Hubbard’s future incarnation on planet Earth. Here the author claims that Hubbard will return to this world not simply with a spiritual mission but also a *political* one, which is really his final secret:

I will return not as a religious leader but a political one. That happens to be the requisite beingness for the task at hand. I will not be known to most of you, my activities misunderstood by many. . . . So there you have it. The secret that I have kept close to my chest all these years.⁴⁹

We should emphasize again that the Church of Scientology initially claimed ownership of all this OT VIII material, but subsequently stated that it was a forgery.⁵⁰ Moreover, the version of the OT VIII text that later was leaked to sources such as Wikileaks is completely different from the version in the Fishman Affidavit.⁵¹ So the status of this text in the Fishman Affidavit, with its extremely controversial claims about Jesus, the Antichrist and Hubbard's future political role—remains quite unclear. Even ex-Scientologists who achieved OT VIII and then left the Church disagree as to the authenticity of this text, some claiming it to be the original work of Hubbard and others that it is a forgery. Ex-Scientologist George Witek (aka George White) has written that about half of OT VIII-level Scientologists he interviewed said this was the real version of the text, and about half said it was fake. Witek himself, we should note, claims that it is the real one that he received in 1988.⁵² The text's authenticity remains quite uncertain, but for critics who want to find continuities between Hubbard's early involvement in occultism and the later Church of Scientology, the Fishman Affidavit lends great support to the idea that Hubbard was still immersed in magic, occultism, and the works of Aleister Crowley, who himself was quite critical of Christianity and also had called himself by the Antichrist-like title of the "Great Beast 666."⁵³

Now, to make things still *more* complicated, all of this leaves open the question of whether there is any additional OT material *beyond* OT VIII. This would seem to be indicated on the Church of Scientology's official Bridge to Total Freedom that lists levels OT IX through OT XV, which presumably would be even *more* esoteric and inaccessible to non-Scientologists. Today, however, it is not really known whether these upper levels even exist, not even by most Scientologists, including former high-ranking members who have left the Church. Current Church of Scientology leader David Miscavige claims to have these remaining OT levels, written in Hubbard's hand, safely in his possession, and is simply waiting for the right moment to release them.⁵⁴ But many ex-Scientologists, such as Mark C. (Marty) Rathbun (b. 1957), who was chief lieutenant under Miscavige before leaving the Church, claim this is a lie and there are in fact no additional levels beyond OT VIII.⁵⁵

So what we have in the OT VIII materials in the Fishman Affidavit is an *extreme example* of what I call the ethical and epistemological double bind of secrecy. Not only is the attempt to pry into Scientology's advanced materials ethically problematic, it is also a *massive epistemological quagmire*. I think we can justifiably examine materials that have been

made part of the public court record, such as the documents in the Fishman Affidavit, but determining their authenticity at this point seems difficult, if not impossible.

THE HISTORY OF A SECRET, FROM THE 1960s TO THE PRESENT

Again, I do not think there is any simple way out of this double bind of secrecy; however, my approach here is twofold. First, I suggest that we shift our gaze from the *content* of the secret to the more visible *forms and strategies* through which secret information is constructed, maintained, and transmitted.⁵⁶ This does not mean that the content is nonexistent or unimportant, but rather that it is in many cases *unknowable and/or ethically problematic*. Here I follow Georg Simmel's seminal insight that secrecy is a *sociological form* that is independent of its contents. In other words, even if we cannot always say much about the *content* of a secret, we can still say quite a lot about the *forms* through which secrecy operates and the *mechanisms and strategies* through which secret information is concealed, revealed, and transmitted. Second, I will trace the *history* of this particular secret and its strategies of concealment through *five historical moments* from the late 1960s to the present.

1. Advertisement of the Secret: Promoting Scientology's Esoteric Materials in the 1960s and 1970s

The first key moment and strategy in this history is what I call the "advertisement of the secret," or the public announcement of esoteric knowledge. Inherent in most forms of religious secrecy is the paradoxical fact that a secret is always partially known and partially revealed. Indeed, the secret is very often an *advertised secret* insofar as the value of concealed knowledge typically depends on the fact that others have knowledge of its existence but not its content.⁵⁷ As Mary H. Nooter observes in her work on secrecy in African art, cultural forms such as masks, emblems and figures serve to draw attention to secret knowledge at the same time that they conceal its content. In effect, they "broadcast secrecy" and "publicly proclaim the ownership of privileged information while protecting its contents;" for "to own secret knowledge, and to show that one does, is a form of power."⁵⁸

This sort of advertisement or broadcasting of the secret can be seen throughout Church of Scientology publications during the late 1960s and early 1970s. As glossy publications such as *Advance!* magazine proudly declared, the OT levels would reveal the most secret and powerful insights into the past history of the universe, offering the keys to

human spiritual liberation, and the means to ever greater spiritual powers. As one promotion put it, "L. Ron Hubbard found the key and taped out the exact path—that path is Operating Thetan. Here the secrets of this sector of the universe are revealed."⁵⁹ These advertisements used a variety of dramatic imagery to illustrate the state of OT, such as doors in the starry heavens opening onto brilliant white light, angels flying into the heavens, individuals on the bridge of a spaceship hurtling through the stars toward a glowing white OT symbol, and a large spacecraft with the OT symbol floating above a distant planet with the slogan: "The Sky Is the Limit: Regain Yourself and Your Full Ability. GO OT."⁶⁰

Hubbard himself, these advertisements explained, had to struggle and suffer to pass through this Wall of Fire, but now everyone could follow him through it to total liberation. One promotional ad from *Advance!* magazine in 1977 described the awesome revelations promised by the First Wall of Fire, OT III:

A catastrophe occurred 75 million years ago that still has tremendous impact on our lives and civilization today. . . . L. Ron Hubbard was the first being to penetrate the mystery of its existence and find a way through this "Wall of Fire". . . . On the other side you will find freedom . . . and the full return of self-determinism. You will understand the terrible fate that has gripped this planet and why Man has previously failed (before Scientology) to answer the riddle of his own existence.⁶¹

These advertisements were consistently accompanied by testimonials from various Scientologists who described their remarkable experiences and achievements upon reaching OT levels. These ranged from more mundane experiences such as a greater sense of well-being and enjoyment of life, to more supernatural experiences such as seeing disembodied spirits, journeying into the future, and even controlling the weather.⁶² Others described healing their sick cats and goldfish, or fighting fires from a distance through the power of their exteriorized thetan.⁶³ "I love it," one enthusiastic member testified, "like Superman!"⁶⁴

OT VIII was first advertised in publications from the early 1970s for a fee of \$500, but the ads noted that it was "not yet released." By 1978, the fee had increased to \$1,326.⁶⁵ "when released."⁶⁵ Later advertisements promoted the profound importance of OT VIII in even more explicit and grandiose terms, as an "utterly astounding level" revealing all the secrets of "yourself and your power as an Operating Thetan, and the actual fulfillment of the Aims of Scientology."⁶⁶ Opening the secrets of OT VIII was promised to carry the Scientologist through the final Wall of Fire into the deepest mysteries of the human self and the universe. "When you reach New OT VIII Truth Revealed, you have stepped across the threshold taking you into . . . vistas never even dreamed of and glories no past glory ever surpassed."⁶⁷

In short, the advertisements throughout Church of Scientology publications consistently worked to accomplish two strategic goals: first, they made it very clear that a tremendously powerful secret *existed* and must be obtained; and second, they always did so by very carefully not saying anything specific about *what* exactly that secret might be.

2. Adornment of Silence: The Secret as Material and Symbolic “Adorning Possession” in the 1970s and 1980s

The second moment in this history of the secret is what I call the fashioning of the secret as a kind of *adorning possession*, again to borrow a phrase from Georg Simmel. As Simmel famously put it, the secret often serves as a form of adornment, which paradoxically enhances and exaggerates the status of one who holds the secret precisely by virtue of what it conceals. Just as fine clothing or jewelry enhances one’s status by covering parts of the body, the possession of secret knowledge can enhance one’s status through its power of concealment. “The secret operates as an adorning possession. . . . This involves the contradiction that what recedes before the consciousness of . . . others and is hidden from them is emphasized in their consciousness; that one should appear as a noteworthy person through what one conceals.”⁶⁸

This adorning function is not simply metaphorical but often quite literal. In the case of Scientology, the individual rising through the OT grades not only acquires ever greater status and abilities, but also may purchase a wide array of specially branded OT jewelry to signal and display their advanced status. In a 2009 *Dianetics and Scientology Catalog*, OT jewelry included a pendant (\$150), pendant with diamond (\$285), ring with diamonds (\$475), earrings (\$350), gold bracelet (\$2,100), and bracelet with diamonds (\$3,200).⁶⁹ In other words, acquisition of esoteric knowledge is often both a social and very material kind of adornment.

In this sense, secret knowledge might also be thought of as a form of symbolic capital, in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense. Among other things, secrecy works by transforming a piece of knowledge into a kind of *scarce resource* that can bestow status, prestige, and symbolic power upon its owner.⁷⁰ As Bourdieu uses the term, “capital” refers not simply to material forms of wealth but rather to “all the goods, material and symbolic . . . that present themselves as rare and worthy of being sought after in a particular social formation.”⁷¹ Symbolic capital thus is a form of wealth that conceals and mystifies the material power behind it, just as, for example, the distinction of “good taste” in wine or clothing at once conceals and legitimates the real economic capital required to buy such goods. “Symbolic capital is ‘denied capital;’ it disguises the underlying ‘interested’ relations by giving them legitimation. Symbolic power is a form of power that is not

perceived as such but rather as a legitimate demand for recognition, deference, obedience or the service of others."⁷² As Bourdieu has suggested, acquisition of symbolic capital is typically linked to a very real exchange of material capital, a phenomenon we clearly see in Scientology's OT levels, which, again, run into the thousands and tens of thousands of dollars.

I think this was at least in part the attraction of Scientology for the many celebrities and actors who joined the movement beginning in the 1970s, such as John Travolta, Tom Cruise, Kirstie Alley, Isaac Hayes, and many others. As we see in the extremely opulent Scientology Celebrity Centres, such as the one in Hollywood,⁷³ becoming a Scientologist was for many rising stars a kind of symbolic capital and "adornment"—both figurative and literal—at once a form of status and a means of social networking in the film and music industries. At its peak in the 1970s and 1980s, the Church of Scientology really did provide a certain status and symbolic capital for many actors, musicians and entertainers, allowing them to enter into a network of successful, wealthy and well-connected individuals. As author Lawrence Wright has observed, Scientology offered members a powerful network indeed, "especially in Hollywood, awarding them an advantage in a ruthless competitive industry."⁷⁴ As we will see below, this probably is no longer so much the case today, as Scientology has lost much of its symbolic power and cache, and now arguably is as much a *liability* as a sign of status.

3. The Litigation of the Secret: Transformation of the Secret into an Object of Legal Dispute in the 1990s

The third period in this history is what I call the *litigation of the secret*, or the transformation of the secret into an object of intense legal dispute. Beginning in the late 1980s and the 1990s, Operating Thetan materials became the focus of several major lawsuits when they were leaked by ex-Scientologists and found their way to the media and eventually the internet.⁷⁵ Indeed, the Church of Scientology established its own Religious Technology Center (RTC) with the stated aim of "protecting the Scientology religion's trademarks and advanced religious scripture."⁷⁶ The RTC became involved in several intense legal disputes over circulation of the OT materials, which it claimed were not only copyrighted and trade secrets (information that has economic value from being not generally known), but also confidential religious texts.

In November 1985, the confidential OT texts were first introduced as evidence in a court case brought against the Church by ex-Scientologist Larry Wollersheim. Although Scientology attorneys argued forcefully that disclosure of the materials was a violation of the group's religious freedom, the Los Angeles Superior Court judge issued an order making

the documents public at the clerk's office. In response, some 1,500 Scientologists crammed the court buildings, and swamped workers with hundreds of requests to photocopy the documents in an attempt to ensure that the materials did not reach the public. In spite of these efforts, the *Los Angeles Times* obtained copies and revealed them in an article in November 1985.⁷⁷

In 1993 Wollersheim co-founded the website FACTNet (Fight Against Coercive Tactics Network) designed to expose the Church of Scientology's activities. Having amassed some twenty-seven gigabytes of material on Scientology, FACTNet was hit with intense legal threats from the Church, which argued that disclosure of these secrets could cause "irreparable spiritual injury if a rival church . . . were allowed to disseminate them."⁷⁸ On 22 August 1995, a federal court ordered a raid on the homes of Wollersheim and another ex-Scientologist, Robert Penny, resulting in the confiscation of the two men's computers, software, and dozens of boxes of paper files. The legal battle over FACTNet, however, dragged on for another four years until a settlement was finally reached in 1999.⁷⁹

The confidential OT materials became part of the court record in a second case involving former Scientologist Steven Fishman, the source of the infamous Fishman Affidavit discussed above. In 1990 Fishman was convicted of mail fraud—a crime he claimed he had been brainwashed into committing in order to pay for his Scientology auditing. Fishman was quoted in a 1991 *Time* magazine article, "Scientology: The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power," in which he admitted his involvement in the enormous scam and even said he had been ordered by the Church to kill his psychiatrist.⁸⁰ The Church in turn sued Fishman for libel, and in the course of the trial Fishman submitted 69 pages of confidential OT materials, including secret documents all the way up to OT VIII.

Once again, copies of the materials were placed in a Los Angeles court file to be available publicly for two years. As in the Wollersheim case, Church members undertook a remarkable effort to maintain the documents' secrecy throughout that period "by alternately checking out the files each day and retaining them until the clerk's office closed."⁸¹ Yet once again, copies of the documents soon found their way onto the internet. The Fishman documents became the object of intense legal debate not only in the United States but also in the Netherlands, when Dutch journalist Karen Spaink put them on the internet and then promptly faced charges that this was a violation of copyright and trade secrets. The Dutch courts, however, ruled three times in the journalist's favor, and so the Fishman materials and their alleged version of OT VIII remain easily available to this day.⁸²

Various other lawsuits both large and small were filed against a wide array of critics, ranging from mega-media empires such as *Time* magazine down to ordinary college students. One of my own undergraduate students, in fact, had posted some of the OT materials on his personal

website and promptly received a threatening letter from Scientology's lawyers, who had his entire website and email service terminated.⁸³ These aggressive tactics of litigation, however, appear to have had little real effect on the circulation of the OT materials, and have arguably even backfired.

4. The Liability of the Secret: Secrecy as a Source of Scandal and Embarrassment in the 1990s and 2000s

Thus, the fourth moment in this history is what I call the *liability of the secret*, or the gradual transformation of secret information from a source of status and power into a source of embarrassment. In the Church of Scientology's case, this began in the 1990s and 2000s, as more and more OT materials found their way into cyberspace and began proliferating wildly.⁸⁴ Perhaps the height of this embarrassment was the 2005 episode of the cartoon satire *South Park*, which dramatized and mercilessly ridiculed the OT III story about Emperor Xenu.⁸⁵

This widespread dissemination of Scientology secrets, I think, is in large part the reason for the Church of Scientology's rapid decline in numbers in the last decade. According to one recent poll of religious affiliation in the United States, the Church's numbers had plummeted from 55,000 in 2001 to just around 25,000 in 2008; meanwhile, its membership in Europe and other parts of the world witnessed similar declines.⁸⁶ As ex-member Robert Vaughan Young put it, the internet may well prove to be Scientology's "Waterloo"—a deeply entrenched, extremely messy, and costly battle that the Church cannot possibly hope to win.⁸⁷

Scientology and its secret materials also became a major target of attack and ridicule by the loose collective called Anonymous, which champions free speech on the internet. In addition to protesting the Church of Scientology in physical public spaces, the Anonymous group has been active in cyberspace, disseminating Scientology's esoteric materials as quickly and widely as it can. In fact, one Anonymous member sent me more than forty DVDs of data and a massive hard-drive filled with virtually all known materials ever gathered on the Church—texts, magazines, audio recordings, movies, ephemera, old mimeographs, FBI files, and various other items. According to a video message uploaded to YouTube in 2008, Anonymous said it was dedicated to nothing less than the "destruction of Scientology in its present form."⁸⁸

5. The Irrelevance of the Secret: Secrecy as an Anachronism in late 2000s to Present

Finally, the fifth period in this history is what I call the *irrelevance of the secret*, which is largely what we see in the Church of Scientology today.

Most ordinary Scientologists know and care little about the advanced OT materials, and few Scientology spokespersons will even acknowledge things like the Xenu story. In a famous interview with *ABC News Nightline* in 2009, for example, Scientology spokesman Tommy Davis was asked repeatedly about the OT materials and the Xenu story; after refusing to answer any of these questions, he grew increasingly agitated and finally removed his microphone and walked off the set.⁸⁹ (Davis later left the Church of Scientology.)

In its promotional materials and websites, Scientology now typically emphasizes the more public and “exoteric” aspects of the Church, such as its ability to help personal lives, build families and further careers, as well as its outreach and charitable work.⁹⁰ Its online materials prominently feature the work of outreach groups such as the Volunteer Ministers, who help with disaster relief and various problems of daily life. This is not some esoteric or obscure elitist religious practice. According to the Volunteer Ministers website, “Scientology offers practical solutions to help you improve conditions in your life and the lives of those around you,” ranging from “resolving marital strife” to “managing a company for optimum success.”⁹¹

While the tantalizing power of the OT levels was advertised and promoted quite prominently in the 1960s through the 1980s, they now are more often *downplayed* in favor of the more public and non-controversial aspects of the Church of Scientology. In sum, the secret itself has largely receded from the promise to reveal the deepest mysteries of the universe to a kind of embarrassing anachronism that means little to most practicing Scientologists today.

CONCLUSIONS AND COMPARATIVE COMMENTS

I would like to discuss briefly both the broader implications and limitations of the approach I have suggested here. This focus on the forms and strategies of secrecy and the emphasis on the history of the secret, I would argue, has many comparative implications for the study of secrecy in other traditions. For example, the tactic of the “advertisement of the secret” is one we see frequently in many, if not most, esoteric traditions. After all, if secret knowledge has value, that value is paradoxically only realized if the existence (though not the content) of the secret is made known publicly. American scholar Paul C. Johnson has aptly dubbed this sort of display of esoteric knowledge “secretism,” the “active milling, polishing and promotion of the reputation of secrets” accompanied by the “promiscuous circulation of a secret’s inaccessibility.”⁹² I think this is much the sort of advertisement or “secretism” we have seen in esoteric movements such as the Theosophical Society. In its foundational text—entitled simply *The Secret Doctrine*—Theosophy promises to reveal

the divine secrets of the world's sacred traditions, though only partially and in half-veiled form.⁹³

Secondly, the role of secrecy as an "adornment" or "adorning possession" is also something we see widely in esoteric traditions. Perhaps the most obvious is American Freemasonry, particularly in its most elaborate and complicated forms such as the Scottish Rite. With the wide array of opulent robes, crowns, jewels and scepters worn by initiates in the upper degrees, Scottish Rite Freemasonry embodies this "adorning" function of secrecy in both a symbolic and quite literal sense.⁹⁴

Thirdly, the "litigation of the secret" is a phenomenon we see increasingly often in the twenty-first century, as many religious movements have begun to adopt the same structures, logics, and legal tactics as multi-national corporations. Similar legal battles have been fought, for example, over many forms of Yoga, such as Bikram Yoga, which claims to hold trademarks over its sequences of postures.⁹⁵ Another example is the Osho International Foundation, which has claimed trademarks and copyrights over the works and meditation techniques of the Indian guru Osho (Rajneesh, 1931–1990); indeed, it has claimed rights to the name "Osho" itself and fought a major legal battle with a rival group that used "Osho" in its website domain name.⁹⁶ It is not a stretch to imagine that these sorts of legal disputes over intellectual property, trademarks, and trade secrets may well become some of the defining issues of twenty-first century religious life.⁹⁷

Finally, what I have called the "liability of the secret" and the "irrelevance of the secret" are common patterns, particularly in esoteric movements, undergoing a period of decline or transformation. Again, American Freemasonry is an obvious example. In its early development in the United States, Freemasonry contained a huge amount of complex occult symbolism and ritual, along with elements drawn from Kabbalah, alchemy and Hermeticism. Yet today, Freemasonry is largely an innocuous and quite domesticated fraternal organization in which secrecy and esoteric ritual is for the most part a curious anachronism.⁹⁸

A similar historical trajectory can be seen in the development of Mormonism in the United States from the nineteenth century to the present. As historian Michael W. Homer has recently argued, early Mormonism was deeply entwined with Freemasonry, which was a foundational element in secret ceremonies and other key elements of mid-nineteenth-century Mormonism. Yet, as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints grew into an established and increasingly "mainstream" tradition, Mormons progressively distanced themselves from Freemasonry, downplaying or "airbrushing" out the esoteric dimensions of Mormon ritual in favor of a more respectable, transparent, and all-American public identity.⁹⁹

We could surely cite many other comparative examples here, such as recent work on Australian aboriginal traditions, Hindu and Buddhist

Tantra, Jewish Kabbalah, and others. But the key point I want to make is that the *content* of the secrecy in each of these cases would obviously be very different and historically variable; but, the *forms and strategies* through which secret knowledge is concealed, transmitted, revealed, and transformed over time may well turn out to be remarkably similar across cultures and historical periods. They may not be universal “archetypes” in Mircea Eliade’s sense,¹⁰⁰ but they may at least provide a useful starting point for interesting cross-cultural comparative work.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the limitations of the approach I have outlined here, with its focus on form and strategy rather than content in the study of secrecy. After all, one might legitimately ask: Are there not cases where the content of the secret really *is* important and really *is* knowable? For example, it is well documented that the Church of Scientology’s intelligence bureau, the Guardian’s Office, was involved in very real acts of espionage against American government agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service during the 1970s.¹⁰¹ Further, many ex-Scientists—Marc Headley, Nancy Many, Gerry Armstrong, and others—have accused the Church of physical abuse and human rights violations in its disciplinary program for Sea Org members called Rehabilitation Project Force (RPF).¹⁰²

To this I would answer, yes, there are indeed forms of religious secrecy that require a different methodological approach, and there are many cases where a focus on hidden *content* would be more directly relevant. Moreover, there are also cases—for example, allegations of abuse and human rights violations in the Church of Scientology’s controversial RPF program—where the role of scholarship leaves off and the role of law enforcement begins.¹⁰³

ENDNOTES

¹ “OT VIII: Truth Revealed,” *Advance!* 155 (2001): 27.

² Michael Taussig, “Transgression,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 349–64.

³ Janet Reitman, *Inside Scientology: The Story of America’s Most Secretive Religion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2011); John Sweeney, *The Secrets of Scientology*, BBC One *Panorama*, 2010.

⁴ Exceptions include Mikael Rothstein, “‘His name was Xenu. He used renegades . . .’: Aspects of Scientology’s Founding Myth,” in *Scientology*, ed. James R. Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 365–88; Hugh B. Urban, “The Secrets of Scientology: Concealment, Information Control and Espionage in a Controversial New Religion,” in *Contemporary Esotericism*, ed. Egil Asprem and Kennet Granholm (Sheffield, U.K.: Equinox Publishing, 2013), 181–99; Hugh B. Urban, “Fair Game: Secrecy, Security and the Church of Scientology in Cold War America,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 2 (2006):

356–89; and Susan Raine, "Surveillance in a New Religious Movement: Scientology as a Test Case," *Religious Studies and Theology* 28, no.1 (2009): 63–94.

⁵ See Urban, "Secrets of Scientology"; and Hugh B. Urban, "The Church of Scientology," in *Revisionism and Diversification in New Religious Movements*, ed. Eileen Barker (London: Ashgate, 2013), 65–78.

⁶ Raine, "Surveillance in a New Religious Movement."

⁷ Urban, "Fair Game."

⁸ Rothstein, "'His name was Xenu'"; see Susan Raine, "Astounding History: L. Ron Hubbard's Scientology Space Opera," *Religion* 45, no. 1 (2015): 66–88.

⁹ Hugh B. Urban, *The Church of Scientology: A History of a New Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 89–117.

¹⁰ "OT VIII: Truth Revealed."

¹¹ Rothstein, "'His name was Xenu'"; see Joel Sappell and Robert W. Welkos, "Defining the Theology," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 June 1990; Trey Parker, dir., "Trapped in the Closet," *South Park*, season 9, episode 12 (2005).

¹² Hugh B. Urban, "The Torment of Secrecy: Ethical and Epistemological Problems in the Study of Esoteric Traditions," *History of Religions* 37, no. 3 (1998): 209–48.

¹³ Urban, "Torment of Secrecy." See also Bernhard Scheid and Mark Teeuwen, eds., *The Culture of Secrecy in Japanese Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 4–5.

¹⁴ Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994); Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997); and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

¹⁵ Paul Christopher Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods: The Transformation of Brazilian Candomblé* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Ian Keen, *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Gilbert Herdt, *Secrecy and Cultural Reality: Utopian Ideologies in the New Guinea Men's House* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Georg Simmel, "The Secret and the Secret Society," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, ed. Kurt Wolff (New York: MacMillan, 1950), 345–78; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research of the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58.

¹⁷ The phrase "Wall of Fire" refers to three of the advanced levels of Scientology auditing: OT III, OT V, and OT VIII. These levels are said to have been extremely difficult and dangerous for Hubbard to break through and reveal, and they are potentially dangerous to the individual Scientologist unless s/he follows the procedure correctly.

¹⁸ Raine, "Astounding History." See also Harriet Whitehead, "Reasonably Fantastic: Some Perspectives on Scientology, Science Fiction, and Occultism," in *Religious Movements in Contemporary America*, ed. Irving I. Zaretsky and Mark P. Leone (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974), 547–87.

¹⁹ Raine, “Astounding History”; Hugh B. Urban, “Typewriter in the Sky: L. Ron Hubbard’s Fiction and the Birth of the Thetan,” in *Scientology and Popular Culture: Influence and Struggles for Legitimacy*, ed. Stephen A. Kent and Susan Raine (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2017), in press.

²⁰ Whitehead, “Reasonably Fantastic”; Urban, “Typewriter in the Sky.”

²¹ See Henrik Bogdan, “The Babalon Working 1946: L. Ron Hubbard, John Whiteside Parsons, and the Practice of Enochian Magic,” *Numen* 63, no. 1 (2016): 12–32; Hugh B. Urban, “The Occult Roots of Scientology? L. Ron Hubbard, Aleister Crowley and the Origins of a Controversial New Religion,” *Nova Religio* 15, no. 3 (February 2012): 91–116; George Pendle, *Strange Angel: The Otherworldly Life of Rocket Scientist John Whiteside Parsons* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2005), 253–54.

²² Pendle, *Strange Angel*, 253–54; Lawrence Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt: A Life of Aleister Crowley* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 414–15.

²³ See Bogdan, “Babalon Working,” 12–32; Urban, “Occult Roots of Scientology?”; and Pendle, *Strange Angel*.

²⁴ Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*, 412–15; Urban, “Occult Roots of Scientology?”

²⁵ Church of Scientology, Letter to the *Sunday Times*, 28 December 1969.

²⁶ Urban, “Occult Roots of Scientology?”; see also Jon Atack, *A Piece of Blue Sky: Scientology, Dianetics and L. Ron Hubbard Exposed* (New York: Carol Publishing, 1990); and George M. Witek, *Lucifer’s Bridge: Scientology’s Lost Paradise* (N.p.: George M. Witek, 2015).

²⁷ L. Ron Hubbard, “Dianetics: The Evolution of a Science,” *Astounding Science Fiction* 45, no. 3 (1950): 43–87; L. Ron Hubbard, *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, 2007).

²⁸ Urban, *Church of Scientology*, 60–68; see also Roy Wallis, *The Road to Total Freedom: A Sociological Analysis of Scientology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 34–68.

²⁹ See L. Ron Hubbard, *The E-Meter Essentials* (Phoenix, AZ: Hubbard College of Scientology, 1967).

³⁰ Hubbard, *Dianetics*, 113.

³¹ Wallis, *Road to Total Freedom*, 125; Harriet Whitehead, *Renunciation and Reformulation: A Study of Conversion in an American Sect* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 185.

³² “Success Beyond Man’s Wildest Dreams,” *Advance!* 7 (1969): 3; “OT Phenomena Success,” *Advance!* 17 (1973): 14–17. See Urban, *Church of Scientology*, 77–82

³³ *Advance!* 1 (1969): 13.

³⁴ Flag Service Organization, “Donation and Registration Rates,” Clearwater, FL, 2009; Urban, *Church of Scientology*, 130–38.

³⁵ Richard Behar, “Scientology: The Thriving Cult of Greed and Power,” *Time*, 2 May 1991, 50–57, available at <http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~dst/Fishman/time-behar.html>, accessed 14 January 2017.

³⁶ Church of Scientology, *Dianetics and Scientology Catalog* (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, 2009).

³⁷ L. Ron Hubbard, *Have You Lived Before This Life?* (Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, 1990), 307. See also L. Ron Hubbard, "Ron's Journal 67," audio (Los Angeles: Golden Era Productions, 1983).

³⁸ See Rothstein, "His name was Xenu"; Raine, "Astounding History."

³⁹ The "second Wall of Fire" is OT V, which is said to remove all the obstacles that prevent the individual from achieving total freedom on all of the eight dynamics (eight urges to survive from the individual self to the Infinite or Supreme Being). Because this level is not particularly controversial I am skipping it for the purposes of this article.

⁴⁰ The document is on record in *Church of Scientology International v. Fishman and Geertz*, Case No. 91-6426 HLH (Tx) U.S. District Court for the Central District of California, 1993. See also "Fishman Index," The Fishman Affidavit, <https://kspaink.home.xs4all.nl/fishman/index2.html>, accessed 14 January 2017; and Urban, *Church of Scientology*, 186–88.

⁴¹ Alan Prendergast, "Stalking the Net," *Westword*, 4 October 1995, <http://www.westword.com/news/stalking-the-net-5055577>, accessed 14 January 2017.

⁴² In one advertisement from 1973, Hubbard actually indicated even more levels: "There are perhaps 15 levels above OT VII fully developed but existing only in unissued note form, pending more peoples' full attainment of OT VI and VII." *Advance!* 20 (1973): 15.

⁴³ This point was brought to my attention by Catherine Wessinger. Under the leadership of Annie Besant (1847–1933), the Theosophical Society promoted the young Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) as the vehicle for Lord Maitreya. See Catherine Wessinger, "The Second Generation Leaders of the Theosophical Society (Adyar)," in *Handbook of the Theosophical Current*, ed. Olav Hammer and Mikael Rothstein (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 80–96.

⁴⁴ L. Ron Hubbard, "Hymn of Asia," audio (Los Angeles: Golden Era Productions, 2009).

⁴⁵ OT VIII B in Fishman Affidavit, filed 9 April 1993, in *Church of Scientology International v. Fishman and Geertz*, available at The Fishman Affidavit, www.spaink.net/fishman/ot8b.html, accessed 14 January 2017. Buddhism does not claim that Maitreya, the future Buddha, will be the return of Gautama Buddha.

⁴⁶ Again, this was brought to my attention by Catherine Wessinger. Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) also used the image of Lucifer as the "light-bearer" of gnosis, for example, in her London journal *Lucifer*. See John Algeo, "Viewpoint: Lucifer: What's in a Name?" *Quest* 89, no. 5 (2001): 162–63, available at www.theosophical.org/publications/1657, accessed 14 January 2017.

⁴⁷ OT VIII B in Fishman Affidavit.

⁴⁸ OT VIII B in Fishman Affidavit.

⁴⁹ OT VIII B in Fishman Affidavit.

⁵⁰ Prendergast, "Stalking the Net."

⁵¹ "Church of Scientology Collected Operating Thetan Documents," Wikileaks, release date 24 March 2008, https://wikileaks.org/wiki/Church_of_Scientology_collected_Operating_Thetan_documents, accessed 14 January 2017.

⁵² Witek, *Lucifer's Bridge*, 58; Tony Ortega, "Up the Bridge: We Finally Reach 'OT 8'—But Was Its First Version Really a Hoax?" *The Underground Bunker*, 24

June 2014, <http://tonyortega.org/2014/06/24/up-the-bridge-we-finally-reach-ot-8-but-was-its-first-version-really-a-hoax/>, accessed 23 January 2017.

⁵³ Urban, "Occult Roots of Scientology?"; see also Sutin, *Do What Thou Wilt*.

⁵⁴ This is also what high-level Scientology spokesman John Wood told me in an email exchange from 16 December 2015 to 3 January 2016.

⁵⁵ Mark C. Rathbun, "Truth Revealed about OT VIII," Moving Up a Little Higher, 16 March 2011, <https://markrathbun.wordpress.com/2011/03/16/truth-revealed-about-ot-viii/>, accessed 14 January 2017.

⁵⁶ Urban, "Torment of Secrecy."

⁵⁷ See Beryl L. Bellman, *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 144; Joshua Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric: Mass Media and the Drama of Secrecy in the Twentieth Century* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2011); and Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods*.

⁵⁸ Mary H. Nooter, ed., *Secrecy: African Art that Conceals and Reveals* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1993), 24.

⁵⁹ "OT III," *Advance!* 66 (1980): 21. This theme recurs in later issues, as we see in the ad for "The Second Wall of Fire," *Advance!* 134 (1998): 30: "Once the hidden secrets of the universe are revealed your infinite power cannot be contained."

⁶⁰ Back cover advertisement, *Advance!* 50 (1978); "Now That You Know Where You're Going Let Us Help You Get There!" *Advance!* 57 (1979): 21.

⁶¹ "Regain your Full Ability," *Advance!* 44 (1977): 29.

⁶² "OT Phenomena Success," *Advance!* 21 (1973): 16.

⁶³ "OT Phenomena," *Advance!* 33 (1975): 8.

⁶⁴ "OT Phenomena Success," *Advance!* 17 (1973): 14–17; "Success Beyond Man's Wildest Dreams," *Advance!* 7 (1969): 3.

⁶⁵ "Ron is Waiting for You on the Other Side of the Bridge," *Advance!* 21 (1973): 12; "Advance Course Donations," *Advance!* 53 (1978): 20.

⁶⁶ "OT VIII: Truth Revealed."

⁶⁷ "Life After New OT VIII," *OT VIII Newsletter* 68 (2010): n.p.

⁶⁸ Simmel, "The Secret and the Secret Society," 337.

⁶⁹ Church of Scientology, *Dianetics and Scientology Catalog*; see "New OT VIII Bracelet," *New OT VIII Newsletter* 67 (2009): n.p.

⁷⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, "The Forms of Capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. John G. Richardson (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 241–58; Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.

⁷¹ Randall Johnson, "Editor's Introduction: Pierre Bourdieu on Art, Literature and Culture," in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, by Pierre Bourdieu (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 7.

⁷² David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 43; see Urban, "Torment of Secrecy."

⁷³ See "Celebrity Centre Thirty-Sixth Annual Gala," *Celebrity* 369 (2005): 8–9.

⁷⁴ Lawrence Wright, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the Prison of Belief* (New York: Vintage, 2013), 277; see Urban, *Church of Scientology*, 139–45.

- ⁷⁵ Ann Brill and Ashley Packard, "Silencing Scientology's Critics on the Internet: A Mission Impossible?" *Communications and the Law* 19, no. 4 (1997): 1–23; Prendergast, "Stalking the Net"; and Mark Fearer, "Scientology's Secrets: The Religion of Science vs. the Internet," in *Composing Cyberspace: Identity, Community, and Knowledge in the Electronic Age*, ed. Richard Holeyton (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998), 350–52.
- ⁷⁶ Religious Technology Center: Holder of the Dianetics and Scientology Trademarks, RTC.org, 2011, available at <http://www.theta.com/goodman/rtc.htm>, accessed 19 January 2017.
- ⁷⁷ Joel Sappell and Robert Welkos, "Scientologists Block Access to Secret Documents," *Los Angeles Times*, 15 November 1985.
- ⁷⁸ Brill and Packard, "Silencing Scientology's Critics," 5.
- ⁷⁹ Fearer, "Scientology's Secrets"; Brill and Packard, "Silencing Scientology's Critics," 5.
- ⁸⁰ Behar, "Scientology."
- ⁸¹ Brill and Packard, "Silencing Scientology's Critics," 9–10.
- ⁸² The Fishman Affidavit; Prendergast, "Stalking the Net."
- ⁸³ Urban, *Church of Scientology*, 194–96.
- ⁸⁴ On 14 January 2017, a Google search for "Operating Thetan" produced about 50,200 hits, while a search for "Xenu" produced 764,000.
- ⁸⁵ Parker, "Trapped in the Closet."
- ⁸⁶ See Brian Schmied, "Growth and Challenges for Scientology," *International Policy Digest*, 16 July 2013, <http://intpolicydigest.org/2013/07/16/growth-and-challenges-for-scientology/>, accessed 14 January 2017. It should be noted that the Church of Scientology disputes statistics like these.
- ⁸⁷ John Cook, "Cult Friction," *Radar Online*, 17 March 2008, <http://www.xenu-directory.net/news/20080317-radar.html>, accessed 14 January 2017.
- ⁸⁸ Anonymous, "Message to Scientology," 21 January 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCbKv9yiLiQ>, accessed 14 January 2017. See also Urban, *Church of Scientology*, 104–96.
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- ⁹² Johnson, *Secrets, Gossip, and Gods*, 3.
- ⁹³ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, Vol. I: *Cosmogogenesis* (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1893); see Gunn, *Modern Occult Rhetoric*; and Hugh B. Urban, "Secrecy and New Religious Movements: Concealment, Surveillance, and Privacy in a New Age of Information," *Religion Compass* 2, no. 1 (2008): 66–83.

⁹⁴ See William L. Fox, *Lodge of the Double-Headed Eagle: Two Centuries of Scottish Rite Freemasonry in America's Southern Jurisdiction* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1997); Kenneth L. Ames, "The Lure of the Spectacular," in *Theatre of the Fraternity: Staging the Ritual Space of the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, 1896–1929*, ed. C. Lance Brockman (Minneapolis: Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum, 1996); and Hugh B. Urban, "The Adornment of Silence: Secrecy and Symbolic Power in American Freemasonry," *Journal of Religion and Society* 3 (2001): 1–29.

⁹⁵ Allison Elizabeth Fish, "Laying Claim to Yoga: Intellectual Property, Cultural Rights, and the Digital Archive in India," PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2010, available at <http://gradworks.umi.com/34/19/3419891.html>. See Andrea R. Jain, *Selling Yoga: From Counterculture to Pop Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁹⁶ Hugh B. Urban, *Zorba the Buddha: Sex, Spirituality, and Capitalism in the Global Osho Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016), 155–78.

⁹⁷ See Mario Biagioli, Peter Jaszi, Martha Woodmansee, eds., *Making and Unmaking Intellectual Property: Creative Production in Legal and Cultural Perspective* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

⁹⁸ Steve C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 318–19; and Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasonry: Three Centuries of Building Communities* (Lexington, MA: National Heritage Museum, 2006), 215.

⁹⁹ Michael W. Homer, *Joseph's Temples: The Dynamic Relationship between Freemasonry and Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ See Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁰¹ Urban, "Fair Game."

¹⁰² Among the many recent works by ex-members making such allegations, see Marc Headley, *Blown for Good: Behind the Iron Curtain of Scientology* (Burbank, CA: BFG Books, 2010); and Nancy Many, *My Billion Year Contract: Memoir of a Former Scientologist* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2009).

¹⁰³ It should be noted that the Church emphatically denies that anything illegal goes on in RPF and in fact there have been no convictions in this respect.